

Η ΜΕΣΟΠΕΝΤΗΚΟΣΗ



Jesus Christ
The Only Catechist

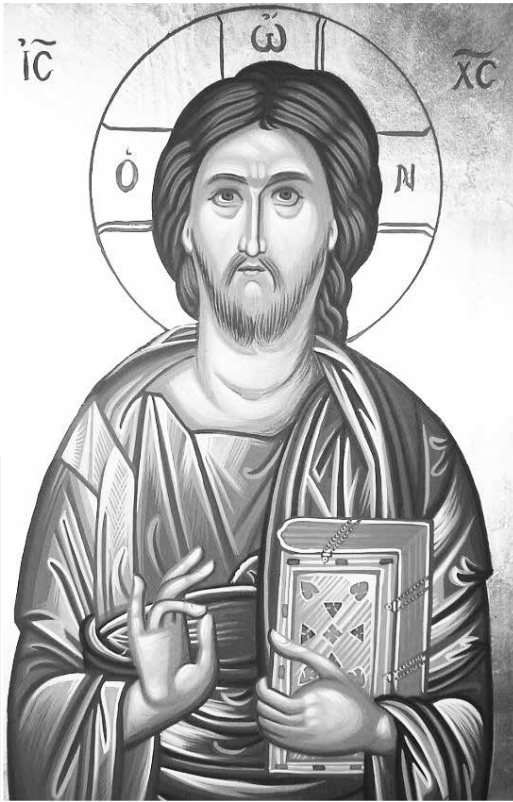


Bishop Sotirios Athanassoulas was born in Lepiana, Arta, Epirus, in 1936 to pious parents, George and Anastasia. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity Degree from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Athens in 1961. As a layman he served as Dean of Students at the Theological School of Boston. He was ordained a Deacon and a Priest in 1962, and has been serving the Church of Canada ever since. He obtained a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Montreal with a specialty in the New Testament. He speaks Greek, English and French. He was elected Bishop on December 18, 1973.

Metropolitan Sotirios (then Bishop) with his mother, Anastasia, ninety-eight years old. She fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 111. This book is devotedly dedicated to his mother and to all mothers.

Orthodox Catechism

Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith



“Now so it was three days they found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them ques-

tions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. (*Luke, 2:46-47*)

My child, listen to Jesus Christ, the only Catechist, by reading this Catechism. By the time you reach the end of this book, I pray that you will experience His Metamorphosis and that you will exclaim as did Peter on the Mountain. “It is good for us to be here”.

My child, be always with Christ, and may He always be with you.

Bishop Sotirios

Orthodox Catechism

Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith

**The Greek Orthodox Diocese of Toronto
(Canada)**

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Foreword

In terms of material goods, Canada is an earthly paradise and it is not deficient in the spiritual field. But things are difficult for Orthodox Christians. Their numbers are small; only about two percent of the population of Canada. Their Churches are few, and they are administered according to nationality. Religion is not taught in the schools, only in the Churches and in religious education classes. Television, radio, and the press are full of non-Orthodox ideas. This is the difficulty with which the clear water of Orthodoxy flows through into thirsty souls. Together with its Communities, our Diocese does whatever it can. To assist our Communities, the Diocese offers our monthly newspaper "Orthodox Way"; radio programs; our weekly television program, "Orthodox Voice"; and now the thirty-six catechetical lessons of the Bishop in English and Greek, on CD's, DVD's and in this booklet that you hold. It is for you and for every Christian. It is for every creature of God. You will find in it all the basic truths of Orthodoxy, which every Orthodox Christian should know and practice. Read it. Open your heart and accept the life-giving water of our faith. Quench your thirst with it. Follow Christ on earth and to eternity. God be with you.

Foreword to Fourth Printing

This Orthodox Catechism is essentially a series of talks delivered on radio and television in 1989, that is to say, before the fall of Communism. It was deemed right to publish these lessons exactly as they were delivered, although two of the examples given in them -one from Albania and another from Yugoslavia- are no longer applicable. This fourth printing is being issued at the request of many Christians. Each lesson concludes with a short prayer. Please do not only read these prayers, but also live them, and send them up to Heaven with all of your soul's might, for your own blessing and for the benefit of others.

Before starting to study this book, let us cross ourselves and pray,

"Christ, the true light, Who enlightens and sanctifies every human, open the eyes of our minds, in order to correctly comprehend the lessons of this Catechism. Touch our hearts with Your true light, so that we may receive not only Your statutes, but also You Yourself as our Lord and our God. Come and abide with us, sanctify us, and save us."

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Introduction

The following pages are catechetical; that is to say, their purpose is to catechize, to instruct religiously, those who are listening. But what is catechism? The word is derived from the Greek verb *katechein*, a compound verb that means *I echo downward*, I shout from the top. Consequently, catechism is a sounding from above. What does that really mean? To put it plainly, it means that the voice is from Heaven. The voice of God.

