

Listening To the Sermon On the Mount

The Integrity Of the Teaching

The Sermon on the Mount is not only the essence of Jesus's teaching, but also one of the greatest pieces of literature our world has seen, which penetrates most deeply into the human soul. If we manage at least to touch upon several themes and images of the Sermon on the Mount here — it is already quite a good result. For as the Gospel puts it, those who touched even the fringe of Jesus's cloak — were healed (Matthew 14, 36).

The Sermon on the Mount is delivered in three chapters of the Gospel of Matthew: from the 5th to the 7th. Its most significant part is consistently articulated also in Luke (6, 20—49), whereas its other parts are stated in other parts of his Gospel. Separate statements from the Sermon on the Mount are found throughout the whole text of the Gospel of Mark.

Matthew starts the Sermon with a description of how Jesus, surrounded by his disciples, ascended the mount.

It is important to keep in mind that the teaching of Jesus along with the Bible itself, is metaphoric and full of parables. The Gospel says that Jesus spoke to the people only in parables, but he later explained their meaning to his disciples in private (Mark 4, 33—34). That is why it is doubtless that Jesus's ascending the mountain with his disciples at the beginning of his preaching is deeply symbolic.

What is the biblical meaning of “annunciation from the mount”? Who was the first to ascend a mount bringing back the Teaching, the Law? — Of course, it was Moses... But he was preceded by God Himself, who proclaimed the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai! Thus, Jesus's ascending the mount, in a way continues the work of Moses (see also Exodus 19, 20; 20, 1—18; 24, 15—18).

Contemporary Samaritans have preserved the custom of ascending the holy Mount of Gerizim on the Pentecost (Shavuot) and interpreting the Torah — the holy Law. It is quite possible that in the period of the Second Temple (up to 70 AD) Jews also shared such a custom. There is some evidence that the

Sermon on the Mount with its interpretation of the Commandments was proclaimed exactly on the Pentecost. And what day is it? — It is the day on which the Ten Commandments were granted.

So, Jesus ascended the mountain in order to become the greatest Mediator between the visible and invisible worlds — and to announce the spiritual Law to the sons of Israel and to the whole mankind.

This is exactly what prophet Isaiah had predicted more than seven centuries before Jesus: “The coastlands wait for His teaching” (Isaiah 42, 4); these words refer to the Torah interpreted in the spirit of the Messiah’s teaching — and announced to the inhabitants of “the coastlands”, i.e. various nations of the world.

The Greek word for the Law explained by the Messiah is “Didache” — “The Teaching” (Mark 4, 2). Its content is implied in the very first words which Jesus addresses to the public. Before that Jesus had spoken to his family, to John the Baptist, to Angels, as well as to the demon in the desert (see Luke 2, 48—49; Matthew 3, 14—15; 4, 1—11). Of course, he was in constant communication with his Heavenly Father. However, he had never addressed the public with his preaching. His only words which had been heard by the surrounding people are delivered in the Gospel in the following way:

...Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. (Matthew 4, 17)

Does not this appeal of Jesus repeat a similar appeal of John the Baptist word for word (see Matthew 3, 2)?

Jesus’s teaching itself starts exactly from the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon represents the core of this teaching.

However, some people find it doubtful: «Does an integrally whole teaching of Jesus really exist? And is there a need for one at all? Are simple faith, church prayer and a feeling of some grace caused by Jesus’s presence in your life not enough?

According to the Gospel, all this turns out to be not sufficient at all. For the teaching is the main thing brought by Jesus into the world! Already in his days people were amazed and kept asking one another: “What is this? A new teaching?..” And in the Gospel of John Jesus says:

*...My **teaching** is not mine...(John 7, 16)*

Let us go deeper into these words: “My teaching is not mine” — whose is it then?—

...but His Who sent me... (John 7, 16)

This is **the teaching** of God the Almighty Himself, and Jesus passes it on to the people. But at the same time the Gospel of Mark says:

*...and in **his teaching** he said to them... (Mark 4, 2)*

*And he said unto them **in his doctrine**... (Mark 12, 38) — KJV*

For the teaching of God is inseparable from the soul of Jesus himself — his thoughts, feelings, wishes. That is why it is “his teaching”. It was David who said that the teaching of the Lord belongs to those whose whole heart is devoted to it:

*I remember Your name in the night, O Lord,
and keep **Your Law**.
This blessing **has fallen to me**,
for I have kept Your precepts. (Psalms 119, 55—56)*

So, it is a question of a holistic **teaching** of Jesus. All his words and actions are to be interpreted as parts, manifestations, testimony of that integral, harmonious teaching, which represents a law of spiritual life for every person. The importance of this teaching for the salvation of the soul is exposed in the words of Jesus’s beloved disciple:

*Everyone who does not abide in **the teaching of Christ**, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in **the teaching** has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 1, 9)*

That means **the teaching** of Jesus is so essential, following it is so tightly connected with **the salvation of one’s soul** that the one who stays beyond this **teaching** — “does not have God”!

When Jesus rose from the dead, he said sending the apostles on their grand worldwide preaching:

*...Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,
and **teaching them** to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you... (Matthew 28, 19—20) — KJV*

Again, the central position here is given to **the teaching** — that great **Word**, which Jesus brought to humanity.

As we have already said, the Old Testament contains a prediction of the fact that the Messiah will bring exactly **a teaching**, which — being followed — will be salutary for a person. This prediction of Isaiah is about “a servant”, the son of God, who will come to the earth in order to proclaim salutary news to the nations:

*...He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait **for His teaching**. (Isaiah 42, 4)*

The original verse in Hebrew provides the word “Torah” — **teaching**, a direct revelation of God to man, “His Law”. This means that the Torah, the Law of God, will be explained anew and spiritually interpreted by the Messiah —

*...until he has established **justice** in the earth...(Isaiah 42, 4)*

When the teaching of the Messiah becomes a cornerstone to the entire life of the people, — then the true justice will be established on the earth. Only then can humanity return to the state granted to Adam in the beginning, and every person will stay in love for God and their neighbours. Until that time comes, Jesus’s mission is not completed, because it is said directly:

*...He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established **justice** in the earth...(Isaiah 42, 4)*

Who has enough courage to say that at present “justice has been established” on Earth — in the meaning of complete justice, truth, righteousness? Two thousand years have passed after the earthly life of Jesus, but if we put it mildly, humanity has not made any moral progress... In fact, the contrary is true — we have seen spiritual regression in this world ... Therefore we should listen more intensely to the Sermon on the Mount — to its teaching concerning the healing and salvation of the soul.

One of the main psychological methods used in this sermon is shifting the attention of the listener from absolute egoism, habitual to most of the people, to sympathy towards one’s neighbour. Jesus urges us to constantly estimate our thoughts, words and actions from the point of view of those who surround us and their interests, but not from the point of view of our profit. This alone is enough for drawing close attention to Jesus’s speech: so striking, confusing — and irresistibly attracting hearts and minds throughout twenty centuries.

