

The Dogmatic Tradition of the Orthodox Church

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Orthodoxy, a way of life, is known for its experiential approach to faith and doctrine. Rooted in the Bible, its faith and doctrine is enriched by the living commentaries of the lives of the saints of the past and the present. It is enriched by the theological speculations of the Fathers and Teachers of the Church, and by the decrees of the various councils which dealt with doctrinal aberrations (heresies). As an introduction to the Doctrine of the Orthodox Church, we will deal with the Tradition of the Church and the Holy Bible, part of this tradition, as the source of our Christian faith and doctrine.

I. SACRED TRADITION AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The source of the faith and doctrine of the Orthodox Church is called "[Sacred Tradition](#)." Unlike Western Christianity, which professes a kind of dichotomy between the Bible, considered to be the revealed word of God, and the tradition of the Church, considered to be:

1. as important as the Bible (Roman Catholic Church) or
2. secondary, and even negligible (Protestantism), Orthodoxy holds the position that the Tradition of the Church includes the Bible, for the Bible is an *epiphenomenon*, an "outward form" of our Christian Tradition.

What is this Tradition? What are its external forms, of which the Bible is one?

The Sacred Tradition of the Church



ICON OF CHRIST FROM
HAGIA SOPHIA

The [tradition of the Church](#) is nothing else but the life of the Church, a life in the Holy Spirit. From a Christian point of view, the Church is not a mere human society such that we could identify tradition with the history of this society. The Church is the living Body of Christ, with a history as far as its human members are concerned, but also with an internal life that escapes the eye of the historian, and is only seen by the eye of faith. In this sense we distinguish between an inner force which guides that history and a spirit which inspires it, this force and Spirit being the Holy Spirit of God, and the external, human manifestations of the life of the Spirit in the Church.

The teachings of the Lord, proclaimed by the Apostles, whether the Twelve or the larger group of Apostles (the Seventy, for example), or the missionary Apostles like Saint Paul, were handed down to the apostolic community. This faith, once handed down to the Saints, continued to live in the Christian community that succeeded apostolic times.

The "Living Continuity"

There is a living continuity between the apostolic community of the early Church and the community that succeeds it. The same faith, teachings, doctrine, and Christian life continue to be present and perpetuate themselves throughout the history of the Church. In this sense, the Church continues to be apostolic, that is, in living continuity with the early Christian, apostolic Community. Tradition, as the life of the Church, is seen in terms of this living community with our Christian

origins.

By the end of the first century of our Christian era, the major teachings of Christ and facts regarding His life and saving work were added to the Christian scriptures. They became part of what by the end of the second century was called the Canon of the Bible, containing forty-nine books of the Old and twenty-seven of the New Testament. However, many more of the teachings of the Lord and of His deeds were not included in this Christian Bible (John 21: 24-25). They remained part of the life of the Church, the inheritance of the apostolic community perpetuated through history.

Saint Basil the Great speaks of the importance of this inheritance of the "unwritten words" of Christ, and this "light of the Tradition" in which one should see the Holy Scriptures. Without this light, St. Basil says, "the Scripture is reduced to a mere letter." The tradition of the Church is not only the context in which one can understand the Bible; it is its living commentary, clarification and completion of its meaning as well.

Tradition, being living continuity with our Christian origins, is not "immobility," or "repetition of sterile formulas." Change is possible within the tradition. There is at the same time continuity with and faithfulness to the origins, but there is also discontinuity. Continuity in the tradition is a creative faithfulness and continuity. The essentials of the Christian faith, doctrine, and life are always the same. The expression of that faith may vary according to the concrete historic circumstances in which this faith is proclaimed.

A favorite distinction among theologians is the one between *Tradition* and *traditions*. Tradition, with a capital T, is the life of the Spirit of the Church. It is this life that makes the continuity of Truth and Life in the Church, and gives to it its stability, continuity, and unchangeability. While traditions (with a small t) are the concrete and historic manifestations of that Tradition, they may change. As in the Bible one distinguishes between the letter and the spirit, so in the tradition of the Church in general one distinguishes between the context and its expression.

One distinguishes various traditions that express the One Tradition of the Church: the *scriptural*, *patristic*, *doctrinal*, *canonical*, *artistic*, *architectural*, and *liturgical* traditions are specific expressions of the Spirit of the Tradition of the Church. What matters most, in terms of the faith, is the so-called *dogmatical*, or *doctrinal* tradition of the Church. However, since all these aspects and these manifestations of the one Tradition of the Church are interwoven, one should consider all the forms that express the spirit of the One Tradition in establishing the context and the very meaning of the Christian faith and doctrine.

In order for anyone to understand this Tradition of the Church, it is imperative for him or her to be part of this Tradition. One can only understand the life of the Spirit in the Church, if he lives this life himself. The "come and see" of the Bible (John 1:46) applies to the Christian Tradition in general.

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5: 25): if one lives by the Spirit he should also walk by the Spirit, and vice versa, one cannot walk by the Spirit and understand His promptings and workings, unless he also lives by the Spirit. Tradition, as the life of the Spirit in the Church, is also witness to His presence and His workings in its everyday life.