But does God speak to us and is He present during catechetical lessons? Do we actually hear God's own voice? Without any doubt God is present, since He is always present anywhere and everywhere. During catechetical lessons God speaks to us through the mouth of the catechist.

If we look at this more closely, catechism is the systematic teaching that teaches us what we should believe, how we should believe it, and how we should behave; that is, what our conduct should be and our deeds, and how we as Christians should worship God in order to be worthy of the name of Christian.

In the first centuries of Christianity, whoever wished to become a Christian first had to receive religious instruction before being baptized. They had to learn their religion well first in order to become one of its members. But the instruction they received was not just dry knowledge. They had to accept the faith and be ready to make it a part of their life. They had to learn the right doctrines and the moral principles of their religion, and they had to know what it was they received in baptism, where they were going, what their duties and obligations were, and also

what were their rights and benefits.

This instruction before baptism was called catechism. Those who attended this teaching and accepted it were called catechumens. In other words, they made up the class of catechumens.

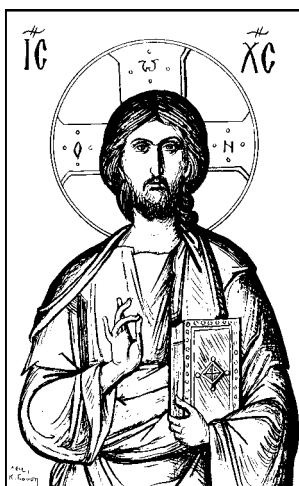
The Divine Liturgy itself was divided into two parts, a part for the catechumens and a part for the faithful. The catechumens stayed only for the first part of the Liturgy. After that they would leave. They could not attend the Liturgy of the Faithful and, naturally, they were not able to receive Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ, since they were not baptized and were not yet members of the Church, members of the Christian religion, members of the Mystical Body of Christ. This class or group of catechumens was later eliminated because infant baptism had been introduced. A child was baptized within a few days or months of its birth, as is still the practice today. But the neophyte or newly baptized child, even though he was baptized and was a member of the Church and of the Mystical Body of Christ, did not know his religion. He had to be instructed, even after baptism; that is, he had to be taught faith in Christ and the moral principles of his faith.

This obligation to instruct the child in its religion as it grew up was the responsibility, as it is today, of the godfather or godmother with the assistance of the parents. But do all godparents and parents have a correct knowledge of the Christian religion? And are they in the position of giving good religious instruction to the child? If they are pious Christians, all is well and good, because they teach the child mainly by serving as an example. However, the Church has always felt the need to teach faith in Christ, to teach the moral principles of Christianity, and the duties and rights of Christians even to those who had already been baptized.

In the pages that follow we will try in simple terms to do the same thing. Follow these lessons and you will discover what you do and do not know about our Christian religion. Pray that God will enlighten me to write correctly and will open all of our

hearts to accept His teaching, His Word, as a true seed of Truth that falls on fertile soil so that it can bear plentiful fruit.

O Christ, Who are the Truth, the Life, and the Way, the True Light that illuminates every one who comes into the world, make the Light of Your Divine Knowledge to shine in our hearts and open the eyes of our minds and hearts so that we may understand Your Teachings and accept Your Word. Although we are baptized, we are also sinners. Before we leave this earth in death, enable us to turn back to You, to give You our heart, to become Yours. Make us abide with You and within You, and do You abide with us. Make us become the branches joined to You, Who are the Vine, so that we may bear much fruit and work out our salvation.



Religion. Christianity.

Religion is the relationship and communication of man with God. By its very nature, the spirit of man turns towards God, Who is his origin and his last and final goal. Between man and God there exists a strong mystical bond, in just the way a bond exists between a child and his father or his mother. God loves man constantly, always and forever, and man in his natural state seeks God's love and offers to Him his obedience. Man wants to do God's will.

This is the natural state of things. And this is the way things were before the disobedience and fall of man. After that disobedience and fall this relationship of man to God weakened. Now a special kind of warmth and cultivation is needed from the side of God. And so religion, which is natural to man, requires cultivation—cultivation by God, because it is God Who knows how to and is able to perform this cultivation correctly—in order to bring fallen man back to the high position he formerly held and the level that is properly his. Unfortunately, man frequently puts himself and his own actions in the way and becomes an obstacle to God's work.

Man must have good will and be receptive to the actions and gifts of God. When man puts himself in the way with his ego and pride, he spoils things. The natural tendency of man to love God and to accept His gifts is suppressed and almost erased. He himself becomes the creator of a distorted religion in which truth is mixed with deception. And so we have the phenomenon of there being so many religions, religions made by man and, because

they are man-made, not perfect.

This is the major difference between the Christian religion and other religions. The other religions begin from man and go towards God. The Christian religion begins from God and descends to man. In the other religions man tries to find God. In Christianity, God becomes God-man and reveals Himself to man. Since no one can know God as well as God knows Himself, when God reveals Himself we have the real truth and not deception. What we should do, then, is to accept the truth that God offers us.