Whatever changes have taken place on Earth, whatever social or political regime has dominated, whatever events have happened, man continues to drink in the words of Jesus — now anxiously, intensely, now triumphantly, then with pain and awe in heart. Everyone tries to understand them depending on the state of their soul and the present life conditions.

Let us reflect, for instance, why the Sermon on the Mount starts with the following opening words:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
(Matthew 5, 3)*

That is how the first of the so-called nine “Beatitudes” sounds. Each of them starts in Greek with the word *ma’karioi* — “blessed”, “happy”, which is the translation of Hebrew *ash’rei*. This very word opens the Psalms of David:

Happy [ashrei]¹ are those who (Psalms 1,1)

Hebrew ‘*esher*, or ‘*osher*, means “bliss”, “happiness”. *Ashrey* has a literal meaning of “*beatitudes*” (the dual number): that is “a double happiness”, “absolute bliss”. “Double”, “absolute” bliss belongs to the one who ... and further we see the enumeration of those moral virtues and actions which make one happy.

The very enumeration of those qualities in the Sermon on the Mount overwhelms and stuns us. It turns out that first of all —

Blessed are the poor in spirit ... (Matthew 5, 3)

The reader starts thinking: who are those? Up to now there have been incessant disputes on that matter: poor, and besides, in spirit! As a rule, those are called happy who are rich, prosperous, but here the poor (let it be in spirit) — are happy!..

Blessed are those who mourn... (Matthew 5, 4)

How could that be? We call those happy who rejoice. Why should we call happy those who mourn?

Blessed are the meek... (Matthew 5, 5)

¹ Here and further square brackets contain the commentary of the author.

The meek dwell on the outskirts of life — they are outcasts, who are pushed aside by rapacious people who seek their own goals and benefit... But, it turns out that it is the meek who are happy!..

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

Blessed are the merciful...

Blessed are the pure in heart...

Blessed are the peacemakers... (Matthew 5, 6—9)

Well, we could agree with that in a way. But what follows further? —

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...(Matthew 5, 10)

Some people feel a true indignation about these words. For what is a persecuted person? Chased, hunted, deprived of home, finding no support, possessing neither a sense of security, nor any stability in life at all. But it turns out that they are the ones who are blessed, happy: they are persecuted for righteousness' sake. But persecution for righteousness' sake quite often goes along with an exile, imprisonment or even execution... It appears that all this can bring happiness! How could that be?

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account (Matthew 5, 11)

Isn't the one who is persecuted, reviled or hated unhappy? According to the words of Jesus, they prove to be blessed, happy!

What does that all mean? The answer is exactly what we have said above. All this is a parable assuming the inversion of a common understanding. A parable which suggests changing the point of view of one's life from one which prioritizes short term gain to one which considers a longer lasting eternal purpose to benefit humanity! What does a man come to this world for? Is it in order to take anything they can? To bite somebody? To gain a momentary satisfaction at somebody else's expense? Or is there some different reason, some other deeper reason for our earthly existence? That very reason, that very destination is spoken about here.

It turns out that in order to understand the second part of Jesus's speech, the following parts of the Sermon on the Mount, one should experience deep inner changes. This is because a greedy and rapacious person, who strives

only for his own profit, finds these words incomprehensible and at times even deeply hostile, for they hit and wound him because they badly hurt his egoism. Such person will at best go through a religious ceremony, — and then continue his former living... But is Jesus's preaching aimed at that — at making a man wave aside, "ceremoniously rid oneself" of God's words?..

The "beatitudes" of the Sermon depict the spiritual evolution, which must be gone through by each who wants to listen to the sermon further. A man is not only to hear of "the poor in spirit", but to become one himself. What is it then — "poor in spirit" ? First of all it is humble, because in the biblical metaphoric language Hebrew *nkhe ruakh* denotes "contrite (literally "broken") in spirit", which is moderate, not praising oneself. The contrition of spirit is opposite to pride, and arrogance. See also: "Then they sweep by like the wind; they transgress and become guilty" (Habakkuk 1, 11). A person "poor in spirit" is the one who has put aside self-love and pride in order to give place to the Light of God.

John the Baptist spoke of Jesus in the following way:

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3, 30)

What can we say if John the Baptist himself uttered such words? In order "Jesus increased" in us and his word became firmly established, shouldn't we ourselves "decrease" — reduce, cut, put aside our own ego? For not a drop of "the living water" — the teaching of the Truth — will flow into the mind filled with one's own importance! That is why one needs to become humble, mourn over one's own sins, become meek, hunger for righteousness...

But there is another meaning of the expression "poor in spirit". A poor person is the one who possesses nothing and is in constant pleading. Such is the proper self-awareness for a person concerning spiritual benefits — constant pleading with God for them because the true spiritual values, which we need so much, are in fact always lacking in our earthly life.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... (Matthew 5, 6)

Dikayo'syune in the Greek text stands rather for "**righteousness**" than for "truth". The literal translation is as follows: "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness**", "blessed are those who are persecuted for **righteousness**' sake"! As may be supposed, why the Russian Synodal translation provides the word "truth" for it instead of "righteousness": in order to avoid another reminder of the righteousness, which had already existed by the times of Jesus, and which he called on to follow all the time.

Jesus does not only speak of the future times. He declares that exactly now, at the moment of his sermon —

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...
(Matthew 5, 10)*

— and

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5, 6)

What did he, as well as his audience, mean by **righteousness**? For his teaching was only starting, it had not been uttered yet — consequently, there was not talking about righteousness in the context of the Gospel yet...

But the Torah, the Book of Deuteronomy, had said — a thousand and a half years before the Sermon on the Mount:

...And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us...(Deuteronomy 6, 25) — KJV

That is why in the context of “the Beatitudes” Jesus speaks of the **righteousness** — faithfulness to the Law of God proclaimed through Moses...

What is the structure of the nine “Beatitudes”, which open the Sermon on the Mount? First they speak of the inner transformation of a person, and then turn to its outer effect. There are such words of Jesus in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas:

...When you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside ... then you will enter [the Kingdom].” (Saying 22, the translation by the Berlin Working Group for Coptic Gnostic Writings)

The canonical Gospel says as well:

If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays. (Luke 11, 36)

It turns out that the transfiguration of the inner world of a person, its enlightenment, illumination — cause the transformation of the outer world.

The inner and the outer are deeply interrelated, in their concealed essence they are one. And it is only the perception of a fallen man (see Genesis 3, 5 — “knowing good and evil”) makes a precise and univocal division of the world into the spheres of the inner and outer. The teaching of Jesus is aimed at eliminating the opposition, “incompatibility” of these two spheres, weakening the separation between them, and allowing a person to see life in its wholeness. For the phenomena of the surrounding being are reflection and continuation of what is enclosed in our own heart...