II. FORMS OF THE DOGMATIC TRADITION

We have already mentioned the various forms of Tradition, specifically with regard to the faith and doctrine. They are the Bible itself, the doctrine of the Fathers, that of the [ecumenical and local councils](#), the Divine Liturgy, and the architecture and iconography of the Church.

a) The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Bible (or Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments) is the most authoritative part of the Sacred Tradition of the Church. As with today's laws that govern the life of our modern society, these laws are the product of the life of the community; however, once produced, they are placed above and regulate this life. So it is with the Holy Scripture: once established by the Christian community, led by the Holy Spirit of God, then Scripture is placed above and regulates the life of the Christian community. The Bible is the product and the *epiphenomenon* of the life of the Church, being also the work of men. But it is also the work of the Holy Spirit of God, working in this life of the Church. This is why the Church is subjected to the authority of the Bible.

Much has been said regarding the Divine authorship and inspiration of the Bible (*theopneustia*). Various theories have been expressed throughout the centuries concerning the way in which the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. Philo of Alexandria is the main exponent of the so-called "mechanical theory" of understanding the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. According to Philo, the authors of the Bible were in a condition of "possession" by the Spirit of God, who was just using these authors as blind instruments. A better view is the so-called "dynamic view" of the cooperation between man and the Holy Spirit in the case of the Bible. In any case of "synergy" (cooperation) between God and man, God leads, and man follows; God works, and man accepts God's work in him, as God's coworker in subordination to Him. So it is with divine inspiration in the case of the Bible: the Holy Spirit inspires, and the sacred author follows the Holy Spirit's injunctions, utilizing his own human and imperfect ways to express the perfect message and doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

In this sense, we can understand possible imperfections in the books of the Bible, since they are the result of the cooperation between the all-perfect and perfecting Divine Author, the Spirit, and the imperfect human author. Biblical textual criticism is completely normal and acceptable by the Orthodox, since they see the Bible in this light. Nothing human is perfect, including the Bible, which is the end product of human cooperation with the divine Spirit.

b) The Fathers of the Church

The Holy Bible, and more specifically the New Testament, does not contain all the doctrine and teachings of Christ. The Church, which has produced the Bible, does not completely submit itself to only one of the *epiphenomena* of its life, even if it is the most authoritative one, the Holy Scriptures. An important part of the teachings and doctrine of Christ continues to be present and handed down to the generations of Saints through other means and ways that are also part of the life of the Church, a life in the Holy Spirit. One of these ways and means through which Christ's truth comes to us is the doctrine of the Holy Fathers of the Church.

The term *Fathers*, as we understand it, refers to great people of faith and sanctity of life, great teachers of Christ's truth, staunch supporters of the Church and combatants of the enemies of Christian faith and truth (the "heretics"). These Fathers have always taught the faith in faithfulness and continuity with our Christian origins. On the one hand, they edified the faithful and were feeding the flock of Christ with the truth of the Gospel in its fuller meaning, which was handed down to them in the tradition of the Saints along with the Gospel. On the other hand, these same Fathers followed in the footsteps of the Apostles in opposing "the opponents of the faith" (Tit. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:4-5; 2 Tim. 4:3-5). A "heretic" (from *airoumai*, choose) is someone who chooses his own doctrine against the doctrine of the Church, or someone who reduces the doctrine to only one of its aspects; thus heresy means reductionism. The Fathers always stood for the wholeness of truth (catholicity from "truth *kata to olon*," in its entirety and wholeness).

Fathers combating the various heresies throughout the ages were the *Apostolic Fathers*, who followed the Apostles and fought especially against Arianism (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the

Theologian, and St. Gregory of Nyssa); the fathers who fought against Nestorianism (St. Cyril of Alexandria), against Monophysitism and Monothelitism (St. Maximos the Confessor), and against Iconoclasm (St. Theodore of Studion, St. John of Damascus). In addition to the "Old Fathers" of the patristic tradition up to the end of the eighth century, our Holy Orthodox Church also acknowledges the so called "Recent Fathers" of the Byzantine era, among whom St. Gregory Palamas (14th century) has a preeminent place.

The Church depends on all these Fathers and the insights they have concerning the living faith of the Church, present in living continuity with the early Church in the life of the Church through the ages.

c) The Major Councils

The doctrine of the Church was best established through its so called "Ecumenical," that is "universal," or "imperial" councils. Two of them, the first, in [Nicaea \(325\)](#) and the second, in [Constantinople \(381\)](#), established the faith in the Holy Trinity; the first established the divinity of Christ, the incarnate Word (*Logos*) of God; and the second established the divinity of the Holy Spirit against the "Spirit fighters" (*Pneumatomachs*).

Three Councils established the so called "Christological dogma," the doctrine pertaining to Christ, "true God and true man" - that is, a divine person who assumed a perfect humanity, thus saving and deifying it (uniting it with the divine). These councils were the [Council of Ephesus \(Third Council, 431\)](#), against Nestorianism; the [Council of Chalcedon \(Fourth Council, 451\)](#), against Eutyches and Monophysitism; and the [Third Council of Constantinople \(Sixth Council, 681\)](#), against Monothelitism.