But even in this respect, unfortunately, man frequently puts himself in the way. He is taught and he teaches things that are not divinely revealed. He becomes a heretic. This designation belongs to those who either create doctrines and teachings that are not found in divine revelation or who reject the doctrines and teachings that are found in it. For example, in the first case we have the Roman Catholics with their doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. In the second case we have the Protestants, who teach that Holy Communion is not the real Body and Blood of Christ but symbolizes the Body and Blood of Christ even though Christ Himself said, "This is my Body" and "This is my Blood."

We said above that religion is natural to man. We may say that it is a universal phenomenon. Plutarch says, "When you travel you find unwalled cities, uncultivated, without a King, without palaces, without money, without even a need for currency, without a number of theatres or athletic stadiums. But no one sees a town or a city without a Holy Temple or without God."

It is possible, however, for someone to observe that what Plutarch is saying does not apply to us today; until very recently, if you went to Albania you saw neither churches nor God. And whoever said that was correct, but only superficially so. No one knew what the Albanians actually believed inside. They could not express themselves. Everything was overshadowed with fear and oppressed with slavery. Religion had been abolished by law. This also happened in China between 1966 and 1979. Things have

changed there. They are changing in Albania. In spite of this, the Marxist preaching of atheism suppresses the natural religious tendency and destroys the natural state of man; without doubt it hurts religion and man because it removes man from his natural environment. I asked Fr. Chrysostom, a Yugoslavian monk, “Fr. Chrysostom, does religion have freedom in Yugoslavia?” and he replied to me, “It has limited freedom, but what good does that do? Through atheism the Communists have ruined and perverted the people and someone will have to start from zero.”

Lord Jesus Christ, Who became man and revealed Yourself as God and Who revealed Your Father and Your Holy Spirit to us sinners, think not of our sins nor those of any man. Send Your Holy Spirit as a life-creating dew to touch and to open all of our hearts for us to accept Your Divine Revelation and to live the natural life of religion. Make us worship You correctly, make our soul seek You, our heart beat for You, our breath praise You. The bad, make good. The distorters, have them accept the truth. The proud and egotistical, make humble and sensible so that they too may accept Your Divine Revelation.



Other Religions and Christianity

How many religions are there in the world? Many. Can we provide an exact number? No. We can, however, divide the religions into three classes. These are the monotheistic, the polytheistic, and the pantheistic. The characteristic of monotheistic religions is belief in one God; and some examples of this kind of religion are Judaism and Mohammedanism. Polytheistic religions are marked by the belief in many gods; and such are worship of the stars, animal worship, plant worship, and others. Pantheistic religions are Brahmanism, Buddhism, and others, and their characteristic is the belief that the universe is God and that within the universe the divine remains passive and does not have a personality of its own.

Christianity is distinct from all of the above religions. It is a monotheistic religion. Christians believe in one, personal God. Sometimes certain people confuse things. Non-Christians, especially, accuse Christians of believing in three gods: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The truth is that we believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, but these three persons are one God. A Trinitarian God. We shall explain this later, when we deal with the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. At present, we should bear in mind that our God is One, but in three Persons.

Christianity has a divine origin. It was revealed to man by God. Revealed and taught to man by Christ, Who was Perfect God, but became perfect man.

Christianity was not given to man from the beginning. God acted pedagogically, the way a child's guardian or teacher acts.

He first tried to cultivate man through Judaism. When the fullness of the time came, then He sent His Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to become man and to teach mankind the truth.

Judaism was given by God. It was not, nor is, a perfect religion. It was the pedagogical preparation for Christ and is perfected only by being complemented by Christianity. Judaism is a sketch. In order to become a finished painting it must accept Christianity. It is the friend of the Bridegroom, but not the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom is Christ and Christianity. Judaism is dusk; it is not the sun. The sun is Christ. Christianity is the light of day, the bright sun.

Christianity teaches the truth. But from where does that truth derive? It comes from Divine Revelation, both oral and written. Oral revelation is Holy Tradition, and written revelation is Holy Scripture; and both Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture are equal. Holy Tradition is chronologically older than Holy Scripture. For example, the Prophets spoke first and afterwards wrote down their inspired words. Christ Himself never wrote anything down. He just spoke. His words were written by the Evangelists many years later, some years indeed after His sacrifice upon the Cross and His Resurrection. And the Apostles spoke and taught Christianity, although in only a few instances did they write epistles.

It is only Holy Tradition that can transmit the divine truths that are not written down in the Bible. Only Holy Tradition can correctly interpret Holy Scripture. When Holy Tradition is rejected and only Holy Scripture is accepted as the basis of our faith, as something to be interpreted by individuals, the unity of the faith is shattered. Then we have the phenomenon of the Protestant churches, which began in the sixteenth century as a single movement and have now ended up including more than twenty thousand churches, all Protestant, but each separate from the other, and at times fighting with each other. Holy Tradition keeps us united—that is, the authentic Holy Tradition. The ark of Holy Tradition is the Church herself. For this reason St. Paul commands, “Maintain and keep the traditions.”

