

# **Biblical Theology and the Sacrament of Penance**

By Rev. Dimitriy Yurevitch SAINT-PETERSBURG ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL ACADEMY  
Vth International Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church ORTHODOX  
TEACHING ON THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH Moscow, 13–16 November  
2007

## **1. Essential aspects of the biblical doctrine of repentance**

The doctrine of Repentance is represented in different books of the Old and New Testament. There it is set out with different degrees of fullness depending on historical conditions as well as on the sacred authors' purposes and objectives. Philologically it is not restricted to any one term; and while the biblical teaching about salvation was evolving, repentance terminology was also acquiring fullness and accuracy in meaning [1].

That is why in setting out the biblical doctrine of repentance there arises a difficulty of a technical character. The abundant material and the wholeness of the scene call for the carrying out of a scrupulous and consistent analysis of repentance in all biblical books, and only after that, can we put the different parts and features of this doctrine together and suggest a certain system as a synthesis. However, while relevant to a comprehensive monograph, such an approach is unacceptable in a short report, not pretending to fullness. So the author suggests that a "mathematical" method should be used in summary of the material: first, a "theorem" will be formulated, i.e. the total scheme of the biblical doctrine of repentance will be presented, followed by its "proof" — illustrations of different aspects of the biblical doctrine in certain texts and examples. Bearing in mind the historical genesis of the biblical doctrine, the final outline will be presented on the basis of the idea that there is a mutual harmony in matters of the doctrine in the books of Scripture.

Briefly the Biblical repentance doctrine can be represented in the following way. From the Scriptural point of view, repentance is an overall change in human life, a fundamental shift of life courses, a person's conversion from sin to the Lord and confirming him upon a new way of life. In the process of repentance a number of aspects can be marked out, that can be described both logically and formally.

With regard to form we are required to distinguish internal and external, as well as private and public repentance [2]. The types mentioned are closely interconnected and may serve as the external terms of the different stages of repentance, and that reflect the logical process.

The first logical stage of repentance is contrition, i.e., when a person (or even a group of people) realizes the viciousness of his way of life, understands sins as definite transgressions of the commandment, and apprehends the bitterness drawn to the soul and to all the human essence by sin. The second stage of repentance — turning — brings change in the sinner's life, his appeal to the Lord begging for pardon and

forgiveness. The third stage — confession — when the penitent uses different ways to express his repentance by oral declamation, offerings in the Old Testament, or the Sacrament in the New Testament Church. Confession is needed not only to express feelings of repentance but to present the sinner with the belief that he is forgiven by the Lord. The stage of purification has also to be attributed to the logic of repentance. That is the mysterious effect of God's Grace on the penitent, in the course of which, the Lord heals the nature struck down by sin, forgives sins and gives power to do good deeds. And the last stage — remaining in virtue — is the penitent's conversion from all former evil deeds in favor of striving for the good.

We will bear in mind this general plan of the biblical doctrine of repentance while studying the following examples, and we will recall that the authors of the sacred books were not restricted to any strict scheme given in advance when setting out the doctrine of repentance. That is why in the examples from the Bible the stages of the repentance process may differ from the above logical plan both in their sequence and number.

## **2. Old Testament doctrine of repentance**

When envisaging repentance in the Old Testament, the holy authors mainly use two ancient Hebrew terms — [niham] «regret, be sorry» and [shuv] «turn back, return», that, depending on the context, could bear different meanings.

In some cases [niham] exactly means «feel sorry»: for example: this word's derivative is used in Gen.6:6; and this makes clear the following phrase sounding like a feeling of dubiety in the Russian translation «Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth». Similarly, a number of derivatives from [niham] in the Russian Synodal translation (RST) have been interpreted like «to be sorry, to grieve», although in fact they mean «to be sorry about something» (Gen 6. 7; 1 Sam 15. 35; Ex 13. 17 — all in RST). Verb [shuv] and its derivatives originally mean «return», «turn back».

### **a) Repentance rituals given in the law of Moses**

In the Pentateuch of Moses there is found a remarkable combination of external repentance resulting from the inner contrition. Targeting the inner spiritual life through Moses the Lord has taught the moral law as criterion of morality. Along with this the people of Judea was summoned to take part in public religious worship, and to observe the rules of ritual purity and impurity. Ritual devotions and sacrifices became the external modes expressing public or private repentance. But they were not to be resorted to mechanically; vice versa, in order to arouse inner contrition in the people of Israel every Jew was to take part in sacrificing systematically. This made him ponder over the meaning of the law.

In the Pentateuch of Moses we find a type of obligatory repentance widespread in the ancient world — that is sacrifice. Having categorized all the offerings prescribed in the Law of Moses, depending on the reason for the sacrifice, we see that two out of four offerings related directly to make an Old Testament adherent feel repentance [3]. First of all, there is «the guilt offering» (Hebrew [asham]), offered when «anyone sins and

does any of the things which Yahweh has commanded not to be done» (Lev 5. 17) or «In the holy things of Yahweh» (Lev 5. 14–16).