In a sense, the other two major (Ecumenical) councils, [the Fifth \(the second of Constantinople, 553\)](#) and the [Seventh \(the second of Nicaea, 787\)](#) are also Christological Councils: the [Fifth Council](#), which condemned the writings of exponents of the School of Antioch, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa, without reversing the decrees of Chalcedon gave an Alexandrian interpretation to its teaching (which were considered to represent the Antiochian School); and the [Seventh Council](#), which defended the doctrine of the icons, may also be considered as a Christological Council, insofar as the doctrine of icons is a consequence of the Christological dogma: the Son of God became man, so He can be depicted in His humanity.

d) The Creed of the Church

Western Christianity utilizes these Creeds, referred to as "ecumenical":

1. the *Apostolic Creed*
2. the *Athanasian Creed* and
3. the *Creed of Nicaea/Constantinople*

In actuality, the first two creeds are not "ecumenical," i.e. "universal." The *Apostolic Creed* is actually the Creed of the Church of Rome, which reflects the common apostolic faith. The *Athanasian Creed* is also a Western creed, created in the West (probably in Southern France) around the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century. It reflects the developments of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas up to that time.

The only true "ecumenical creed" is the Creed of Nicaea/Constantinople, or, simply *the Creed*. It was first promulgated by the Council of Nicaea [325]. It was edited and completed by the first Council of Constantinople in 381. Since that time, the Creed is universally accepted as the summary of all the important Christian doctrines, and is used both for catechism and for the worship of the Church.

e) Later Councils

The Orthodox Church considers itself to be the Church of Christ. From this point of view, any general and major councils even after the separation between Eastern and Western Christianity [1054] may still be considered and called "ecumenical councils." However, in deference to the "ecumenical problem" and as a matter of pastoral prudence and strategy, the Church has not given the name "ecumenical" to Councils that do not represent the "undivided Church" of the Byzantine Empire.

Nonetheless, important Councils convened in the East after the separation between Eastern and Western Christianity and are as important in terms of establishing the faith and clearly enunciating its content. Such are the important Councils of 1341 and 1351, which established the Orthodox Christian doctrine concerning divine grace, the divine energies of God and the "uncreated light," according to the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas.

Councils convened during the seventeenth century to counteract Protestant infiltrations in the East and establish the Orthodox doctrine vis-à-vis the Protestant teachings, like the Councils of Jassi [1662] and Jerusalem [1672] are also considered to be councils of relative importance. Documents produced by these Councils, or ratified by them, along with other important documents, such as "confessions of faith" by Orthodox prelates and teachers (St. Photios, Michael Cerularius, Mark of Ephesus, Gennadios of Constantinople, Jeremiah II of Constantinople, Metrophanes Kritopoulos, Peter Moghila, etc.) are given the name of "Symbolic Books" of the Orthodox Church. They are certainly witnesses of the Orthodox faith "once handed down to the saints" and perpetuated in the Orthodox Church. However, their authority is subjected to the authority of the Ecumenical Councils and the ancient Fathers of the Church.

f) The Divine Liturgy

The Orthodox Church is known for its [rich liturgical tradition](#). The Orthodox liturgy is characterized by its poetry, biblical roots, and its dogmatical accuracy.

Anyone who opens the Orthodox liturgical books readily realizes that they are filled with Scriptural quotations and reminiscence. No one has any difficulty calling the Orthodox worship a "Biblical worship," for direct or indirect quotations of both the Old and New Testament abound throughout the Orthodox Liturgy. Moreover, this same Liturgy, which celebrates the mysteries of faith, of which the Resurrection of Christ has a central place, is filled with dogmatical and doctrinal statements, whether from the doctrine of the Councils, or from the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church. The third characteristic of Orthodox worship, which is its poetry, may in some ways be disharmonious with the previous one, that of dogmatical accuracy and precision. Basically, the statement *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of faith) is always true. However, at times poetry has its own requirements, in order for it to still remain "poetry" (which at times means "poetical license" or imprecision). This characteristic of Orthodox worship is by no means harmful to the faith; to the contrary, it strengthens and enlivens the faith by adding to it an extra dimension, or to use a better phrase, by strengthening the "heart" dimension of the faith.

The Divine Liturgy itself, the text and celebrations of the Holy Sacraments, the Liturgical texts of the Church in general are a mine of both precise theology and theological meditation, which can be of great help to anyone who wants to know the faith by praying and worshipping according to the faith.

g) The Canons of the Church

The abundant [canonical legislation of the Orthodox Church](#) is also a mine of information concerning the doctrine of the Church. The canons apply the faith - and the moral principles of

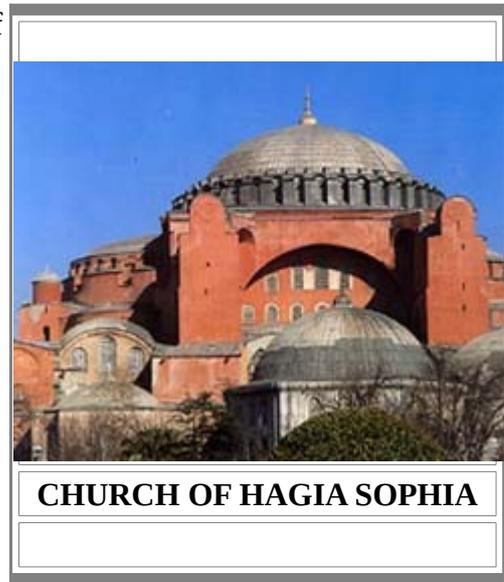
Christianity based on the faith - to concrete, local, and historical situations.