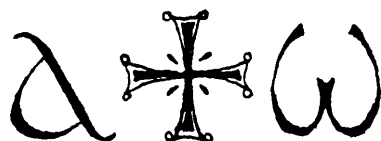
We have said that Christianity draws the truth from Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture. We call Holy Scripture simply the Bible. When we say Holy Scripture or Bible we mean both The Old Testament and The New Testament.

The Old Testament is comprised of forty-nine books, which were written by various writers inspired by God. All of these books were written in Aramaic. They were translated into Greek and this translation is known to us as the Septuagint (Translation of the Seventy). The Old Testament is the covenant between God and the Hebrews, the covenant that contains all of the conditions under which the people could be guided to Christ and to salvation.

The New Testament is comprised of twenty-seven books, all of them written in the Greek language, and it is the new covenant between God and mankind that was made with the incarnation of Christ and was signed and sealed with His Sacrifice upon the Cross and with His Resurrection.

In essence Christianity draws the truth from Christ, Who is Himself the truth and life. Whoever wishes to be alive as a Christian must remain united with Christ, for He is the Vine and the Christian is the branch. When he is united with Christ, the Christian draws sap and abundant life from the Vine.

Our Christ, Who are the Truth, the Way, and the Life, we thank You for having revealed Yourself to us and for having given us Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture. Grant us a clear mind and sincere faith with which to study Your Word and to grow spiritually. Abide with us and keep us united with You, so that we may enjoy abundant life. Life eternal.



God Exists

People often ask whether God exists. And if He does, how can it be proven? It is the most difficult question that can be asked.

God certainly exists. This is apparent mainly from four things: First, faith in God is a universal phenomenon among all mankind. From the very beginning of the time that we are able to trace mankind on earth, we find his faith in God. The most primitive men and the most civilized believe in God. And it is also true that we can say that their faith is not always right. As we noticed previously, men have believed or do believe in God as a star, or an animal, or a stone, or a man, or something else. However, the fact remains that all men of all ages believe in God. Yet it should be pointed out that there are those who contend that they do not believe in God. This is especially so in the twentieth century, where Marxists hold to an atheistic theory and philosophy. Through violence, they attempt to uproot faith in God. To some extent they have succeeded, but not entirely. The chief thing they do is that, by destroying faith in the true God, they lead people to superstition, to belief in astrology and different forms of fortune telling. But faith in God is so deeply rooted and natural to man that it cannot be anything else but true.

Secondly, the existence of the world, with its multitude of precise natural laws, leads us to believe in the existence of God. We marvel at the universe and how it is sustained in ceaseless motion without a collision that would destroy it. Even more we marvel at the human organism, at how much perfection and harmony it has. Its functioning is one of the most complex and admired

phenomena that exist. Have you ever stopped to think what a complete chemical laboratory is a little flower, which can transform water and earth into such beauty, with so many colours and fragrances? Within a single pot, plant different seeds and you get different flowers. Isn't all of this proof that there exists a Creator? Can there be a house without a builder? Can there be a watch without someone having constructed it? A ship or an aeroplane or a spaceship that can travel without a Commander? Do not be deceived when you hear about self-propelled missiles—they have their commander from afar. Even more to the point, they have their manufacturer. We come back, therefore, to the saying, "Every house is made by someone and He that made all things is God."

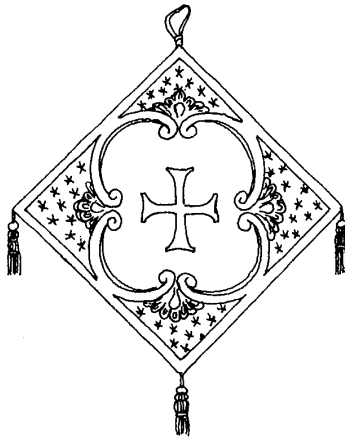
Thirdly, there is another powerful proof of the existence of God. That is, the voice of our conscience. It commends us when we do what is right, moral, and just; it censures us when we step out of line and we do what is not right, what is immoral and unjust. Who planted this voice within us? Who else but God?

Fourthly, whether we like it or not, we must accept the fact that we all have the problem of death. We are drawn to the belief in life after death and to a longing to return to our origin. We feel like migrating birds that fly away and return. We do not know why we have this feeling, but even so it leads us to believe in God and in an other-worldly origin of ours.