The second one — «the sin offering» (Hebrew [hattat]) — offered when anyone realized his spiritual or body as being in sin or viciousness (Ex 29. 14; Lev 4. 21 and other). At first sight, some very natural occasions served as reasons for this offering: impurity incurred by touching an “unclean” thing or a corpse, during male or female effusion, woman’s postpartum condition, falling ill with leprosy and the like [4] . But there were many more cases when the sin offering was to be made; they included any violations of religious and moral standards, and it was to be offered not only by specific persons (rulers, Lev 4. 22–26, common people, Lev 4. 27–35), but by the whole congregation of Israel (Lev 4. 13–21) as well. The offering name itself — [hattat], together with its relative word[hæte], — used to denote the sin per se, understood as a sinner’s being flawed. The relative Acadian words (adjective hatu, meant «wretched», and nouns hitu and hititu, meant «lack, flaw» [5] ) indicate that the Hebrew term; [hattat] etymologically goes back to «miss, meet with a failure» [6] . The sin is found not only in a violation of the Commandment, not only by doing harm to one’s neighbor, but as upsetting the order of life laid down by the Lord; it makes the sinner’s life incomplete being the cause of his joyless condition — that is the meaning of ; [hattat] [7] . For this reason the sin offering not only reminded a person of his depravity but also made him contrite: in the Law of Moses a sinner is promised forgiveness after making sacrifices — Levi says about the repentant person making the offering: «and the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven» (Lev 4. 31, 35).

#### b) Different types of repentance in the Old Testament

In addition to the religious ceremonies prescribed by the Law in the Old Testament books there are also descriptions of widespread forms by which exterior repentance was expressed by the whole people and by individuals as well.

First of all, there are penitential acts that expressing humility, acts that consist in refusing food and drink, and which are conveyed by the ancient Hebrew verb [tsom], i.e. «to keep fast». Fasts sustained the prayer of repentance of the people of Israel, as pronounced by Samuel after the people turned off from the pagan cults of Baal and Astarte (1 Sam 7. 6); David fasted after he had sinned with Bathsheba; he fasted while praying penitently for his new-born child to be healed (2 Sam 12. 16, 21, 22); Ahab also fasted earnestly on hearing the Lord’s frightening sentence upon himself and his descendants. (1 Kings 21. 27–29) [8] .

In the Old Testament some other external forms for the expression of repentance are described: to tear one’s clothes and put on sackcloth (ancient Hebrew [sak]), i.e. coarse clothes of basic shape that looked like a sack of goat hair (1 Kings 21. 27; Joel 1. 13; Jon 3. 6, 8; Neh 9. 1 and others); sitting or laying in ashes, or sprinkling ashes on the head (Is 58. 5; Neh 9. 1; Dan 9. 3; Esther 4, 3 and others). Fasting and wearing sackcloth as forms of repentance were popular outside of the borders of Palestine as well, as is proved in book of Jonah, where the contrite people of Nineveh wore

sackcloth and fasted not only themselves but made their herds and flocks fast as well. (Jon 3. 7).

One of the most important expressions of repentance was the public confession of sins to the Lord. It could be a confession of the whole people as, for instance, under Samuel, when the whole people repented of idolatry (1 Sam.7:6); under Nehemiah, at the moment when the Law was renewed and when the people of Israel «stood up and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers» (Neh 9. 2); or it could be a confession of individual persons — like the penitential prayer of Daniel and the song of three youths, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego cast in the Babylon furnace (Dan 9. 4–19; 3. 25–90), — although they repented not of their personal sins but for the sins of the whole people.

### c) Repentance historiography in the Old Testament

The idea of public repentance runs through the Book of Judges, that historiography considers that Israel's misfortunes during the first Palestinian period (particularly, the fall under the oppression of neighboring nations) resulted from the people's fall into idolatry. The sacred author thinks that by means of these misfortunes the Lord admonished the people of Israel. Every time they were unable to bear the conquerors' oppression any longer the «children of Israel» used to exclaim «to the Lord» (Judg 3. 9 and other) and He chose for them a leader with whom they could overthrow the foreign yoke. These leaders are known in history as the Judges (Hebrew [shofetim]). The Book of Judges describe a cycle repeated many times in the pre-monarchical period of Israel's history: the nation's backsliding from the Lord, severe longstanding misfortunes as the Lord's corrective penalty, the nation's repentance and plea to the Lord asking for help, release by the judge, and an ongoing period of prosperity together with the obedience to the Lord.

In the monarchical period, while describing the periodical backsliding of the Judaic and Israeli kingdoms into idolatry, the historical books tell of repentance worked out in practical terms: most importantly, abandonment of the erroneous pagan cults and return to the true God, the Lord of Israel, and His teachings (1 Sam 7. 3; 1 Kings 13. 33; 2 Kings 17. 19–23). In one case the importance of studying the Law of Moses for this type of repentance is specially noted: when the story of the pious King Josiah is related, it is said that he has appealed ([shav]) to the Lord not only «with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might», but also «according to all the law of Moses» (2 Kings 23. 25).

### d) Inner repentance in the book of Job

In one of the earliest books [9] of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, the Book of Job, a question is raised: how does a private person's responsibility for his faults correspond to natural human depravity? In other words, what is the sinner contrite for in the face of God, for his specific misdeeds or for his potential ability to sin, an ability peculiar to any human being?

In the beginning of the book named for him, Job is described as a holy man who is not only pleasing to the Lord himself but also weakly makes burnt offerings for his sons and daughters in case they should sin in their feasts (Job 1. 4). Thus, in mentioning the sacrifices, the author signals the penitent mode of Job's life.

Then a number of misfortunes befall Job and the friends who came to console him try to convince him that there is a connection between these terrible miseries and his private awful sins that have made the Lord angry. The friends' idea is not unique: in the ancient East there was a wide spread conception that any sin brings punishment from God. Job does not deny this idea as such, saying: «If I sin, thou dost mark me, and dost not acquit me of my iniquity» (Job 10. 14), but he firmly denies his share in such great misdeeds as could only, according to his friends' ideas, have led to such awful suffering. On the contrary, Job, as saint John Chrysostom writes, «did not see the cause of his calamities, and this uncertainty tormented him more severely than the worms» [10] .