The canons of the Church are an example of the intent of the Church always to re-express its teaching and readjust its strategy according to contemporary needs. Besides this, many of the canons, especially the so-called "dogmatical" ones, express the doctrine of the Church in a clear, indisputable way, equal to that of the decrees of faith promulgated by the same ecumenical Councils that also produced the canons. These canons are certainly important witnesses of the faith of the Church, and must be utilized as an important expression of the faith.

h) Christian Art: Iconography, Architecture

Finally, one of the forms with which the doctrinal tradition of the Church may be expressed is the [architecture and iconography of the Church](#). The Byzantine church tradition has developed an important symbolism regarding the church edifice: the narthex is the preparation for the entrance into heaven; the transept of the church, with the dome above it, represents heaven itself; and the sanctuary, the "Holy of Holies," with the altar in its center, represents the "holy dwelling place" of God and God's throne. This symbolism is especially vivid in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, during which "the Kingdom of God breaks through" to be present in the midst of the congregation.

Byzantine iconography is also a means of expressing the faith. The icons, "books of the illiterate," teach most of the faith to one who knows how to read them. Painted according to an austere tradition, in an austere style, after prayer and fasting by the iconographer, the icons become "windows of heaven," revealing to the faithful heavenly mysteries, the mysteries of faith. The icons become a real, sacramental presence of the persons or realities depicted in them, thus leading the faithful to communion with the person or the reality depicted in them. On the basis of the witness obtained through these exponents and expressions of the dogmatical and doctrinal tradition of the Church, one can consequently express the major doctrines of the faith as lived and experienced in the life-context of the Orthodox Church.



III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH -- ORTHODOX DOGMA AND BELIEF

The beliefs, doctrine and dogma of the Orthodox Church are in direct continuity with the doctrine of the Bible and the uninterrupted tradition of the Church of which the Bible is the authoritative exponent. The Orthodox Church may rightly glory in its history, as being a "historical" Church, of which the history has no innovations to present, but rather an absolute faithfulness to the basic Christian message as preserved in the Bible.

All the dogmas of the Church are "Biblical," i.e. based on the Bible. The dogmas of the Church are nothing else but an authoritative presentation of the revealed doctrine, both for didactic and also apologetical purposes. Heresy was one of the reasons why the Church established and enunciated its doctrine in a very clear and unequivocal way. However, the dogmas decreed by the Councils that opposed heresy are not the only ones promulgated and taught by the Church. The doctrinal system of the Church contains both these dogmas and all the other doctrines that the Church always proclaimed as being part of the message of salvation that she addresses to the world.

The Triune God, the doctrine of creation of angels and man, man's fall, the divine plan of salvation, Christ's person and work, the Church, the Virgin Mary, the Saints, the Sacraments, and Orthodox

eschatology (the "last things") are some of the points of doctrine that will be presented here, in a very synoptic manner.

a) Triune God

In the estimation of the spiritual fathers of the Orthodox Church, knowing God is not just another kind of knowledge: it is a matter of life and death. For there is no third choice between the Holy Trinity and hell.

Also, knowing God is not just another intellectual exercise. It is the kind of Knowledge that commits your entire existence, it is an existential, experiential, apophatic, and doxological Knowledge. We know God when we experience His presence as filling and overtaking us, when we feel completely dependent on him, "as infants feel dependent upon their mothers" (St. Basil). We know God not through our concepts and ideas only, but beyond and above them: for our entire existence is united with Him. We know God when we are familiar with Him as "the cattle are familiar with their manger." We know God when "we breath Him," when we feel His presence any place we are or go; we know God when we constantly depend on Him, when our lives belong to Him, when our lives become a constant praise of His Holy Name.

We know God as *transcendent*, as far away; one of the feelings of truly authentic experience of God is that of awe, that of feeling annihilated in His awesome and distant Presence. However, it is also true that the opposite feeling is also part of true and authentic religious experience: that is to feel God as *immanent*, and intimately close and nearby and present.

The theological explanation of the Orthodox tradition regarding both God's immanence and transcendence is simple: God is present to us through His *energies* (operations, activity) which "descend toward us," whereas He is completely transcendent, far away, unapproachable in His essence (St. Basil, expanded upon by St. Gregory Palamas).

Our Christian God, then, is not the "God of Philosophers." He is not a "Supreme Being" similar to other beings, another "essence" among many essences. The Christian God is "super-essential" and "super-existent" only in the sense that He is totally different from created existence. "If everything else is being, God is not a being," said St. Gregory Palamas.

Our Christian God is not a "God exiled in heaven," according to the theology of "The Secular City" (Harvey Cox). Our Christian God is very much involved with us and the world, for we are His creation and continue to depend on Him.

Our God is also a personal God, a trinity of persons, a fellowship of three sharing the one essence and energies of the one divinity.