All that we have said up to now indicates so powerfully that there is a God, that it would be difficult for someone to doubt it. However, the real proof of the existence of God is our faith. The person who believes does not require any other proof or evidence. His faith is tangible proof of God. He does not require any evidence. He feels and experiences the existence of God. He is within God and God resides within him. If the faithful person needed proof of his own existence, then he would also need proof of God's existence. But who doubts his own existence? Perhaps only a madman. What faithful person can doubt the existence of God? No one. But in order to be faithful, we must have a pure

heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall have sight of God.” Blessed and happy are those who have a pure heart, for they shall see God.

Most holy and All-knowing God, You know our souls and our hearts. You know who has a clean and who has a soiled heart. You see the faith and unbelief and deceit of men. Even more so, You know that the man who lives in misery tries to find happiness—true happiness. And it is a fact that true happiness is found only in You. Do not misunderstand us, my God. Do not turn against even the most sinful or the most unfaithful. Do not turn away from or scorn even the most blasphemous against You. We are all Your children. True, we offend You. But bear with us. Forgive us all. Grant us a clean heart in which to enthrone our belief in You. Bring it about that all may know Your existence. Live inside every human heart. Let all human existence be dedicated to You, the Creator of the Universe, the Father of us all. You exist, and we believe in You, and we worship You. With Your perfect love, You have revealed Yourself even to those who doubt You and to those who reject You.



What God is

There is no definition of God. That which is defined, is limited. How can we define and limit God? If we could do this, God would not be God, but, instead, we would be gods or at least something superior to God.

Reading Holy Scripture, we can, without fear of being in error, say that God is the highest, infinite, unlimited, perfect spiritual Being from Whom derived all that has been created and is sustained. John the Evangelist says: “God is Spirit.” As Spirit, which God is, He does not require space, but rather He fills space; He is, that is to say, present everywhere. He is beyond time; that is, eternal. He is unaffected by change and therefore is unalterable. The Spirit cannot be confined within earthly limits; it does not age, does not accept changes or alterations. Since God has all of these qualities, He is All-knowing. He comprehends everything. He has unlimited knowledge. He knows and has always before Him the past, the present, and the future. Past, present, and future have a meaning for us; but for God, Who is eternal, they have no meaning or significance. Everything is in the present to Him. God is All-wise. And He acts always correctly and with purpose. He is the All-mighty and the Ruler of everything. He is All-powerful; nothing can resist Him. Before Him, “every knee” is bent. Again, John the Evangelist tells us that God is Love. Since He is complete Love, He is also Most-Holy. He is Perfect Goodness. He is the highest justice. He treats all of His creatures with utmost love, justice, and mercy. God is self-sufficient. He has no need whatsoever of anything outside of Himself. He is truly

Blessed. Scripture tells us still again that He is Light, the Light of Truth that enlightens and blesses everything.

In addition to all that we have said to now, we can conclude without any doubt that “every perfect Gift is from above;” every good quality is found in God and is directed by God with perfect selflessness and love, and is directed toward His creatures. All of God’s actions are for man’s good and the good of His creatures. God’s perfection and the fact that the world is such a harmonious whole, lead us to the conclusion that God is One. One directing mind that rules everything. There is no greater blasphemy than for someone to believe that many gods exist, one god for heaven, another god for the earth, another god for the sea, another god for Hades, and so forth. Nothing can stand beside the One God.

Some will ask how can you say that we believe in one God when you speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? And again, what position does the Panagia (The Virgin Mary) have in divinity? Is God the Father? Is God the Son? Is God the Holy Spirit? If so, do we not, perhaps, have three gods? And beyond that—is the Panagia a goddess? At this point we will say very simply that the Father is really God. And the Son is God. and the Holy Spirit is God. There are not, however, three Gods. There is one trinitarian God. In another section, we will explain all of this in detail to the extent that the human mind can comprehend it. I say this because, as we said previously, God is infinite and the human mind does not have the capacity to understand that. When discussing theology, we must also bear in mind these philosophical thoughts. Ideas have three categories: logical—that is, those that are in accord with human logic; irrational—which are contrary to human logic and consequently cannot stand; and supra-logical ideas—that is, those ideas that go beyond logic, that are above logic. Supra-logical ideas cannot be investigated by the human mind.

As for the Panagia, the Mother of Our Lord, we can say that of course she is not a goddess. She is herself human. Worshipping

her is not permitted. We can, however, honour her. We can request her to intercede for us because her intercession has a powerful influence upon her Son and her God, and our God, Jesus Christ. But we shall speak about our Panagia in another section.

Only True, Trinitarian God, All-holy, All-mighty, All-wise, All-loving, All-knowing, Eternal and Unchangeable, Who are present everywhere, accept our humble praise. Receive our thanksgiving and our gratitude, which arises from our sinful hearts, but with sincerity. Hear our supplication. During the course of this catechism, whose purpose is to know You better and to unite us to Yourself, become Yourself the mouth of the speaker. Open the hearts of men to accept Your Word. Abide with us. Let as many people as possible hear Your Word for them to be fertile soil in which Your Word may bear fruit. Gaze with love and goodness upon how men suffer from sin because they are not near You. Redeem us all. Make all of us Yours.