The friends try to persuade Job that human nature is tainted by sin and, thus, any human being is sinful. For instance, Eliphaz the Temanite tells him: «Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth!» (Job 4 17–19). Job does not deny the idea of the universal depravity: «how can a man be just before God?» he cries rhetorically (Job 9. 2). But in his thoughts he goes further; he realizes that this depravity develops differently in the individual's specific deeds. And he, Job, has not committed such a measure of sin to deserve to suffer so awful a punishment from the Lord. «...that thou dost seek out my iniquity, and search for my sin? — asks Job appealing to the Lord but in fact addressing the thoughts of his friends, and he says further directly, — although you know that I am not guilty» (Job 10. 6–7). Further, in the book of Job it is seen that he has been right, as his misfortunes have been sent on him not because of his sins but in order to reveal his forbearance (James 5. 11).

Thus, according to the book of Job, in the face of God anyone is to be contrite not in his potential ability to sin but in his actual deeds contrary to divine will [11] .

#### e) Inner repentance in the 51st psalm

One of the most outstanding Scripture texts concerning the doctrine of repentance is the 51st (the 50th in LXX and Russian Synodal translation) psalm written by David after his famous sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12). This work is remarkable not only because it is well known to any devout person due to its inclusion in the Orthodox Church's liturgical practice, but also because almost all the stages of repentance described at the beginning of this paper as the sum of biblical doctrine on this matter, are represented here.

David's repentant prayer goes to the sinner's inner world. David begins by begging the Lord to forgive his sins but at the same time he implores Him to purify his soul from the filth and stain that came into his nature through sinful deeds: «Wash me thoroughly from

my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin» (Ps 51. 2). In the Russian (as well as in the English) variant the word «sin» corresponds to the above-mentioned Hebrew term; [hattat], that meant the flaw of a human being's sinful state. It is noteworthy that David thinks of a sin not juristically, nor as causing the Lord's anger (although such an aspect can be found in other Old Testament texts) — It is not anger which is important to him but grace, God's «loving kindness» that can «wash» and «cleanse» the sinner's nature from involvement in sin. Despite sinful flaw the Lord can heal: «purify me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow», — prays David (51. 7).

David considers inner repentance as the most important condition for the Lord to forgive and cleanse him ; without this external repentance, the offering of the sacrifice does not have any sense in the Lord's eyes: «for you do not delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it. You take no pleasure in burnt offering», says David (51. 16). The Lord does not want David to offer the sacrifices without inner repentance because sacrifice is a public act, and David acted publicly but hypocritically by sending Bathsheba's husband Uriah to imminent death. On the surface everything looked decent but at the same time, internally, David was full of guilt. As sacrifice only symbolizes repentance, without inner repentance it will lose all sense. David wishes first to change internally, he wishes this conversion to become the foundation for the ensuing public sacrifice: «The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise», he says (51. 17).

After the perception of sin and having inner contrition , after the appeal to the Lord through a broken heart and making this the foundation for the ensuing sincere public confession of sin by means of sacrifice, David pleads for grace hoping to gain purification . Recovery of the entirety and harmony of the soul will to prove him that the Lord has forgiven him: «Create in me a clean heart, O God, Renew a right spirit within me» (51:10). The Lord makes this purification through His Holy Spirit: «Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me» (51. 11). The result of purification for David is the joy of a righteous man; the joy of being in the Lord and with the Lord: «Restore me to the joy of your salvation. Uphold me with a willing spirit» (51. 12). Here «the joy of your salvation» corresponds to the Hebrew expression ^[<v«salvation», that later obtained the messianic character imparted by the prophets, is very important [12] .

However David does not ask for the Lord to only purify him; he wishes to remain doing good: then his repentance will become full, definitive and final: « Then I will teach transgressors your ways. Sinners shall be converted to you», — says David (Ps 51. 13). David considers glorification of the Lord as one of the main deeds of virtue: «O Lord, open my lips. My mouth shall declare your praise» (51. 15). Only if David remains in the good will his kingdom be strengthened; in particular, Zion will prosper and Jerusalem will be secure (51. 18), and David and his people can bring offerings to the Lord in peace (51. 19).

f) Repentance in the prophetic books of the pre-exilic prophets

The prophets have especially strongly formulated the doctrine of repentance as a conversion to God that presupposes new relations between the human being and the Lord, and which touches all spheres of human activity. To a certain extent the development of this doctrine has resulted from a lessening of the feeling of inner repentance in the people of Israel, while at the same time they still mechanically took part in outward ceremonies [13]. The prophets strove to remove from the doctrine of repentance all elements that could have been understood by the common people as magical [14].

The prophets considered the different private and public occasions of sin (for instance, idolatry, prayer at the high places, political alliances with pagan nations, social injustice) as results of the particular spiritual state of people of Israel. The prophets were able to characterize this state in the personalized terms of relations between two persons: the Lord and the nation; in which Israel's stance was as that the unfaithful one [15]. For example, the prophet Hosea describes relations between the Lord and Israel as a marriage where Israel behaves like an unfaithful wife (Hos 1–3), the prophet Isaiah speaks of the people of Israel as sons rebelling against their Father (Is 1. 2), and Jeremiah calls sin an act of forsaking the Lord (Jer 1. 16; 2. 13, 17, 19; 5. 7, 19). All these patterns underline the idea that sin is a betrayal of or a backsliding from the Lord. That is why repentance in the prophetic literature is thought of as a return from the way of sin to the former right relations between Israel and the Lord (Hos 2. 9), as first laid down in the Covenant between the Lord and His people [16].