The divinity existing in the way of a fountainhead is the Person (*Hypostasis*) of the Father. The divinity existing in the way of Generation from the Father is the person of the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Word (*Logos*) of God. The divinity existing in the way of Procession from the Father (only), is the Person of the Holy Spirit of God.

Each one of the three Persons (*hypostases*) of the Holy Trinity is the entire divinity. On this basis, the three divine persons dwell in one another (*perichoresis*) inter-dwelling, co-inherence. Each one of the three acts together with the other two; however, each of them relates to the creation in a personal way: the Father conceives the plan of creation (and of restoration of Creation in His Christ); the Son of God makes the Father's plan of creation (and the salvation of creation) a reality; the Holy Spirit leads God's (the Father's) plan of creation (and restoration of creation in Christ, the incarnate Logos of God) to its perfection.

b) Creation

The Creed of the faith speaks of "God the Father All-Governing," as "creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." First of all, it is understood that, according to St. Irenaeus, God the Father creates by using "His two hands, the Son and the Holy Spirit." St. Basil is more specific when he says that God the Father is the "Primordial Cause" of Creation; the Son of God is the "Creative Cause" of God's creation (see St. John 1:3: "all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made"); and the Holy Spirit is the "Perfecting Cause" of creation.

Creation is a Christian concept. It comes from direct revelation (Genesis). No philosopher could have ever discovered the concept of creation as a "call to existence out of nothingness." Time and space are created also by God, for they exist as categories that are connected with creation. The goal and purpose of God's creation is the participation of this creation in God's blessedness: St. John of Damascus speaks of "God's glory and man's *theosis*"; however, God's glory *is* man's *theosis*, for God creates to communicate Himself, His blessedness and glory to the creatures He creates - the entire creation, and in this creation, man in particular.

Creation is possible in Christianity only, for only Christianity makes the distinction between the essence and energies of God. God creates through His energies, without communicating His essence.

1) Creation of the World

God is the creator of heaven and earth. God creates the world out of goodness. He is interested in His creation, and involved with it. Unlike philosophical systems (deism, secularism) that want God disinvolved, our Christian god is a caring and loving God, the Father in heaven. He creates, keeps things into being, and provides for them as well. Even if His creation turns against Him and rejects Him - that is, the mystery of God the Father's *kenosis*, self-emptying - God continues to love it and care for it.

Man's example confirms this attitude of the Creator: In spite of man's revolt, God continues to love him, and finds a way of bringing him back to Him, "from death to life," for God is Life and the absence of this Life is death. Evil in the world can only be understood as man's invention. The world is affected by man's evil. It can also be redeemed, and participate in man's salvation and glory. This is what the Greek Fathers, on the basis of St. Maximos' theology, refer to as "the cosmic aspects" of salvation in Christ.



ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

2) Angels

God is not only the creator of heaven and earth; but also of everything both visible and invisible. Our Christian Church believes in the existence of spiritual beings, likewise personal, for they are also created "like man" in the image of God, who preceded the creation of the world itself. They are sexless, their number is great, however not infinite. They are "liturgical ministering spirits, sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

The name given to angels in the Old Testament is that of a messenger, or a minister, a servant of

God. The New Testament retains the same meaning for the word "angel." The three names that we know from the canonical books of the Holy Scripture are: Gabriel (man of God), Michael (Who is as God?), and Rafael (God heals).

The main purpose of angels is to be God's servants in His creation, and especially man's helpers. Each man is assigned a special guardian angel by God (see Matt. 18:10). The ultimate purpose of the creation of angels is the glorification and praise of God's Holy Name.

At this point mention should also be made of the "fallen angels," Lucifer and his companions. It is also the doctrine of the Church that some of the angels, created as good angels by God, revolted against God because of pride, trying to be "gods without God." The result of their revolt is their fall from God's good graces and God's life. They live an inauthentic life away from God, counteracting God and His plan of theosis for man and the world.

3) Man's creation

Among the visible things that God created is the crown of His creation, man. In Genesis we read the story of God's creation. We cannot interpret this story to the letter; however, its message is loud and clear: God is the creator of everything that exists; there is order in God's creation, and a development (even "evolution") from lower forms to higher forms of life; God created everything good; man, created in God's image and likeness, has a very special place in God's creation, called to be God's proxy toward His creation.

Man is created as a psycho-physical unity: God "uses his hands" to create man, to show special care about man's creation. God takes dust from the earth, fashions man, and breathes into man's nostrils the "breath of life," man's soul, of a spiritual nature. Man becomes the link between the spiritual creation of God - (angels) and the material one (earth), for he partakes of both. This is why "man's mission will be to bring the creation into communion with God" (St. Maximos the Confessor).

Man is created in the image of God, with the specific call to become God-like. The Fathers of the Church elaborate on this doctrine of *Genesis*. Man's being in the image of God means that man has a spiritual soul reflecting God (the Father) as a person. Man is capable of knowing God and being in communion with God. Man belongs to God, for being God's child and image makes him God's relative. Man's soul is endowed with God's energies and life; one of these energies is love. Love, coming from God, is also directed toward God, creating union and bringing communion with God.