The first “beatitudes” are aimed at the transformation of the inner world of a person — one is motivated to feel with one’s own heart and admit one’s guilt in order to come to God with repentance, mourning the sins:

Blessed are those who mourn. (Matthew 5, 4)

Such a person stops being avaricious and becomes meek. But meekness can only be shown towards other people. This “beatitude” is transitional from the inner state to outer manifestations. And further “beatitudes” are turned towards the outer world, concerning the relations with one’s neighbours.

They describe manifestations of a purified, illuminated soul. Thus, the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is the one who manifests righteousness and calls upon the others to follow it. Mercy is required of those who need sympathy. Peacemakers bring peace to their associates. And what about those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake? — It cannot be done without other people — both those who this righteousness is proclaimed to, and who persecute you for its sake.

Salt And Light

After enumerating “the beatitudes”, Jesus reveals to his listeners, what an important role his disciples are destined to play in the world:

You are the salt of the earth... (Matthew 5, 13)

What if salt loses its taste? —

It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. (Matthew 5, 13)

Since ancient times it has been common knowledge that salt prevents food from spoiling. Just like that, the community of disciples created by Jesus, who live in brotherly love, must preserve the humanity from spiritual defilement. With its mere existence this fraternity is a constant reminder of the presence of the Creator in the creation. With its mere life example it keeps up the level of conscience, truthfulness, mercy in surrounding people, which answers the teaching of Jesus.

How is it possible to enter, become part of this community of disciples (1Corinthians 12, 12—25)? It is necessary to start with oneself, to become “salt” oneself — only then you can take up the mission, assigned by God:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. (Matthew 5, 14)

That is the second image of the position that Jesus’ disciples have in the world. What hill and what city are meant? No doubt, it is Jerusalem! The Bible states more than once that Jerusalem “stands on mounts”, the most important of which are mount Moriah with the holy Temple on it and mount Zion (2 Chronicles 3, 1; Psalms 50, 2; 127, 5). “The mountain of the Lord” , the place where this city stands, is the symbol of its spiritual height: it is the centre of the humanity, the centre of spirituality. For it is said in the prophecy of Isaiah that there will be times when

*...The mountain of the Lord...
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
...and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;*

*that He may teach us His ways...”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2, 2—3)*

The Word of renewal, the Law for all humanity, will go forth exactly out of Jerusalem. Yet spiritually Jerusalem is represented by the fraternal community founded by Jesus.

Let us keep in mind that the words concerning “salt and light” are said by Jesus at the very beginning of his sermon — when the community of disciples was only forming. But already at that moment those to whom the Teacher addressed his words were named “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”! But why? It is because the speech was of the people of God which had existed long before! The disciples of the Messiah were to become that “faithful remainder” of Israel, over which all God’s promises and blessings would be fulfilled.

That is why Jesus states that

...A city built on a hill cannot be hid. (Matthew 5, 14)

And further the Teacher goes on to say:

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. (Matthew 5, 15)

No, there is no way the candle of God, which illuminates the way to all mankind, can “be hid”. Once lighted, it should not remain “under the bushel basket”, in concealment. “The kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19, 6), which has been called on to fulfill the role of priesthood in the humanity from ancient times up to the present days, always reminds to the nations about the Almighty and points out the way to Him.

But at first, the disciples of Jesus, as a “faithful remainder” of the people of God must themselves get **enflamed** with the fire of love towards God and people, and only then — **illuminate** all the world. For if you have not light within yourself, how can you enlighten the way to other people? Moreover, the community of the disciples does not conceal itself — it is not “in a napkin”, just like the lamp (“candle”) is not under the bushel basket. It is put, established “on high ground” — in full view of all nations! This fraternal community represents spiritual Jerusalem, illuminating the path for all humanity. For it is said in the Book of Isaiah:

For darkness shall cover the earth,

*and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you [Jerusalem],
and His glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60, 2—3)*

How can that inner light, which has lighted up in one's heart, be delivered to others? Jesus speaks about that in the following way:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5, 16)

The Light — it must become **yours**, and this can only happen when you become united, identified with this **inner light**! Only then **your light** will start shining to others — through **your good works**.

“Inner faith” alone — with no good works — cannot help reach one's own salvation, or illuminate the paths for other people! For the glory of God is in the fact that people and nations see the Light and come to it.

On mentioning that, we can turn to one of the main statements of the Sermon on the Mount:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5, 17)

On the one hand, the teaching of Jesus is a word uttered **for the first time**, and is unexpected to our mind. A person who goes deep into his teaching feels astonishment, inspiration, elation — or, on the contrary, feels shame and pangs of conscience — depending on the state of their soul. And still, the teaching of Jesus is a development of the oldest tradition, it completes all that God had announced through Moses and the prophets. More than once, mentioning that continuity, Jesus uses the word, which in Greek sounds like *dikajo'sune* — “righteousness [by the Law]” (in Hebrew — *tzeda'ka*): that is the righteousness according to that very Law, which Jesus, as he himself would say, has

Come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5, 17)

The aim of Jesus consists in teaching people to obey this Law in the right way. And the Teacher says in his sermon:

...Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law... (Matthew 5, 18)

Too many people throughout centuries have strained to break, check, deny the connection of the Gospel with the Law of Moses — the Torah. That is why they have tried to figure the case as if Jesus had spoken not of the necessity to keep the commandments of the Torah, but the commandments of his own teaching — the very “beatitudes”, which open the Sermon on the Mount. But the one who tries to discern the essence of Jesus’s speech, finds it absolutely obvious that he speaks here exactly and only about the commandments of the Law of Moses, which had been explained for the nation by the earlier prophets:

...I have ...not... come to abolish... (Matthew 5, 17)

— what exactly “not to abolish”? — “the Law or the Prophets!”

A whole range of thinkers throughout centuries have asked themselves the following question: How indeed could human society be arranged on the foundation of such romantic, poetical, inspiring, but “very far from reality” commandments of Jesus, such as admonitions concerning the purity of heart or the fact that one should turn the other cheek to anyone who strikes on one? That all is so beautiful and desired, but ... impracticable!.. So, let us go on living as we have before: rob and plunder, rape and destroy our own species... For no doubt, Jesus’s commandments are impossible to fulfill in the earthly life!..

But how could that be? Can God have sent His Son to proclaim a Law, which is impracticable and unneeded for the earthly life? Definitely not! On no account! In this case let us ask ourselves such a question: What part of Jesus’s teaching contains regulations referring to the political, economic, social and other aspects of the lives of separate people, as well as the lives of whole societies and nations? Researchers “fail to find” such regulations... That is why they come to a strange conclusion: say, if we take the Sermon on the Mount and combine it with the Roman slave-owning, with the despotism of kings, etc., as it was done in the IV century during Emperor Constantine I, when Christianity became the state religion of Rome, everything straightens out, no contradictions are traced in such a “fusion” of the spiritual teaching with a pagan state system.