What, according to the prophets, will be the practical results of Israel's return to the Lord? First of all; they will be obedient to God's will, keeping his commandments, even as Israel has fully trusted Him with its life [17]. This ideal is especially proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah when he is transmitting the Lord's message to the sons of Israel: «You have now turned and had done that which is right in my eyes» (Jer 34. 15). Earlier the Lord denounces Israel through the same prophet: «It may be they will listen and turn ([wæyashubu]) every man from his evil way; that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to do them because of the evil of their doings» (Jer 26. 3).

Evil evasiveness, and an aversion to everything disagreeable and contrary to the Lord can be a practical result of this return [18]. Without this, according to Hosea, there can be no repentance: «Their deeds will not allow them to turn ([lashub]) to their God», — says the prophet (Hos 5. 4). The Lord will send sorrows and misfortunes so as to make people repent (Hos 2. 8–17; 14. 1–2), they will not only come to reason but also be restored in subjection to the Lord and to just royal power: «For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return ([yashubu]), and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to his blessings in the latter days», the Lord promises (Hos 3. 4–5) [19].

The holy prophet Isaiah says that all sin in the face of the Lord: «For we have all become as one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is as a polluted garment» (Is 64. 6) [20]. The causes of sin and the lack of repentance are seen by the prophet in the

people's evil habits; but by depriving themselves of repentance, the people are also deprived of the purification given by the Lord: «Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn ([bashab]) again and be healed, says Isaiah in the name of the Lord (Is 6. 10). If any sinner repents, the Lord promises him/her a full and total forgiveness and purification from sin: «Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool» (Is 1. 18).

As there is no repentance by the people, the Lord pronounces His judgment upon Israel . He orders Isaiah to give one of his sons a symbolic name [shear yashub], i.e. «the remnant will turn» (Is 7. 3). This means that after the destructive Assyrian invasion only a small remnant of Israel will be left; the remnant that will turn to the Lord. This is proclaimed by the Lord directly through Isaiah in the 10th chapter (Is 10. 21–22) [21] .

The Prophet Jeremiah speaks of the necessity of inner repentance and considers the avoidance of evil deeds as a compulsory condition: «If you will return ([im-tashub]) , Israel , says Yahweh, and if you will put away your abominations out of my sight; then you shall not be removed (Jer 4. 1).

According to the prophet, the Lord sends misfortunes in order to make everyone turn from his evil way (Jer 26. 3; 36. 3, 7). He pays special attention to the evil habits and deeds hindering repentance: « Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil?» (Jer 13. 23). Here Jeremiah laments the difficulty of repentance for the people. Although he does not expect renewal to arise among the people themselves he foretells that it will be effected by the Lord Who will write His law on their hearts (Jer 31. 33) [22] .

g)The doctrine of repentance during and after the Exile

While the pre-exilic prophets think of Israel 's repentance in the context of the whole people's turning back, the prophet Ezekiel, when writing about repentance, pays special attention to the orientation of individuals [23] . He prefers to speak not so much about the conversion of the whole people, but about the conversion of a particular person whom he calls [[rasha] — i. e. «evil, sinful», in LXX translation — ο' ἄνομος , and thus in the Church Slavonic and Russian Synodal translations; «the wicked» (Ezek 18. 21, 27; 33. 9, 11, 12, 14 и др.). Here he means everyone who sins, whether in religious, ritual or moral aspects (for a very vivid description of such sins see Ezek 18. 10–13). Repentance for Ezekiel is the conversion of such a sinner when he changes his way life totally (3. 19; 18. 21, 23, 27; 33. 12, 14, 19), abandons sin, [[rasha], and longs to become what Ezekiel calls [tsadik], i. e. «a righteous man» [24] . «But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keeps all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die, says the prophet in the name of the Lord, None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him: in his righteousness that he has done he shall live» (Ezek 18. 21–22).

Unlike Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel sees in each person an ability and a strength to choose freely what he is going to be [rasha] or [tsadik] [25] , although he appeals for the conversion and the Lord still helps in it (Ezek 11. 19; 18. 30–32; 36. 26). The death that awaits an unrepentant sinner does not bring any joy to the Lord; vice versa, the Lord wishes the sinner to repent in order to prevent his punishment. «Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Yahweh; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?» (Ezek 18. 23). Ezekiel specially underlines everyone's individual responsibility in the sight of the Lord: « the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself» (Ez 18. 20).

### **3. The doctrine of repentance in the intertestamental period**

For an appropriate interpretation of the New Testament doctrine it is necessary to touch on the terminological transformation of repentance terminology that occurred when the Old Testament Church came into a Hellenistic culture.

In the New Testament the doctrine of repentance is closely connected with the Greek verb μετανοέω and its derivative noun μετάνοια [26] . In ancient Greek language and literature, the general meaning of these words is a «change of mind», in an extended sense, a «change of direction» [27] . But to just automatically accept these meanings of the New Testament texts would be incorrect [28] . The influence of the Greek language of the LXX translation must be taken into account, as well as the influence the Greek-Hebrew authors of the intertestamental epoch had on New Testament (and later on Church) terminology [29] .

In the LXX Greek translation, the verb [shuv] has both the general meaning of «turn, return» and the religious and moral meaning of interest to us, where the Greek uses the word ἐπιστρέφω (-ομαι) and ἀποστρέφω (-ομαι), to mean « to turn (oneself) to something or out of something», «to come back», « to return» [30] , but never uses the verb μετανοέω. With this verb and noun μετάνοια the Septuagint translators interpreted a different ancient Hebrew term referring to the repentance idea, [niham]: « to be sorry about something», «to change one's own decision» [31] . However, the prophets, in particular the prophet Jeremiah, have drawn the meanings of [niham] and [shuv] closer (compare Jer 8. 6 and 31. 18–19) [32] , as both of them implied movement to the side contrary to a certain point. Thus the affinity between the meaning of the verbs in religious use μετανοέω and ἐπιστρέφω / ἀποστρέφω is noted in LXX translation [33] .