The Fathers also make a distinction between the *image* of God in man, and his *likeness* to God: image is the potential given to man, through which he can obtain the life of theosis (communion with God). Likeness with God is the actualization of this potential; it is becoming more and more what one already is: becoming more and more God's image, more and more God-like. The distinction between image and likeness is, in other words, the distinction between *being* and *becoming*.

Being in the image of God and called to likeness with God also means for man that God's immortality is reflected in man, insofar as man continues to be in communion with God through God's image in him, and that man is assigned God's creation, to be God's proxy in it, to have dominion over it and keep it in touch with the Creator.

St. Maximos the Confessor gives this noble mission to man (to *Adam*, the first man): man has to overcome all kinds of distinctions within God's creation, before man brings God's creation back to God: man was called to overcome the distinction between male and female, inhabited earth and paradise, heaven and earth, visible and invisible creation, and, finally, the division between created and uncreated, thus unifying God's creation with the Creator. Since man failed to achieve this union (*theosis*), the "New Adam," Christ, took it upon Himself to fulfill this original call of the first man (Adam).

4) Man's Fall and its Consequence

Unlike St. Augustine's doctrine of "original justice," which attributes to the first man several excessive perfections, perfect knowledge of God and God's creation, for example, that make the fall impossible, the doctrine of the Greek Fathers of the image of God in man as a potential to be actualized, allows the possibility of a deterioration, as well. St. Irenaeos speaks of the first man (Adam) as an infant (*nepios*), who had to grow up to adulthood. Instead, man failed himself, by not "passing the test" of maturity given to him by God.

In spite of God's prohibition, man chose to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis). Being "good by nature" man had to also become "good by choice." Unfortunately, it did not happen that way. Following the "snake's" advice (the devil's, that is), man also tried to do what the fallen angels did: to "become a god without God." Man's imperfection and innocence, or, better, naiveté, and his relative pride, cultivated by the "accuser," became the cause of man's fall from God's communion, due to his disobedience and rejection of God. Man put his purpose in himself, instead of putting it in God. Man's free will is responsible for his own decline.

The consequences of this revolt against God, which the West calls "original" and the East "ancestral" (*propatorikon*) sin, are that man lost his original innocence; the image of God in him was tarnished, and even became distorted; man's reason was obscured, his will weakened, the desires and passions of the flesh grew wild; man suffered separation from God, the author and source of life. He put himself in an inauthentic kind of existence, close to death. The Fathers speak of "spiritual death" which is the cause of the physical one, and which may lead to the "eschatological," eternal death: for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6: 23).

This state of fall, of inauthentic life close to death, this status of "spiritual death" continues to be transmitted to all of man's progeny, even those who are born of Christian parents. The personal guilt of the first man belongs to him exclusively. However, the results of his sin are transmitted to the entire human race. A personal commitment through an engagement of one's personal free will is required, in order for things to turn around. Christ, who requires this personal commitment, made this change possible through His coming and His work upon earth.

5) The case of Mary, the Mother of God

Does the Mother of God, Virgin Mary, participate in the "ancestral sin?" The question does not make much sense for the Orthodox, for it is obvious that Mary, being part of the common human race issued of the first man (Adam), automatically participates in the fallen status and in the "spiritual death" introduced by the sin of the first man.

The Fathers of the Church speculate on Luke 1:35, concluding that Mary was purified by the Holy Spirit the day of Annunciation, in order for her to become the "worthy

Mother of God." However, even after she gave birth to the Son of God, Mary was not exempted of less serious ("venial") sins. St. John Chrysostom attributes to Mary the sin of vanity, in the context of the first miracle of Christ in Cana of Galilee.

Mary was also saved by her Son, for God is her Savior (Luke 1: 47) as well. It is unfortunate that the Roman Catholic Church promulgated the doctrine of the so-called "Immaculate Conception" in 1854, which contradicts the traditional doctrine of the Church concerning Mary.

IV. THE DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION

Man failed God and failed himself through his revolt against God. However, God did not abandon him. God kept following man with His loving care and providence. God prepared man's salvation in the same eternal Logos of God, through whom we are created, so that even after our fall we may return to immortality (St. Athanasios).

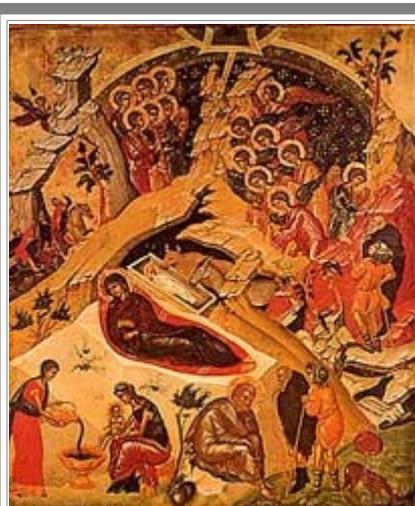
The plan of God for man's salvation is called the plan of "divine economy," i.e. divine dispensation. God the Father conceives the plan, the Son executes it, the Holy Spirit fulfills it and leads it to perfection and finalization.