The Holy Trinity

We believe in one God. This God is trinitarian. That is to say, God includes three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But if He is three persons, how can He be one God? This is the greatest mystery that the human mind can absorb. It does not perplex only us. We are not the only ones who cannot understand by rational means the great mystery of the Holy Trinity. Great wise men and the great Fathers of the Church had the same problem. One Father of the Church, St. Augustine, studied the mystery of the Holy Trinity and although he was at his wits' end, he still could not comprehend it. One day he was walking on the sandy beach by the ocean. There churned in his mind the mystery of the Holy Trinity. He was talking to himself: "One God, but three Persons. Three Persons—not three Gods but one God. What does it mean? How can it be explained? How can my mind take it in?" And so he was torturing his mind and beating his brains out, when he saw a little boy on the beach. He approached him to see what he was doing.

The child had dug a small hole in the sand. With his little hands he was carrying water from the ocean and was dumping it in the little hole. St. Augustine asked, "What are you doing, my child?" The child replied, "I want to put all of the water of the ocean into this hole." Once more St. Augustine asked, "But is it possible for all of the water of this great ocean to be contained in this little hole?" And the child asked him in return, "If the water of the ocean cannot be contained in this little hole, then how can the Infinite Trinitarian God be contained in your mind?" And

the child disappeared. He was actually a little angel.

St. Augustine learned his lesson. He reverently thanked God, Who taught him in such a miraculous way that the mystery of the Holy Trinity cannot be comprehended with human reasoning. It is a matter of faith rather than of human reasoning. Whoever believes in God lives the mystery of the Holy Trinity and does not require rational proof.

We ourselves cannot prove rationally the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It would not then be a mystery. However, we shall mention a few verses from the Old and the New Testament that speak about the Holy Trinity and do not leave any doubt that God is One, but trinitarian. He has three Persons.

In the Old Testament, the emphasis falls mostly on God as one. Moses shouted aloud to the Israelites, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One" (Deuteronomy, 6:4). In spite of this, even in the Old Testament there are indications and references to the Holy Trinity. Not clearly and plainly, but in a cloudy way and veiled. There are many verses in which God is presented as being comprised of more than one Person. At the creation of man we read, "And God said, Let Us make man in Our own image and likeness" (Genesis, 1:26). When men had committed many sins and when they were building the Tower of Babel not for the glory of God but for their own glory, in order to bring them to their senses, God decided to "confuse their tongues." And God said, "Let Us go down and there We will confuse their tongues." There are other references in the Old Testament where God speaks in the plural. But why so? He is not using the "royal plural" form of the verb. Simply put, this plural form refers to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More concretely, the Prophet Isaiah remarks that the angels, the Seraphim, fly about the throne of God and offer praises to Him, saying "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of the Sabbath, the entire earth is filled with His glory." Why "holy" three times? As the Fathers of the Church explain, it refers to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. "Holy" is the Father. "Holy" is the Son. "Holy" is the Holy

Spirit. In addition we have the hospitality of Abraham. There the three Persons of the Holy Trinity appeared as three angels.

The New Testament teaches about the mystery of the Holy Trinity more explicitly. When Christ was baptized in the Jordan River we have the appearance of the Holy Trinity. Christ was being baptized. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. The Father exclaimed from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” For this reason the holy day for this event is called Theophany (the appearance of God). And after His Resurrection Christ said to His Disciples, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” St. Paul greets the Corinthians, “The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” With all of these verses and many more, the New Testament does not leave any doubt that God is trinitarian. We cannot ask for an explanation of the mystery. It would not be a mystery if it had an explanation. We accept the truth of God and we understand it and we live it only through our faith.

Thrice Holy One, Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank You that You have revealed Yourself to us. Together with the Seraphim, we glorify You, saying Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, Holy is the Holy Spirit. We sinners humbly beseech You. Grant us peace and serenity. Lead the whole world to know You as You are, Trinitarian and Most Holy. Let no one be lost. Bring all to true faith. Unite us with Yourself. Keep us in Your love and in Your Kingdom.



God the Father

We all know that God is called Father. It will serve us well to look at a few of the passages from the Holy Scriptures where God is called Father.

In the Old Testament the psalmist says, “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.” In another place he says again, “Father of orphans and judge of widows.”

In the New Testament St. Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When His Disciples asked Christ Himself to teach them how to pray, He taught them “Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .,” and in this way He calls God Father. Again we find in the Gospel of St. John, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have ever-lasting life.”

Although there exist many other passages in the Holy Scriptures that call God the Father, those that we have referred to are sufficient to convince every well-intentioned listener.