The tendency to impart the meaning of the ancient [shuv], i.e, «conversion» to the Greek verb μετανοέω is found in the later Old Testament translations as well. Symmachus uses μετανοέω 6 times in the cases when [shuv] means a religious turn, repentance (Is 31. 6; 55. 7; Jer 18. 8; Ezek 33. 12; Hos 11. 5; Job 36. 10) [34] . The extracanonical books in Greek, the Old Testament apocrypha, and works by Philo of Alexandria testify to this as well. In all the above mentioned works μετανοέω and μετάνοια have the main Old Testament meaning «turn (oneself) and «convert» [35] .

On the basis of the surviving linguistic material from the intertestamental period it can be said that at the beginning of the New Testament epoch, in the religious vocabulary of the Hellenistic Jews the verb μετανοέω was a commonly used and even preferred equivalent to the main Hebrew term, repentance standing for «conversion» — [shuv] [36] . Hence we may conclude that although the New Testament doctrine of repentance is connected with the ancient Greek verb μετανοέω and noun μετάνοια terminologically, the sense is also related to that which goes back to the Old Testament conception of repentance as a whole conversion of the human being from sin to the Lord, a concept that has been added by the messianic context.

#### **4. New Testament doctrine of repentance**

##### **a) Repentance in the teaching of Saint John the Baptist**

The call to repent is pronounced for the first time in the New Testament by Saint John the Baptist. «In those days , says the evangelist Matthew, meaning the beginning of the messianic epoch, John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”» ( μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν . Mt 3. 1–2). Here the call to repent is heard in the context of the Old Testament bWv [shuv] — «turn to the Lord», «change your way of life». This is confirmed by the outward sign chosen by John the Baptist for people who have signified their desire to turn to the Lord; immersion in the water or baptism ( Mt. 3. 6). It should be remembered that to accept baptism was paradoxical for Jews, as this rite was used for proselytes, i.e., those who wished to turn to Judaism from idolatry [37] ; but John the Baptist appeals to born Jews who have deviated from the Lord through their private sins and calls out: «turn to Him», «become Jews again»!

In the doctrine of repentance of John the Baptist, compared with that of the Old Testament, there is an important difference: it is necessary to appeal to the Lord as His Kingdom is already at hand. But this Kingdom is the new, messianic one, founded by Christ. This is what the evangelist Matthew meant when he says of John the Baptist: « For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight .” » (Mt 3. 3). The evangelist implies that the words of prophet Isaiah refer not only to the Baptist’s person but to the symbolism of the Messiah’s meeting with the people of Israel [38] . The meeting with the Messiah, depicted by Isaiah, looks to that proclaimed by Saint John the Baptist in the sense of realizing repentance in the Old Testament understanding of «conversion», i.e. a radical human’s turn of the way of life. «Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain» (Is 40. 4). This is what Isaiah means by preparing « the way of Yahweh ». This symbolism is taken from the custom of repairing roads when they were to be used by Oriental Kings on their travels [39] , and presumes that all the crooked ways will be made even, the low places will be filled in and the hills brought down as the way is being prepared for a king, and thus made ideally even, level and plain. The spiritual sense intended by this presupposes that all stain, sin and intemperance, flaws in one’s way of life, are to be expelled from the human hearts of the

people so that they may be able to meet with Lord [40] . Hence the sense of John the Baptist's call: turn to the Lord with all your heart, rooting out your flaws .

In the evangelical account it may be seen that the doctrine of repentance of John the Baptist has included some other elements of Old Testament repentance: along with regret for sin and a turning to the Lord by the Jews who came to John the Baptist , «confessing their sins» (Mt 3. 6), and John himself led a life of outward repentance by wearing coarse clothes and observing a constant, strict fast (Mt 3. 4). This repentance was to result in good deeds: «Therefore bring forth fruit worthy of repentance» — as John the Baptist appeals to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 3. 8). He teaches that for the ones who do not wish to turn, the Lord Himself has prepared judgment: «Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire» (Mt 3. 10). He also teaches of a blessed purification of the contrite sinner by the Lord. Those converted by John the Baptist proved this by being immersed in water, and the coming Messiah will purify those who convert to Him by «the Holy Spirit and fire» (Mt 3. 11).

#### b) The doctrine of repentance of the Lord Jesus Christ

The doctrine of repentance of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as that of John the Baptist, presupposes a total change of a person's life by turning to the Lord, for the new, eternal life. The principal difference between the teaching of Jesus Christ from that of the Old Testament, and John's interpretation is in the following: The prophets and John the Baptist calling for repentance name the Lord the focus for the adherent, while they themselves remained only His messengers. Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, while calling people to the Lord in repentance, also calls them to Himself, and it is He who gives a new, eternal life to the repentant sinner.

Like John the Baptist the Lord Jesus Christ also begins his public ministry with the call to repentance. In the evangelist Matthew's interpretation the first words sound the same as John's: «repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand» ( μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν . Mt 4. 17). According to the evangelist Mark, in the Lord's call to repentance there was also an explanation: to repent is necessary in order to come to believe in the Gospel: «repent and believe in the Good News» ( μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ . Mk 1. 15).

Like John the Baptist, as an outward sign of turning to the Lord, He chooses immersion in water, baptism. But this baptism bears a crucially different, ontological character as it gives purification from sin and the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in the Son of God (Mt 3. 11; Lk 3. 16; Acts 1. 5; 2. 38; 22. 16 and others). This is why John's baptism is called a «baptism of repentance» (βάπτισμα μετανοίας, Acts 19. 4) by the Holy Apostle Paul. Christ's baptism calls for repentance only as a preparatory stage, being itself the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and a joining with the Lord in Christ.