However, the words of the Sermon such as:

...I have come not to abolish [the Law (the Torah) or the prophets] but to fulfill. (Matthew 5, 17)

— completely refute the point of view stated above — if we get an insight of their meaning. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is inconceivable without leaning on the base of the Torah, without accepting the Law of God as the foundation of the life of a man and humanity, for Jesus has come **not to abolish but to fulfill** the Law of God, which had been proclaimed one thousand and a half years before that! And it is exactly the Torah which contains very detailed commandments, regulations, referring to the political, economic, social life of people!..

Let us give one simple example: the Torah orders to let a slave go on the seventh year, so that no person living in a society which follows the Torah can stay in slavery more than six years. Besides, the released slave is to be supplied with all the tools and ground needed for farming. Thus, on the seventh year the slave becomes a free man, who has his own household. The important thing is that the coming of the seventh year does not depend on the time when the person becomes a slave. Every seventh — “sabbath” — year, the year of forgiveness of debts (and the slavery used to be a debt enslavement mostly) — released all the enslaved people at the same time (Exodus 21, 1—2; Deuteronomy 15, 1—2; 12—14).

Now let us imagine what changes could have taken place in the Roman Empire, which converted to Christianity, had the authorities obeyed the following words of Jesus:

...I have come not to abolish [the Law (the Torah) or the prophets] but to fulfill. (Matthew 5, 17)

One would have had to release all slaves on the seventh year, declare them to be free citizens! Then the whole formation of the empire would have turned upside down — which, according to various features, was, to put it mildly, “not very humanitarian”... Was it possible that the representatives of the authority, who in their turn were slave-owners and “devoted slavery defendants”, could allow such thing to happen?

It means that caesar and his supporters had to do everything in their power to weaken, and further on — to abolish the social meaning of Jesus’s words, to reduce his teaching to dogmatic formulas and ceremonial regulations, “taking away the ethical weapon” of the Good News and concealing its true meaning. That is why, first of all they started emphasizing “the separateness” of the New and the Old Testaments, “the contrast and incompatibility” of the Gospel and the Torah.

For instance, the words of the Sermon on the Mount:

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'

But I say to you ... (Matthew 5, 21—22)

—were interpreted as if Jesus tried to abolish the old commandment, granting a new one... But can such a conclusion be made? In case (Lord forbid!) he had said that it was allowed to murder from now on, — then, of course, one could speak of the opposition of the two Testaments... But he establishes the commandment "You shall not murder", and is far from abolishing it! "But I say to you" — is not an argument against a commandment, but a rhetoric formula, which precedes the explanation, the interpretation of the commandment itself! Jesus spoke the language of the Mishnah — the Aramaic Hebrew language, which was common for the Judea of the 1st century. So, in Hebrew one and the same particle *ve* is used both for the expression of relation and opposition, and it can be translated differently: as "and", "yet" and "but". In the context of the Sermon on the Mount "**but** I say to you" denotes "**and** I say to you" beyond any doubt. There is no opposition here at all. Jesus provides an interpretation of the commandment, but in no way contradicts or disagrees with it.

What does the commandment say?

... 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' (Matthew 5, 21)

Here we come across the Sixth commandment of the Decalogue — the Ten Commandments of Moses together with their extension — the commentary, the description of the way a murderer is to be treated (Exodus 20, 13 and 21, 12—13). This commentary emphasizes the difference between a deliberate murderer, who took the life of a person intentionally, and an involuntary manslayer, who killed unintentionally (the latter finds shelter in one of "the cities of refuge" — Exodus 21, 13; Deuteronomy 19, 3—13).

Let us take special notice of the fact that Jesus, instead of assigning the punishment **after** the crime has been committed (as it has been done in any legislation up to the present time), — teaches that the punishment must **precede** the crime so that the crime was not committed!

He gets at the root, going deep into the state of a person's soul: in order to prevent a crime, one should constantly judge themselves, then they will abstain from an evil action:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment... (Matthew 5, 22) — KJV

By the way, there is no phrase “without a cause” in most of the ancient manuscripts. Even if it had primarily existed in the Sermon, it does not change much. We can see from other places that any anger on the part of a person directed to their neighbour is causeless in its very essence:

...For your anger does not produce God's righteousness. (James 1, 20)

“Whosoever is angry... shall be in danger of the judgment...” But can the human court judge our thoughts? Our inclinations, our will? Evidently not! Who judges in such cases then? — God does. If a person deserves it, God announces His judgement to them through conscience and heart; in case they do not, — God will judge them in another way...

...and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council... (Matthew 5, 22)

But did the council, sanhedrin, which sat in session in Jerusalem, judge people for a rude word, for an insult? In the street, at the marketplace, in any sidewalk or house one could often hear a shout: “Raca!”, which was the expression of a disdainful, contemptuous attitude towards a person one had an argument with. Let us imagine a modern eastern city: similar situations take place there every now and then! But a person turns out to deserve the judgement of the council for an insult of “Raca”!.. The Sanhedrin considered only most important cases, — less substantial ones were examined in local courts.

That means that, according to the teaching of Jesus, contempt towards one's neighbour, denying their human dignity is so important a thing that it should be considered by the main court of the country!.. *Raca* is the Aramaic for “hollow [person]” (*reik* in Hebrew). *Raca* denotes the one who is as if deprived of their human nature, in one word — nobody. So, such an attitude towards a neighbour — a person created in the image and after the likeness of God — makes the offender himself be brought to the law and become imperfect, disrespected member of society — until he repents. For the one who stands to the council is excluded from the ordinary life and is kept in custody. Such a person is dangerous! The one who does not honour the image of God in another person presents danger for the society and must be isolated and judged. And such a person had better be judged by the judgement of his own heart...

And finally:

*...But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
(Matthew 5, 22) — KJV*

Can a human court assign a punishment in the hell fire? Of course not! God alone can!

What does “thou fool” mean? The Greek text uses the word *mo're* — the vocative case of the word *mo'ros* — “a fool”. The Russian Synodal translation provides a stronger word — “insane”. The Hebrew or Aramaic original is hard to define, there are various suggestions. So that is the idea, the one who dares to bring down a man — the only creation on earth which possesses a developed mind — to the level of a senseless beast by their defamation brings their own condemnation to the hell fire.

What does it show to us? Namely, that whatever a person is like, we should try to find a common language with them appealing to their reason. In case you “pass a judgement to them” saying that they are fools, then all relations between you and them are destroyed once and for all, the very opportunity of communication and of human unity is destroyed.

Transforming Paradox

In his further Sermon on the Mount Jesus touches upon various aspects of life. His sermon could be called an encyclopedia of spiritual existence of each soul as well as of the whole humanity.

Penetrating into his each expression, each parable, we find out over and over again that Jesus's approach to the moral life is based on a paradox. However, this paradox exists only for a selfish person, who looks at all things from his own bump and stump, who never in his life thinks of looking at something from the point of view of his neighbour. More than that, such an egoist has no idea of a possibility of "a space of vision", which embraces all points of view at the same time...

So now, let us give several examples of the paradoxical approach of Jesus to those life situations, which were regulated by the commandments of the Law of Moses at the time of his life.