God the Father acts out of love for man, in sending His own Son for the salvation of the world (John 3:16). When the time was ripe, after a series of purifications throughout the Old Testament that led to the Virgin Mary who could respond to God, accepting man's salvation on behalf of humankind, God sent forth His only-begotten Son, "born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal. 4: 4-5).

a) Christ's Incarnation and the Mystery of Salvation

Christ saved humankind through what He is, and through what He did for us. Beginning with St. Irenaeos, the Greek Fathers continually reiterate the statement that the Incarnate Son of God "became what we are (a human being) so that we may be deified," says St. Athanasios. By assuming our human nature, the Incarnate Logos, a divine person, brought this humanity to the heights of God. Everything that Christ did throughout His earthly life was based on the presupposition that humanity was already saved and deified, from the very moment of His conception in the womb of Mary, through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

b) Jesus the Christ, the God-Man



ICON OF THE NATIVITY

Anointed by the Holy Spirit of God since its conception, Christ's humanity is the humanity of the Messiah (the Anointed one) since the beginning of its existence.

Christ is at the same time the son of the Virgin, but also the natural Son of God, by His very nature. His humanity is a real humanity, with a body and soul, which suffered hunger and thirst, which suffered humiliation and the Cross. The Church condemned such heresies as that of the Docetists, who said that Christ's humanity was not real, Arios who taught that there was no soul in Jesus, and Apollinarios of Laodicea who taught that there was no reason in Jesus.

The Church also defended the divinity of Jesus against the Ebionites, who denied Christ's divinity, the Monarchian heresy

which subordinated the Son to the Father, and Arianism, which also denied the divinity of the Logos of God. Against all these heretics the Church upheld the doctrine that Christ, a divine person, is "true God of true God," for He is the only begotten Son of God, not in a metaphorical, but a natural sense. He has the divine properties of omniscience and preexistence in terms of God's creation. He is the only one without sin: He operates miracles through His divinity, accepts divine honor and worship due to the divinity, and accepts faith in Him.

Humanity and divinity are *hypostatically united* together: the two natures exist in the one person of the Word who became flesh, a divine person (or *hypostasis*). Christ exists "in two natures," without being of two natures; the two natures exist united together "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." (Council of Chalcedon). The first two adverbs are addressed against the heresy of Eutyches and the monophysites who confused the natures and the last two against the Nestorians, who separated and divided humanity and divinity in Christ.

Consequently, Christ has two wills also and two operations, one human and one divine; the two work together "to achieve man's salvation"; however, the human will and operation is always subjected to the divine (Third Council of Constantinople, the Sixth Ecumenical, against Monothelism).

The consequences of this hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ are the "coinherence" of human and divine nature, the *communicatio idiomatum*, the natural sonship of Christ's humanity, one worship of the two natures in Christ, deification of Christ's human nature, Christ's *double knowledge* and power (however, attributed to one person), Christ's absolute un sinfulness, and the Mother of God being truly *Theotokos* and Virgin before, during, and after she gave birth to the only-begotten Son of God.

c) Jesus the Prophet, the Priest, and the King

Jesus had the following obstacles to overcome in order for Him to accomplish the work for which He came (*theosis*): the obstacle of nature, the obstacle of sin, the obstacle of death, and the dominion of the devil. The obstacle of nature was overcome with His Incarnation; the obstacle of sin and death was overcome by the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus. The dominion of the devil was overcome by Christ's descent into Hades (Hell).

According to Eusebius of Caesaria and the patristic tradition of the Church, the mission of Christ (continued by the Church) is threefold: Prophet, Priest, and King.

As a *Prophet*, Jesus taught humankind the truth of God, being Himself the Incarnate Truth, the Way and Life. Christ's teaching is characterized by clarity and lucidity, simplicity and completeness. Christ is the teacher who backs His teaching with His life.

As a *Priest*, Christ offers Himself as a victim "for the life of the world." Through His sacrifice on the Cross, Christ "redeems us from the curse of the law, by His precious blood," bestowing "immortality upon humankind" (*Troparion* of the Crucifixion). The blood shed upon the cross washes away our sin; as it fell upon Adam (man's) skull and dry bones (according to a pious tradition Adam's tomb lay under the place of crucifixion on Golgotha) they were made alive again; man's poisonous blood was replaced with the life-giving blood of God (*Troparion* of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross). Through Christ's death upon the Cross, man was restored to life.

Christ is *King* throughout His earthly life, for He came to establish and to announce the Kingdom of God (see Matt. 4:17). However, the highlights of His Royal Ministry are the Cross itself (for, according to St. John Chrysostom, Christ dies as the King who offers His life for His subjects); the descent into Hades to announce salvation to "those who were asleep there from all ages" (*Troparion* of Holy Friday); the Resurrection, through which Christ "tramples down death by death, bestowing

everlasting life to the dead" (Resurrection hymn); Christ's Ascension into heaven, through which He reenters into the Father's glory; and Christ's glorious coming again.

d) The Mission of the Holy Spirit

The last part of the plan of salvation (divine economy) is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit of God (economy of the Holy Spirit).