However, at this point we must clarify something. God is called Father in two senses: the moral and the doctrinal sense. God is the Father of all of us in a moral sense and meaning. This is how He is presented in the Lord’s Prayer, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and in many other places in the Old and in the New Testaments. He is a Father with infinite love for His creatures. A Father Who sends the sun and the rain and all His other gifts to all people. A Father Who always receives with open arms all sinners; those who have taken the wrong path; even criminals, as long as they repent. He is our Father, our Creator, and our

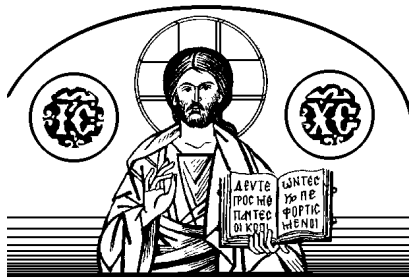
Protector. He accepts us when we repent and reinstates us in our former glory. He is our Father because He intends us to be heirs of His Own Kingdom. For all of these reasons, He is our Father. But all of us, and the angels, too, are children of God “by grace.”

This does not apply to Christ. He is not the Son of God “by grace;” He is the Son of God “by nature.” He is the Son of God by His nature and substance before all ages. In many instances when Christ speaks about God as Father, He makes this same distinction. In order to understand this beyond any doubt, we have only to remember what He said to Mary Magdalene after His Resurrection: “Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren and say unto them, ‘I ascend unto my Father and your Father and to my God and to your God.’” He did not say, I am ascending to our Father; He made the distinction. In order to avoid the error of thinking that this distinction is not important, let us point out that it was because Jesus called God His Father in a distinct and separate sense that the Pharisees sought to condemn Him. John the Evangelist says it clearly. He says that they sought to kill Him because He called God His own Father and made Himself equal to God. The Pharisees understood correctly what He was saying, but they did not want to believe it. They forgot and did not want to hear about the voice of God that was heard at Epiphany and at the Transfiguration, when, in a sense entirely distinguishing Him from others, God called Jesus Christ “His beloved Son in Whom He was well pleased.”

Unfortunately, there are people today who speak very irresponsibly, having personal benefit for themselves as their standard and aim. At least they think so; actually they are working for the benefit of Satan. They are people—yes, they are Protestant Christians—who assert that they can call God Mother. This has grown out of the feminist movement, and it has no bearing upon theology or religion. We cannot find God called “Mother” anywhere in Holy Scripture or in the writings of the Holy Fathers. Those who persist in this are deceived by Satan, and they are deceiving themselves and others. They would do well to study Holy

Scripture and examine their deception. By remaining deceived, they act diabolically and their reward will be eternal damnation.

Our Heavenly Father, You know that we are Your children by Grace. We do not claim to be Your children by our nature. Only our Saviour, Christ, is Your Son by nature. We fervently beseech You: accept us as the Prodigal, as the Thief, as the Tax- Collector. As Peter, who denied You. Open the eyes of our mind and soul to acknowledge You as our Father by Grace and the Father of Christ by nature. Give us Your Grace abundantly, not only to acknowledge You as our Father by Grace, but also to act as Your true children and as brothers among ourselves. You have destined us to be heirs of Your Kingdom; help us to inherit it. We wish it. We seek it. We desire it. If our path is not straight, it is because Satan deceives us. Our evil self is drawn toward sin, but, Father, we do not want this to happen. We want Salvation. Save us, through Jesus Christ, our Deliverer and Saviour.



The Son is God

All Orthodox Christians believe that the Son, that is to say, Jesus Christ, is God. With a profound comprehension of soul, they repeat the words of the Creed, “I believe . . . and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in essence with the Father, from Whom all things were made.”

Orthodox Christians believe quite correctly. Their belief is supported by Holy Scripture. John the Evangelist tells us, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” In this way he calls the Son and the Word of God, God. He further informs us that the Son and Word of God existed from the Beginning, that is, before Creation, before Time. He always existed, together with the Father. He was and is inseparable from God the Father. And He is Perfectly God. St. Paul complements this by saying, “Great is the mystery of godliness—God appeared in the flesh.” How? By the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ. Elsewhere, St. Paul calls Christ Lord and God, Great God, Blessed God. But first St. Thomas, after Christ’s Resurrection, had called Christ, “My Lord and my God.”

In other places in Holy Scripture, the same Divine attributes are ascribed to Christ that are also ascribed to the Father. He is called The One Who Existed Before All Time, the All-mighty, the All-Knowing, Equal to the Father, Creator of the World.

From what we have said, from the Creed and Holy Scriptures,

it becomes very clear that the Son is Perfect God as is the Father. Christ Himself teaches that “All must honour and worship the Son as they do the Father. He who does not revere the Son, does not revere the Father.” In other words, he who denies the divinity of the Son, denies the divinity of the Father and, therefore, is an unbeliever.