First of all, let us recall the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We shall touch upon its plot in a couple of words. A lawyer came up to Jesus and, as if trying to understand more precisely the Teacher's words concerning one of the main Commandments — love to one's neighbour, he asked:

...And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10, 29)

Asking this question he was likely to clear up the truth for himself rather than argue with the teaching of Jesus: for in that case he would have doubted the commandment of the Torah, whose zealous follower he himself was! The lawyer questioned Jesus: say, you are speaking of the commandment of love to one's neighbour; and who *is* my neighbour? Define the outline of these relationships!..

Jesus replied with a parable about a person belonging to another ethnic group and another faith — a Samaritan, who was riding a donkey and came across a man beaten and injured by robbers. Some time before a priest and a Levite, who were hurrying to a worshipping service in Jerusalem, had indifferently passed by that very man giving him no help. Unlike them, the Samaritan was moved with pity for the injured person: he stopped, examined the sufferer and put bandages on his wounds softening them with expensive oil and disinfecting them with wine. Then he took the sick man on his donkey to an inn, gave some money to the host saying he would soon come back to pay for the stay of the sick man — and, apparently, would take him to his own place until the complete recovery (see Luke 10, 25—36).

On finishing the story Jesus asked: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The question was in the air: “The one who showed him mercy” (Luke 10, 36—37).

Probably, the lawyer omitted mentioning the enemy believer: he did not say “the Samaritan”, but — “the one who showed him mercy”... However, confessional and ethnic separation retires, withdraws on meeting a real humaneness...

What conclusion did Jesus come to after narrating the parable and the response of the lawyer? —

...Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10, 37)

Few readers of this parable pay attention to the fact that it contains the inversion of the common view and the accepted approach. For what was the original question:

...And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10, 29)

But Jesus asked in response: “Who was the sufferer’s neighbour?” Thus, the question is addressed to the one who asks. The meaning of this “counter-question” is the following.

Do not ask: “Who is my neighbour?”, but look for the one whose neighbour you can be! — And become his neighbour closer than any brother, relative or friend! Become the one who saves his life and offers help in the hardest circumstances!

It is only then that a person begins to transform spiritually — when the question “Who is my neighbour?” turns into the question: “Whose neighbour can I become?” This is the way one’s attention is transferred from himself to his brother in earthly being!

In a similar way — inverting a common view and approach — Jesus expresses himself in other parts of the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, he says:

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. (Matthew 5, 38—39)

And he goes on to explain what it means — not to resist an evildoer. He pronounces those very words that have given rise to the deepest astonishment, and often even resistance throughout the history of Christianity. How is it possible — to turn the cheek to the one who strikes you? How is it possible — to love those who hate you? Is it possible to fulfill — to bless those that curse you and pray for those who persecute you? Or is such a high — literally saint — stage of self-consciousness and world-view is meant that very few may step on it — maybe only one out of a million?

But Jesus speaks to everyone: “Be exactly like that!” He appeals to his every disciple, but not only to the saint. Saint people have naturally fulfilled this plea in reality. But it is addressed to any believer, to anyone who calls himself Jesus’ disciple no matter what confession he belongs. Besides, at the time of Jesus there were no confessional separation among his followers...

And now let us raise a question: how should Jesus’s direction in question be correlated with the commandment of the Torah he himself quotes? —

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer... (Matthew 5, 38—39)

Is there any connection between these two regulations, or do they oppose each other?

In order to understand, whether Jesus contrasts his teaching with the Law of Moses or explains this Law, we should ask: from whose point of view does Jesus suggest looking at the situation described by the words:

... ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ (Matthew 5, 38; see also Exodus 21, 24)

A common understanding of this ancient commandment is this: the one who injures you must be injured in the same way! Let him suffer the same damage he caused to you... However, Jesus suggests considering this commandment in a different way, from the other point of view. As if he says: “That will happen to you! It is you who may lose an eye for plucking out somebody else’s! It is not your offender who will be revenged “an eye for an eye”, but you yourself — for injuring your neighbour! And so —

...Do not resist an evildoer... (Matthew 5, 39)

Take care of at least your own eyes and teeth! Pray for those that curse you, bless them, love your enemies — at least not to be injured for the damage you cause them! What can this situation be compared to? The Torah, the Law of God, implies that as a rule, a person perceives a neighbour not as an independent personality, but purely as an instrument. As if somebody else were not “who”, but “what”: as if he were “a thing”, which either helps you, or stands in your way. He just does not exist in your mind as he is, as a separate individual. It is only you who exists, together with your interests, while the other either goes in accord or in conflict with them. That is why, the Law of God teaches “to get to know and acknowledge” another person — at first if only “mosaically”, fragmentarily, in parts. Thus, for example, he irritated you, got you out of temper, and you are ready to hit him in the eye; but what you have to understand and realize is that, according to the Law, his plucked out eye becomes your plucked out eye. And if you knock out his tooth, your tooth will be knocked out, too: “burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” — this is what the Torah says (Exodus 21, 25). And so, a man, taking care of his own eyes and teeth, starts realizing that another person has similar body parts. And gradually, through the mist of beastliness, savagery and egoism, another person begins to appear, show through, become visible “in fragments”. At first his eye or tooth can be seen, then — his arm or foot: if you break them, yours will be broken as well (Exodus 21, 24). Back in ancient times pharisee sages (unlike sadducees, who interpreted the commandment literally) explained that these words do not speak of causing an equal trauma, but of a financial ransom for the caused damage. However, the literal meaning of the Law, in its moral sense, cannot be nullified. For there is a principle of even/equal reward, which is not exercised by man, but by God Himself:

*As you have done, it shall be done to you;
your deeds shall return on your own head. (Obadiah 1, 15)*

Then why did the Pharisee teachers substitute literal reward for a money ransom? Their reasoning was as follows: the eye of a single-eyed person is not equal to the one of a common person's: in case it is plucked out, the single-eyed person becomes absolutely blind. That means that in this case, as well as in other cases, it is a question of “the price of an eye”, “the price of a tooth”, but not the eye or the tooth themselves.

But in the end, going deeper into God's commandment and straining for inner perfection, man will realize: one must abstain from doing evil to their neighbour with all their power. And if you want to escape evil, — you had better love your neighbour as yourself from the very beginning... Thus through Moses, and later through Jesus, God teaches that man must see his

neighbour as his brother — and treat him accordingly. In fact, this is the way to expiate the second greatest sin done on earth. Which exactly?

The first sin was disobeying God's commandment in the Paradise, when Adam listened to Eve, while Eve listened to the serpent... And man turned away from God, destroyed the great saving connection with his Creator. If he had rejoiced to hear God's voice before, now on hearing it he escaped and hid (according to the tale — in a hollow of a tree, see Genesis 3, 8 — “among the trees of the garden”, in the Hebrew original — “inside the tree”). Adam hid from God when he found a kind of “a defect” in the universe (and to be more precise, in his own soul) — that very “hollow”, in which one could allegedly “hide” from the All-seeing.