The Spirit of God prepares for the coming of Christ in the Old Testament period, becomes the ointment of Christ's flesh the day of the Annunciation, accompanies Christ throughout His mission on earth, and applies Christ's work, both saving and deifying, to each Christian individually, through the sacramental life of the Church. Christ has achieved our salvation and deification in an objective way, in our nature. The Spirit applies salvation and deification in a subjective way, to our persons. Divine grace, the Church, and the sacraments are the working of the Holy Spirit.

e) Divine Grace

By divine grace we understand the saving and deifying energy of God, made available through Christ's work, and distributed by the Holy Spirit, the source of grace and sanctification.

Divine grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, is a free gift, necessary for our salvation, non-coercive, which requires our cooperation (synergy). Our response to the grace of God is our works of love, which are the fruits of God's grace working in us. We are justified by God's grace. However, this justification is not real, unless it produces the "works of righteousness."

f) The Church of Christ

The place where the saving and deifying grace of the Holy Spirit is at work is the Church of Christ. The Church is at the same time the image of the Holy Trinity, the people of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. All these aspects are necessary for a complete image of the Church.

The Church is the great sacrament of salvation that Christ has instituted in the world. It is the Ark of salvation, and the inaugurated Kingdom of God. Its unity is not affected by schism and heresy; its holiness is not affected by sin; its catholicity and truth is not affected by partiality and falsehood. Founded upon the Apostles, she continues the apostolic mission and ministry in the world, being the "pillar of truth," never failing in accomplishing her mission.

g) The Communion of Saints

The Church thus conceived is not just another human organization; it is a gathering of people who profoundly share the life of faith, the new life in Christ, the life in the Holy Spirit, the life of God. The Church can best be characterized as a "communion of saints." For all its members are called to holiness, through their rite of incorporation into the Holy Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the People of God. Militant on earth and triumphant in heaven, the Church is only one family, sharing in the same means of grace, the holy sacraments.

V. ORTHODOX ESCHATOLOGY

The Holy Spirit of God, working through the Church and its sacramental life, leads the plan of salvation in Christ to completion and final fulfillment. The final battle with evil that operates in the world will occur just before the coming again of the Lord. In the meantime, the struggle against evil and dark forces in the world continues, with some victories on behalf of the Church, and with some failures on behalf of some of its members. This is the normal condition of the life of the Church, which is the inaugurated Kingdom of God, and which, however, has not yet come fully. Two

distinct stages are to be recognized, in terms of Christian Orthodox eschatology: that of a "partial judgment," of a "partial" or "realized" eschatology, and that of a "final judgment," at the coming again of the Lord, which will come at the end of time.

a) Partial judgment - the hour of our death

Our physical death, a consequence of the first man's sin that we still suffer, can be seen in two ways:

1. negatively, as a kind of catastrophe, especially for those who do not believe in Christ and life everlasting in Him; and
2. positively, as the end of a maturation process, which leads us to the encounter with our Maker. Christ has destroyed the power of the "last enemy," death (1 Cor. 18:26).

A Christian worthy of the name is not afraid of this physical death insofar as it is not accompanied by a spiritual or eternal (eschatological) death.

A partial judgment is instituted immediately after our physical death, which places us in an intermediate condition of partial blessedness (for the righteous), or partial suffering (for the unrighteous).

Disavowing a belief in the Western "Purgatory," our Church believes that a change is possible during this intermediate state and stage. The Church, militant and triumphant, is still one, which means that we can still influence one another with our prayers and our saintly (or ungodly) life. This is the reason why we pray for our dead. Also, almsgiving on behalf of the dead may be of some help to them, without implying, of course, that those who provide the alms are in some fashion "buying" anybody's salvation.

b) General Judgment - the Coming Again of Christ

The early Church lived in expectation of the "day of the Lord," the day of His coming again. The Church later realized that its time is known but to God; still, some signs of Christ's second coming were expected:

1. The Gospel will be preached everywhere in the world (Matt. 24: 14; Luke 18:8; John 10: 16);
2. The Jews will be converted to Christ (Rom. 11:25-26; cf. Hosea 3:5);
3. Elijah, or even Enoch, will return (Mark 9:11);
4. The Antichrist will appear with numerous false prophets accompanying him (1 John 2:10; 2 Thes. 2:3; Matt. 24:5);
5. Physical phenomena, upheavals, wars, sufferings will occur (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:25); and,
6. The world will be destroyed by fire (*ekpyrosis*; see 2 Peter 3:5).

All these signs are expected to be given in due time; without them, the end-time will not come.

The resurrection of the dead is a miracle that will happen at the second coming of the Lord. According to the Creed: "I await the resurrection of the dead." This resurrection will be a new creation. However, our physical bodies as we know them now will be restored, in a spiritualized existence like that of the Lord after His Resurrection.

The final judgment will follow the resurrection of all. Some will rise to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of judgment and condemnation. Christ will be our Judge on the basis of our deeds, our works of love or our acts of wickedness.

The end-time will follow, with a permanent separation between good and evil, between those who

will be awarded eternal life of happiness and bliss in heaven, and those who will be condemned to the fire of eternal damnation, to the eternal remorse of their conscience for having rejected God and authentic life in Him and having joined the inauthentic life invented by the devil and his servants.

A new heaven and new earth will be established, inhabited by righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). The Kingdom of God will be fully established; the Church will cease to exist. Finally, the Son of God will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, "that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15:28).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, New York (Fordham University Press), 1974.

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