In Acts there is a description of a situation where the Holy Apostle Paul offered the Ephesians already baptized by John, a new baptism «in the name of the Lord

Christ» (Acts 19. 5). The preaching of the apostles began with the call to repentance (Mk 6. 12; Acts 17. 30), but they baptized those who turned to Christ, proclaiming a baptism purifying them from sin (Acts 19. 5).

We may conclude from the conversation between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus, that the Lord expects all who would enter God's Kingdom a total change of his way of life, i.e, He requires repentance in the sense of the Old Testament prophetic term «turn»: «unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God», says Christ (John 3. 3). Of course, further on the Lord brings the term of repentance to a new level, now, as in answer to the one who turns to the Lord there is shown the power of the God's grace: « unless one is born of water and spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God », Christ explains (John 3. 5).

As in the Old Testament, when the Lord proclaimed His Judgment through the prophets and punishment upon all who would not turn to Him, so the Lord Jesus Christ also speaks of God's Judgment upon those who do not wish to repent, and even of whole cities. In answer to the question about the Galileans «whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices», Jesus Christ claims that neither they nor the eighteen people of Jerusalem on whom the tower of Siloam fell, killing them, were «worse sinners than all the other Galileans» or «worse offenders than all the men who dwell in Jerusalem ». «No, but unless you repent you will perish in the same way» , this is Christ's conclusion (Lk 13. 1–5). I.e. the lot of anyone who has not entered the Kingdom of Heaven but remains in the power of sin, is on its horror, comparable to a person's cruel death. However this does not exclude the possibility that the Lord will punish a non-contrite person, or even a community of people, in order to bring them to reason. As in the Old Testament the Lord foretold misfortunes to Israel because its people did not want to repent, Christ also foretells miseries to Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, cities where, according to the evangelist's note, «most of his mighty works had been done» but where the population remained indifferent to that preaching (Mt 11. 21–24). The doctrine of repentance of the Lord Jesus Christ has a certain, practical aspect as well: regret for sin committed. This attitude reveals itself in daily life not just canceling out the principal question of conversion to God but, rather entailing of him even a willingness to lay down his life for Him. «Take heed to yourselves, Christ says; If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him» (Lk 17. 3–4). Luke points out that these words have been told by the Lord to the apostles as to the first members of the Church. Thus the Lord gives practical guidance for the ongoing life of the church where, as will be seen later, there will also be conflicts and sins amongst its members.

After His Resurrection the Lord appears to his apostles and grants them the authority to forgive human sin with the power of the Holy Spirit. He tells the apostles: «As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.» When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, «Receive the Holy Spirit! Whoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven them. Whoever's sins you retain, they have been retained»» (John 20. 21–23; compare Mt.16:19). These words may be understood not only as granting the apostles the

competence to baptize, but also as the foundation of the Sacrament of Repentance in the life of the church [41] . In the Gospel of Matthew an analogous doctrine is set forth by the Lord in the context of the church life: first He speaks of the sinning brother convicted of sin before the Church, and then He concludes: «Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in heaven» (Mt 18. 18).

### c) The doctrine of repentance by the Holy Apostles

The holy apostles' doctrine of repentance, on the one hand, follows the Lord Jesus Christ when considering repentance as conversion , i.e. the preparatory stage for entering the Church. The Holy Apostle Peter in his speech in the porch of the Jerusalem Temple sees repentance as a condition for the forgiveness of the sins and for entering the messianic kingdom: « Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out ( μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε, εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ), so that there may come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Christ Jesus, who was appointed for you » (Acts 3. 19–20) Repentance upon entering the Church sometimes went with confession, probably public, by those who turned from their sins (Acts 19. 18).

On the other hand the holy apostles' doctrine of repentance adds to the practical aspect of the church's life a teaching about repentance that must characterize the life of the early Christian communities from the very beginning of regular Christian life. There emerges a necessity to tell people who have already become Christians about repentance. The Christians meant here are those who show that they are spiritually weak and have committed the vile sins described as «sins leading to death» by the apostle John the Evangelist (1 Jn 5. 16). It has become clear that until the Lord's final triumph over the whole creation that will happen only at the Second Coming, even faithful Christians bear some responsibility for sin, and even that they sin, although these sins are of a very different type, but those which do not deprive Christians of God's grace, and are called by the apostle; «sins not leading to death» (1 Jn 5. 16), a reminder of the sickness of human nature and the depravity of the whole world. Thus the Apostle Paul speaks of this: « For the good which I desire, I do not do; but the evil which I do not desire, that I practice... For I delight in God's law after the inward man, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members» (Rom 7. 19–20, 22–23). The Apostle James characterized this briefly: «in many things we all stumble» (James 3. 2).

In connection with this there emerged the necessity of repentance for faithful Christians who wish to purify themselves every day, even from the trifling sins, so as to appear before the Lord with a clean soul and a sober heart. For example, the holy apostle Paul expects repentance from the Corinthian Christians because of their « uncleanness and sexual immorality and lustfulness» (2 Cor 12. 21). Simon who wished to gain the gift of the Holy Spirit for money is offered repentance by the apostle Peter: «Repent therefore of this, your wickedness, and ask God if perhaps the intent of your heart may be forgiven you» (Acts 8. 22).

Hence the initial teaching about the Sacrament of Repentance by the holy apostles was concerned with the practical aspect where sorrow for one's sins took place. There is no possibility of surety about what external rite was used in the early Church, as baptism could not be performed a second time. The idea that external rite was to appear early on is suggested by the words about the connection between repentance and sorrow for sin spoken by the apostle John the Evangelist: he writes: «If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins ( ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ), he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1. 9)».