And the second greatest sin was the sin of Cain, fratricide. So, man and mankind on the whole can return to the light spiritual world, get back to Paradise, only after expiation, correction of these two greatest sins: falling apart from the love to God — and falling apart from the love to the brother — to man, up to hatred towards him and murder...

John, Jesus' beloved disciple, speaks of that directly:

All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. (1 John 3, 15)

Thus, returning to the Father and love for a brother — open for us the gate to the Paradise.

It is obvious that murder is an absolute and final rejection of the commandment: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ In the life of a murderer God's commandment is substituted for the opposite one, the one of the devil: “You shall ruin your neighbor for the sake of yourself.’

But what does the road to murder start from, where does its spring lie? Of course, in hatred! And the beginning of hatred is anger. That is why anyone who is angry — is already on his way to a murder, and in a spiritual sense, by the cause-and-effect relation, — he is already “liable to judgement”. The one who expresses his full rejection of the other calling him “raca” — “emptiness”, “nothing” — is liable to the council. The one who neglects the main advantage of man, his sign of his being godlike — his reason, declaring his brother in mankind “a fool”, — is liable to the sufferings in hell of fire.

Speaking of all this, Jesus creates a new, more complete and wonderful version of “the golden rule” of morality. That rule implies the teaching common to all the great religions, concerning the way one should treat the

other: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow”. This rule exists in the Indian Upanishads, in the teaching of Confucius, in the Gathas of Zoroaster, in the words of Greek philosophers (the Seven Sages speak of it, and it is repeated by Socrates and Plato). Naturally, it can be found in the prophetic tradition of Israel, moreover, it is placed in the forefront. Quite precisely it was articulated by Hillel the Elder, whose interpretation of the Torah in some questions anticipated the teaching of Jesus. It is well-known that once Hillel was visited by a gentile, who wanted to make out the essence of the Torah, so he asked: “Explain to me the Teaching while I’m standing on one foot [which is immediately]”. And Hillel replied to him: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn!”

But Jesus’ wording of this rule was different. While Hillel and other great teachers, prophets and sages from various nations suggested “negative” versions of “the Golden Rule” — “do not do”, Jesus was the first to provide a “positive” version — “do”:

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you... (Matthew 7, 12)

And it means the following: do not only refrain from doing evil to your fellow, but also constantly do whatever you can to do them good — just as you wish others did to you. This is a sermon in favour of active effort aimed at establishing good and spreading light in the world:

In the same way, let your light shine before others... (Matthew 5, 16)

... Many thoughts, parables, teachings and sayings declared in the Sermon on the Mount have been attracting attention for already two thousand years — and have caused constant deep consideration from century to century. Let us for instance take such well-known words as:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.

For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7, 13—14)

These are great, mysterious words, which have been interpreted in different ways in different epochs...

The very opposition of the narrow gate to the wide one makes us wonder how many people can enter a narrow gate at the same time? And there seems no escaping the answer that only one person can force his way through it! But a

wide gate is intended for crowds: whole communities — confessions, unions, parties — enter it and go to destruction... Not only spiritual destruction, but even also a physical one: for two most horrible in history world wars which took tens of millions of earthly lives were unleashed in the very center of the Christian world! And it took place after almost two thousand years of “preaching” the Gospel... That very “preaching”, which reduced the teaching of Jesus to dogmatic and ritual regulations, concealing the true essence of the teaching.

It is said of the narrow gate: “There are few who find it.” As we have mentioned, they can be entered by a single person... One should find this gate on his own in order to walk in his own, unique way. Because it is only and precisely on that road to God, the way of life is salutary, which is found by the person himself, after one restores relationships of his soul with both the Almighty, and with his neighbours. A believer does not walk that way because everybody does, but because that is the way to the Kingdom of God that he personally found, tried and felt!.. Just as Apostle John said about it:

*Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts.
(1 John 5, 10)*

— the testimony of their of their own spirit. And unlike the external, dogmatically ritual way, “the narrow road” leads **into** the soul, and it is walked invisibly. Only the actions of mercy and self-sacrifice for the sake of God and fellows make this road reveal itself, become visible for the others. It is notable that right after the warning against choosing “the wide gate that leads to destruction” Jesus turns to the question concerning false prophets:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7, 15)

Who is a false prophet? It is obvious that he is contrasted to a true one. What does a true prophet do? — He proclaims the will of God, the teaching of God. That means that a false prophet proclaims something different from the will of God...

In another place Jesus says:

...Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. (Mark 13, 6)

Here Jesus warns that soon a new teaching will arise, get form — a teaching of “many” and for “many” — which will pretend to be a true word of Jesus and will seduce souls.

Just as many take “a wide road” leading to destruction — many will emerge claiming to provide a “true”, “faultless”, “saving” interpretation of Jesus’ words. This false interpretation of his words will lead nations to destruction... Destruction may have different sides, bringing physical death, historical unconsciousness, and, lastly, spiritual death — the latter refers to those who

... will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord... (2 Thessalonians 1, 9)

By what means exactly do false prophets draw people to an “easy”, road leading to death? Jesus warns us: “...who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are **ravenous wolves**.” What is it, what feature of soul is addressed to by such prophets? — To one’s ravenousness! Can a wolf preach meekness, as a sheep can? No, he will always speak a wolfish language — out of the abundance of their heart, for it is said:

... Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12, 34)

A wolf is a ravenous animal, and it proclaims a wolfish law: it calls for selfishness, greed, rankling, murdering, appropriation of the property of another. At the same time it skulks behind the teaching of Jesus: “Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’”

Another verse says:

... False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. (Mark 13, 22)

It is common knowledge what consequences low attention to these words of Jesus has caused throughout centuries: the Crusades, when tens of thousands of people were massacred under the guise of “the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre”; the misdeeds of the Inquisition, which tortured, tormented and burned people for “belying their faith”; the cruelties of colonialism which accompanied superficial “christianization” of the conquered nations. For there existed no civilization except the European one which would exploit the colonized, conquered nations on such a large scale...

The Cornerstone

So now, as long as the teaching of Jesus has been followed, separate people and families, as well as whole nations and states have prospered. While they have degraded in case the teaching of Jesus has been violated: the foundations of human souls as well as whole communities have collapsed. The humanity has suffered countless troubles. That is why, studying the Sermon on the Mount, we should realize who, when and under what circumstances has obeyed the genuine teaching of Jesus, and who, when and in what way has distorted it, substituting the essence of the New Testament sermon for quite other ideas and callings:

*... You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?
So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.
(Matthew 7, 16–18)*

That is why, foreseeing the ending from the very start, Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount with such a comparison:

*... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. (Matthew 7, 24–25)*

What does the rock symbolize? — The integrity and firmness of the teaching! The rock as a basis of life is loyalty to God's Word! The parallel verse in the Gospel of Luke states that it is necessary to go into the teaching of Jesus by searching the true meaning of his words. The builder, according to Luke, —

... dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock... (Luke 6, 48)

One should examine the teaching of Jesus, enquire into the origin — the “firm foundation” of his thought. Investigate with both, one's “spirit and mind” (1 Corinthians 14, 15) — just like a man building a house on the rocky ground of Judea had to dig down finding the rocky ground — and laid the foundation on it, but not on the upper sand layer of the soil, if he wished to erect a building on a firm foundation.

But the one who builds one's outlook and life upon the variety of petty views and private fuss, upon the "sand" of most diverse theories, desires and approaches — has "built his house on the sand":

...And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7, 27)

These words refer to "the houses" of separate people, as well as to "the house" of each nation and each state, and also to our mutual house — Earth. At present time we can clearly see the results of the disregard for the Sermon on the Mount, the denial of its true essence. After centuries of following this sermon's external outline and neglecting its true sense, the consequence is vivid. Our common house is on the verge of a terrible fall, for it is said:

...And great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7, 27)

But each person as well as the whole humanity even now has an opportunity to listen to the words of Jesus, accept them with all their heart and follow them! It is not late **to lay the foundation** of our inner world **on the rock** — our own house, the house of each nation and the house of the humanity.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...

—the apostle says —

...Piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4, 12)

Let us summarize what has been said. Naturally, we have just touched upon a few aspects, only two-three facets of the gemstone which is named the Sermon on the Mount.

However, at times Jesus himself worded his teaching very briefly — for instance, when a lawyer came up to him and asked: "Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?". Naturally, that scribe meant the most important commandment, which united all the other commandments: for any Jew of that time was sure to know the first commandment uttered by God on Mount Sinai:

...I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...(Exodus 20, 2)

For a pharisee mind, for people who studied the Law with all their effort, trying to find the most essential, the most significant in it — for such people one of the main questions was: “Which commandment in the Law is the first, which means the main?”

What did Jesus answer in return? —

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ (Mark 12, 29—30)

In his reply Jesus quoted the Book of Deuteronomy (6, 4—5). From these words it follows that in order the “first” (i.e. the most important) commandment were obeyed, the existence of Israel is necessary, i.e. the unity of people faithful to God and loving one another. Later the Church took the name of “the New people of God”, identifying itself with the ancient people — chosen by God. The main commandment pointed out by Jesus “throws a bridge” between man and God drawing people back towards the divine-human communication. It restores the dialogue with the Creator, which was broken back in the Paradise by Adam and Eve, who had committed the sin. It brings man to the way of love towards the Creator. For God on His part loves man all the time; but only when man requites His love, the communication is recommenced, “the dialogue” between the Creator and His creation, for which the whole world was made...

Here is another, the second main commandment:

The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12, 31)

According to the text by Matthew, Jesus says:

... On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22, 40)

Here the Greek word “hang” is used: the Law and commandments are figured as though they were hanged upon the two main commandments. As if the hand of God drew down these two commandments from heaven for us — “hanging” the Law, the Books of Prophets and all the spiritual life of humanity on them...

The second commandment (which is again the second main one) — “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” — is a call for awakening to the fact that

all people are unified and have the ties of blood as the descendants of Adam, as well as spiritual ties in prospect. We should mention that the spiritual relationship unites only those who accept the One God as their father. Obeying the second commandment is the atonement of the sin of Cain the fratricide.

So, the aim of the whole teaching is the recreation of the humanity as a united family headed by God Himself...

“Hear, O Israel!”— these words do not accidentally open the main commandment, but for the following reason. One of the meanings, which this name has, is “an essence beholding God” (Yesh-roe-El). “The unity of Israel”, i.e. the togetherness of all believers in love for the Creator and for one another, is the image of the oncoming brotherhood, which all the nations are called on to join. Gradually all the humanity is to become such a spiritual community loving God. Thus, the Lord’s promise given to the ancient Israel will come true:

... You shall be ... a priestly kingdom and a holy nation... (Exodus 19, 6)

On receiving the Torah, the people of God were raised to the rank of priesthood for all human kind in order to serve the Creator devotedly and call on all the people to realize that they are brothers and return to the One Father. When the people of Israel followed its calling — it prospered, when it deviated from its mission — it was severely punished...

Returning to God and to life full of love, according to the Sermon on the Mount, starts with an inner transformation of a person — at their own will. It cannot be forced externally. But is there in the New Testament a description of such a community, which has adopted and kept the Teaching of Jesus? — Yes, certainly. Such a community is described in the Book of Acts. These people prayed together, lived a mutual life and owned common property, from which they gave to anyone who had need (see Acts 2, 44—47). They were that very community, which the Sermon on the Mount invokes to create:

*... And you are all brothers;
... You have One Father... (Matthew 23, 8—9)*

Further Jesus goes on to interpret several of the Ten Commandments. As it has already been mentioned, the Sermon on the Mount must have been delivered on the Holiday of Pentecost, when the granting of the Torah is celebrated. There had existed an ancient custom on this day to interpret the commandments of the Law, proclaimed by God from the Mount Sinai. In his message Jesus explains the Sixth, the Seventh and the Third

commandments in succession: «You shall not murder», «You shall not commit adultery», «You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God» (in Jesus's interpretation it is «You shall not swear falsely»). The essence of his interpretation is this: if the punishment simply follows the crime, then the crime is just admitted to be inevitable. But in order to avoid evil, a person must be spiritually awake — then God's «punishment» (admonition), delivered through the heart and conscience, will prevent the very possibility of crime. In this case only evil will be averted. For example, in order to obey the Sixth Commandment — one mustn't even be angry. In order to keep the Seventh Commandment, — one should extinguish the evil desire, «the lust of the eyes»...

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount has got a spiritual and social orientation (focuses on spiritual and social questions). But a question arises: Is it possible that this new ethical address failed to be heard of in Rome — by its authorities, its Senate headed by the caesar? By the politicians, whose extensive knowledge allowing such a huge empire to be ruled is so illustrious? Is it possible that such words as «Woe to you who are rich»; «Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep» have been overheard by them? Is it possible that all this was not understood and taken for a call to riot, for a protest against the power of caesar, for an attempt to overthrow the existing regime and order? For the uprising of Spartacus, for instance, was suppressed, though with difficulty. In case the huge rightless masses of slaves and the poor of the Empire had united into fraternal communes, passively resisting the misanthropic ideology of slave-owning, would it have been easy for the authorities to handle the situation? Three centuries after the sermon of Jesus, by the time of Emperor Constantine, despite a most severe persecution and execution, despite the great amount of martyrs, burnt and torn by wild beasts, — a substantial part of the Empire's population adopted Christianity, and an even larger amount of people agreed with its teaching! What were the authorities to do? How were they supposed to retain the power?