The apostle uses the verb ὁμολογέω, that in the New Testament scriptures can mean on the one hand, «to admit a fact», «to attest one's word», «to affirm», «to testify», and on the other, «to proclaim something openly», «to profess» [42] . From the context of the apostle's words, the first meaning of the verb is preferable, namely that to be forgiven we are to admit our sins in the sight of God. But the second meaning can not wholly be excluded either, for there then arises a concept of the necessity to externally confess sins before the Church, in the name of its particular representatives, among whom are, appropriately, the apostles and their successors authorized by the Lord to give absolution (Jn 20. 23) [43] .

Some evidence concerning the connection of repentance with an external act of confession of sins before the members of the early Church can be found in the book of Acts and in the letter of the holy apostle James.

The first text is the story about the incident at Ephesus when « Many ... of those who had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds» ( ἐξομολογούμενοι καὶ ἀναγγέλλοντες τὰς πράξεις αὐτῶν . Acts 19. 18). The author uses verb ἐξομολογέω, which is close to ὁμολογέω, in its meaning and the sense of phrase is this: the converted Christians publicly admitted their sins; although it might be that this was closely connected with baptism and entry into the Church [44] .

The second text is the call of apostle James to Christians: «confess your offences to one another» [45] ( ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰ παραπτώματα , James 5. 16). Here the verb ἐξομολογέω, also used and the sense of this phrase is well translated in the Russian Synodal version: «confess your sins before each other» [46] . Further on the apostle continues: «and pray for one another that you may be healed» (James 5. 16), meaning the healing of spiritual ailments [47] , in the nearest historical context, the words of confessing mean that Christians admitted their sins before each other in order to pray for each other [48] .

More precise details about how confession was referred to the authority to «bind» and «forgive» human sins of the apostles and their successors (Mt 18. 18; see also John 20. 23), are already outside of the chronological borders of the New Testament, and are covered by the period of early patristic literature. However it is exactly the connection of these two terms that has become the foundation for the Christian ecclesiastical

Sacrament of Repentance, that is expressed in a form of confession before a bishop or priest.

[1] Покаяние, обращение // Словарь библейского богословия. Под ред. К.Леон-Дюфура и др. Пер. с франц. Брюссель, 1990. Стлб. 813.

[2] Ibid .

[3] Троицкий И. Г. Библейская археология. СПб., 1913. С . 424.

[4] Ibid. Прим .1.

[5] Code of Hammurabi, 235.18, 267.84. Marie's Archives. III, 12.14.

[6] Gaster T. H. Sacrifices and Offerings. Old Testament // The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. 4 vol. N. Y., 1962. P. 152.

[7] Ibid. P. 151.

[8] It should be remembered that ~wOc [tsom] is not always used in connection with repentance. For instance, in Judges 20. 26 the fast sustains the earnest pleading prayer of the people of Israel to the Lord; in 1 Sam 31. 13 and 2 Sam 1. 12 — fasting accompanies grief for the misfortunes that befall on Israel resulting from the death of King Saul etc.

[9] The discussion of the date when the book of Job has been written is beyond the scope of this paper. Neither in the ancient Church nor in pre-revolutionary Biblical study was there any consensus on this matter (see: Олесницкий А. А. Руководственные о Священном Писании Ветхого и Нового Завета сведения из творений свв. отцев и учителей Церкви. СПб ., 1894. С. 56–57; Юнгеров П . А . Введение в Ветхий Завет . Т . 2. Эл . изд - е : М., 2007. С. 137–145). The conclusion of the eisagogic question is of no fundamental significance for this paper but, nevertheless, the author shares Pavel Alexandrovich Yungеров's opinion of the early origin of the book.

[10] St. John Chrysostom . Letter to Olimpiade. 2, 8. Quoted from : Олесницкий А. А. Руководственные о Священном Писании Ветхого и Нового Завета сведения из творений свв. отцев и учителей Церкви. СПб., 1894. С. 56.

[11] Using later terms from the ascetic practice of the Christian Church, the book of Job tells of a balance between passions that exist in any human being and specific sins resulting from these passions. Realizing the passions inside him all are, nevertheless, to be contrite for specific transgressions — even though they be only in thought (as in monastic practice).

[12] For more details on this see for example.: Brownlee W.H. The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible (with special attention to the Book of Isaiah). N. Y.: Oxford , 1964. P. 199–203.

[13] Wuerthwein E. Μετανοέω , μετάνοια. B. Repentance and Conversion in the Old Testament. II. The Prophetic Concept of Conversion // TDNT.

[14] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[15] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[16] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[17] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[18] Бродович И. А. Книга пророка Осии: введение и экзегезис. Киев, 1901. С. 193–194.

[19] More details of Hos.3:4-5 see in Бродовичи . А . Книга пророка Осии , с .122–129. Палладий (Пьянков), еп. Толкование на книгу святого пророка Осии // Палладий (Пьянков), еп. Толкование на святых пророков Осию и Иоила. Вятка , 1972. С. 27–28.

[20] Literal translation of the ancient Hebrew Wnyte\_ḳod>ci-Ḳ' ~yDIP[i dg<b . In the Russian Synodal Translation the prophet's words are translated: «like the dirty garment».

[21] Якимов И.С. Толкование на книгу святого пророка Исаии. СПб., 1883. С . 124. Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[22] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[23] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[24] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[25] Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[26] These terms are met in the synoptic Gospels (μετανοέω 16 times, including 9 times in the Gospel of Luke; μετάνοια 8 times, including 5 times in the Gospel of Luke), in the Acts of Apostles (verb 5 times, noun 6 times), once in the 2nd Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter (noun), 8 times in Paul's epistles (once and 7 times, verb and noun respectively), 12 times in Revelations (verb). See: μετανοέω and μετάνοια in the New Testament. I. The Linguistic Understanding // Wuerthwein. Op. cit. It should be remembered that the texts of the New Testament, when referring to the idea of repentance, are not restricted to the use of these terms only.

[27] μετάνοια goes back etymologically to the preposition meta, (that bears a number of meanings: «following», «together with», «with the help of something» and others) and the verb νοέω (meaning «to direct the mind to a certain object»). Behm J. νοέω // TDNT. Behm J. μετανοέω, μετάνοια. A. Greek Usage // TDNT.

[28] Покаяние, каяться // Ринекер Ф., Майер Г. Библейская энциклопедия Брокгауза. Под ред. В.А.Цорна. Paderborn , 2001. Эл. вар-нт: Изд-е миссии «Свет на Востоке» на CD ROM «Цитата из Библии», версия 4. 5. 1.

[29] For more details of the influence of the LXX Greek language on the inter-Testamental literature and in Greek New Testament Scripture and church authors see: Корсунский И.Н. Перевод LXX: его значение в истории греческого языка и словесности. Сергиев Посад, 1897. С. 527–641.

[30] Bertram G. ἐπιστρέφω, ἐπιστροφή,. 2. In the Old Testament // TDNT; μετανοέω, μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. I. The LXX & μετανοέω and μετάνοια in the New Testament. I. The Linguistic Understanding // Wuerthwein. Op. cit..

[31] μετανοέω, μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. I. The LXX & μετανοέω and μετάνοια in the New Testament. I. The Linguistic Understanding // Wuerthwein. Op. cit..

[32] Jer 8. 6: At[r̄"-l]; ~x'nI vyai !yae , literally: «noone is sorry for his depravity»; в LXX: οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος μετανοῶν ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας αὐτοῦ ; in the Russian Synodal translation: « no man repents him of his wickedness ». Jer 31. 18–19:

yTim.x;nlybiWvyrEx]a;-yKi ... ζyh'k{a/hw"hy>hT'a;yKiÀhb'Wva'w>ynlbeyvih] , literally and the Russian Synodal translation: « turn me, and I shall be turned; for you are Yahweh my God.....after that I was turned, I repented »; in LXX: ἐ πίστρεψόν με καὶ ἐπιστρέψω ὅτι σὺ κύριος ὁ θεός μου ... ὅτι ὕστερον αἰχμαλωσίας μου μετενόησα .

[33] In addition to the cases noted in the comments above, the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 46. 8 is in this aspect very significant (it deviates from the Masoretic text):

μετανοήσατε οἱ πεπλανημένοι ἐπιστρέψατε τῇ καρδίᾳ . It should be kept in mind that in the LXX translation the noun μετάνοια is not met with. See: Μετανοέω , μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. I. The LXX // Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[34] And, vice versa, in Symmachus translation of Jer.18. 8 to interpret ~x;nl [niham] μετανοέω is not used. See: Μετανοέω , μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. I. The LXX // Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[35] References and examples see: Μετανοέω , μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. II. Other Literature // Wuerthwein. Op. cit..

[36] Μετανοέω , μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature. I. The LXX // Wuerthwein. Op. cit.

[37] Oepke A. Βάπτω, βαπτίζω: C. lb;j' and βαπτ(ίζ)ειν in the Old Testament and Judaism // TDNT.

[38] Isaiah calls Messiah «Glory of Yahweh» and (according to the translation LXX) «Salvation of Yahweh» (Is 40. 5): καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ , Russian Synodal translation: «and all flesh shall see it (redemption of Yahweh) together». It has already been mentioned above that the prophets use the term «Salvation» as a messianic title; see more details in, for ex., Brownlee W.H. The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible (with special attention to the Book of Isaiah). N.Y.-Oxford, 1964. P. 199–203. About the interpretation of Isaiah 40. 5 in a messianic sense see Якимов И. С. Толкование на книгу святого пророка Исаии. С. 674–675.

[39] Григорьев И. Пророчества Исаии о Мессии и Его царстве. Казань, 1901. С. 281.

[40] See Григорьев . Указ . соч . С. 282.

[41] In the pre-revolutionary systems dogmatic theology these words of the Lord were considered to be the biblical foundation of the Sacrament of Penance. See for ex.,: Макарий ( Булгаков ), митр . Православно-догматическое богословие. §222. Т.2. Изд-е 4. СПб., 1883. С. 426.

[42] Michel O. Ὁμολογέω, ἐξομολογέω, ἀνθομολογέω, ἀνθομολογέομαι, ὁμολογία, ὁμολογουμένος // TDNT.

[43] For the comprehension of such double meanings see, for ex.,: Евсевий, архиеп. Беседы на 1- ое Соборное послание св . ап . и ев . Иоанна Богослова . СПб ., 1880. С. 38–39.

[44] Клеон Л. Р.-мл., Клеон Л. Р. III . Новый лингвистический и экзегетический ключ к греческому тексту Нового Завета . СПб ., 2001. С. 461.

[45] Literal translation. Compare with the Church-Slavonic: « исповедайте бо друг другу согрешения ».

[46] Клеон, Клеон. Указ. соч. С.860.

[47] Георгий (Ярошевский), митр. Соборное послание св. ап. Иакова. Опыт историко-экзегетического исследования. Киев, 1901. С. 293.

[48] Георгий (Ярошевский), митр. Указ. соч. С. 293.