In order not to lose the power or the wealth, the authorities had to nullify the social meaning of the teaching of Jesus, emphasize the other part of it — the inner self-perfection of a person, «removing» one out of society, separating from the others. First of all, of course, the slave system of Rome had to be protected from intrusion... And that required the sacralization of the power of the caesar himself. Those who were most persistent, most steady in calling to obeying the social teaching of Jesus, were either executed, or isolated. At best, such people were deported to remote areas of the Empire, losing their inter-relation and connection with public. Many of them were put to cenobitic monasteries supervised by authorities: they were supposed to fulfill their desire for fraternal unity there, in closed communities...

Thus, «for the sake of the empire's welfare» the «nullification» and concealment of the most «dangerous» sides of the teaching of Jesus were executed. In other words, the dogmatic teaching was gradually developed, in contrast to the social one. The authorities watched carefully in order to emphasize the contemplation about high theological matters, which are beyond understanding, instead of the social and ethical side of the sermon. That is why the Ecumenical Councils were busy elaborating the most detailed dogmatics, but not at all trying to really implement the principles of philanthropy, expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Since that very time — since the IV century — there exist two lines in Christianity; the one still clings to the policy of the Roman Caesar described above; whereas the other strives to implement the true aims of Jesus displayed in his teaching as far as it is possible. These directions have at times interwoven in quite peculiar ways throughout the whole history...

How did bishops and presbyters of the Church react to the radical change in the attitude of the Roman official authorities towards Christianity in IV century? Quite a number of them, tempted by high-paid positions and other exceptional treatment, or under threat of repressions — accepted compromise. They got tired of persecution, longed for acknowledgement and stability.

But was it possible that most bishops and presbyters, after becoming executors of the caesar's will, agreed to openly betray the teaching of Jesus? Of course, not! They hoped that gradually, due to official promotion of Christianity, the basics of the Gospel would take root in the popular masses. They turned out to be right in some way: such form of preaching, such way of attracting nations towards the Gospel — played a great role in history...

Yet, other, more spiritual, leaders of the church maintained unshakeable faithfulness to all the conclusions driven from the teaching of Jesus. As Russian old believers used to say 1300 years later, they were ready to die for «the single azŭ» — for any letter, more than that for the very spirit of the teaching: just not to betray, not to belie! They found themselves among those, who apostle Paul referred to in his prediction:

... All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3, 12)

The apostle's prophecy cited above has been coming true from century to century: those who fully obeyed the will of the caesar, were the only ones who obtained the power in the Church and stopped being persecuted. The

merger of the Church and state authorities led to alienation among the members of communities, fading of the initial fraternal love. A considerable part of the clergy joined the majority, who, according to the Sermon on the Mount, «enter through the wide gate»:

... for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it... (Matthew 7, 13)

But, obviously, God allowed both ways to exist in Christianity: the «easy» one, proclaiming the fundamental principles of the teaching at least externally — to the majority of people, and the «narrow» one, which is indeed salutary, which can be found and chosen by an individual on their own. Besides, paradoxically, another reason for the «easy» road is that due to it eager people can learn about the «narrow» one as well...

In addition, there existed another way «to nullify» those parts of the teaching of Jesus which were considered as «dangerous» for the state. It required the opposition of the Gospel to the Torah, so that the social effect of the new teaching «had been eliminated». A very vivid manifestation of that, as we have seen, referred to slavery. The thing is that the Sermon on the Mount does not mention the relief of slaves' conditions — that served to make a conclusion that Christians are not prohibited to have slaves and enrich themselves on their labour. For, despite the Law of God prescribes to release a slave on the seventh year, granting him a personal piece of land and tools, and treat him as a brother during the period of his «slavery» (see Exodus 21, 1—3; Leviticus 25, 39—43; Deuteronomy 15, 12—18) — new «exegetes» taught that Jesus allegedly abolished, denied the words of the Torah, instead of reaffirming them. At the same time they tried to ignore or misinterpret the direct evidence in the Gospel saying:

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Law [the Torah] until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5, 18)

... And still, a universal acknowledgement of Christianity, by the untraceable will of the Providence, led to the gradual withering away of slavery in the Roman Empire. The slave-holding system changed for the Colonate, or the interaction system between landlords and free or semi-free farmers... However, in a number of European countries serfdom lasted for centuries more (in Russia, for instance, up to 1861), and quite often it was the real slavery, which was sanctified by the official church. Few people opposed it, and if some did raise their voice against slavery, they were forced to stay silent, not only by repressions but also by references to the interpretation of the New Testament texts officially accepted by church.

On top of that, from the epoch of Constantine on, Roman authorities thought it necessary to isolate Jews abiding by the Torah, especially — to undermine the influence of Judeo-Christians because the latter had always reminded them that Jesus had not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill (see Matthew 5, 17). Note that these words from the Revelation of John refer exactly to the primary Church created directly by Jesus and his apostles and including Judeo-Christians:

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14, 12)

It was they who aroused a special anger of the dragon symbolizing the pagan state power of Rome:

Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12, 17)

All possible measures were taken to create and maintain a negative image of the Jewish people on the whole, and especially — the already mentioned line of Christianity. Being a separate movement contradicting the official Church, Jewish Christians were doomed to gradual extinction. The result of all that was the preservation of the main basics of the Roman pagan state system and social order, which were disguised as victorious Christianity.

However, Jesus originally taught — and keeps on teaching — «as one having authority» (see Matthew 7, 29). The Light of his teaching, penetrating into the mind of those who at first accept the Gospel only outwardly, — displaces the darkness. It is the Light, which is described at the beginning of the Gospel of John:

...The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1, 5)

— that Light can by no means be concealed or extinguished.

In this context one biblical event can be recalled. When the elders of Israel headed by Moses went up Mount Sinai, they saw the God of Israel there:

...And they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. (Exodus 24, 10)

What does this image — «a pavement of sapphire stone» — denote? In order to interpret it, we shall turn to another passage of the Writing, in which God speaks through prophet Isaiah:

*... Heaven is My throne
and the earth is My footstool... (Isaiah 66 , 1)*

So, the earth is the footstool of God. And God showed to Moses and the elders on Mount Sinai what will our Earth look like, how it will change when all the human kind turns back to God. The Earth will be like heaven, resembling in its pureness a transparent blue sapphire stone. That was the main aim of God when He sent prophets to the Earth. For that the Son of God came to people. It is clearly expressed in the Revelation of John, where the New Jerusalem is described coming down out of heaven at the end of time:

*... “See, **the home of God is among mortals.**
He will dwell with them
...He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21, 3—4)*

Then people will not only stop suffering and crying, but also stop dying — for death is a result of leaving God, the Source of life. Then God will reside among people.

Indeed, exactly in order to erect such a Dwelling of God in the souls and hearts of people all the prophets came to us, for that reason the Son of God came — it was Jesus Christ. And up to the very «end of darkness» — we do not speak of «the end of the world», but of «the end of darkness», for we hope for the victory of Light — will that Dwelling of God be erected. And one of the main means and tools for building is the Sermon on the Mount itself and living in accordance with it...