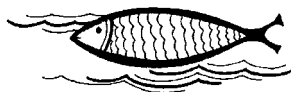
What we have said above is the Orthodox faith. However, there are heretics. Sadly, the heretics who deny the divinity of Christ insist that they are supported in their heresy by Holy Scripture. They are the Arians of the period of the First Ecumenical Council, the Jehovah Witnesses of today, and certain Protestants.

Let us see how and why they are mistaken. In the Gospel of St. John, at the Lord’s Supper, Christ says, “My Father is greater than I.” What does this mean? According to the heretics it means that since Christ regards the Father as greater than Himself, He therefore is not equal to the Father and truly God. But these words of Christ refer to His human nature and not to His divine nature. As a man, Christ cannot really be equal to the Father. He is Perfect Man, but no man, no matter how perfect he may be, can be God. What we should keep in mind is that while the Son became man and took “the form of a servant,” He did not cease to be God, to remain always “in the bosom of the Father.” Never did He cease to be Perfect God. The real meaning of the above words of Christ, “My Father is greater than I,” is that He is greater than I because you see Me now as a human being in the form of a servant; however, I remain God “in the bosom of the Father,” but I will return to the Father also as human. At that time, My human nature will be granted unlimited glory.

Another passage of the New Testament that is misinterpreted by the heretics to support their deceptions is the discussion that Christ had with the wealthy young man. The young man called Him “Good Teacher,” and Christ replied, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except One, that is God.” Heretics ask how could the Son, Jesus Christ, be God since when the wealthy young man’s question was directed to Him, He Himself

accepted by His answer that He was not good, but that only God was good? Here we find again the same misinterpretation. Why? Most simply, because Christ knows that the young man sees Him as strictly human and nothing more. It is as if He were saying to the young man: “Yes, you want to seem to be clever, but at least have some respect for yourself. You know that the Perfect Good is God, and therefore you do not believe in what you are saying.” Here once more Christ regards Himself as human in comparison with God, because that is how the young man perceives Him, as human only. The interpretation given by St. John Chrysostom of this passage is quite interesting, and so we will present it here. St. John Chrysostom writes, “Attend more to the Lord’s answer.” He did not say “No one is good except One, the Father,” but rather, “No one is good except One, God.” He said this so that we might understand that He is God and the Son of God, equal to and as good as God the Father.” Consequently, the Lord as God is unlimited Good, All-good, as is the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus Christ, You were and are True God, God always “in the bosom of the Father” before all ages. You accepted and received the form of a servant. You became man for our salvation and You humbled Yourself all the way to the Cross and death without ever ceasing to be the Perfect God. With all of the ways in which You endured and suffered for us, show Your compassion still and Your unlimited Love and Mercy for mankind, Your Creation. Do not forsake us who believe in You and bear Your witness. Lead us near to You. Elevate us spiritually daily. Forgive those who deny You and blaspheme You. Enlighten them to recognize You. To live and to feel the warmth of Your Love and everlasting happiness. Condemn no one. Save Your people, O Lord.



The Holy Spirit is God

Our Church believes that the Holy Spirit is God. He is the third Person of the Holy Trinity. He is equal to the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son. This belief of our Church is based on both the Holy Scriptures and on Holy Tradition.

In the Old Testament it is mentioned that the Prophet Isaiah talked with the Holy Spirit (Isaiah, 6:1-10). This is confirmed when St. Paul says, “Well spoke the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the Prophet to our Fathers” (Acts, 28:25). A similar passage is found in the Prophet Jeremiah. And again we have the witness of St. Paul, who confirms that “the Holy Spirit” speaks (Hebrews, 10:15-17). There are many more similar passages in the Old Testament that bear witness that the Holy Spirit is God.

In the New Testament many passages bear witness. When Christ was resurrected, He said to His Disciples, “Go you and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Mark, 16:15). Here the Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and to the Son. There is no doubt that He is God. Saint Peter categorically calls the Holy Spirit, “God” (Acts, 5:4). And St. Paul characteristically says, “Now the Lord is that Spirit” (II Corinthians, 3:17). In very many other places in the New Testament the Divinity of the Holy Spirit is revealed. It is not necessary, however, to mention them all here.

In opposing the heresy of Macedonios against the Holy Spirit, the Second Ecumenical Council, which took place at Constantinople in the year 381 A.D., produced the eighth article of the

Creed, which states, “. . . and [I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, and is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, Who spoke through the Prophets.” This is a teaching that is absolutely based on the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. Pay attention to these words: “worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.” Who is worshipped and glorified? God. God alone. And so, since the Holy Spirit is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, He is also True God.

Many opposed this Orthodox belief. In the Fourth Century, it was Macedonios and his followers. They said that the Holy Spirit is not uncreated God, as is the Father and the Son. They said that He is a creation, and therefore no different from all other created beings; no created being is God, and so the Holy Spirit cannot be God. This arbitrary opinion cannot be supported by Holy Scripture or Holy Tradition.

In our times there are others who are worse than the followers of Macedonios. The Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the existence of the Holy Spirit. The worst is that they call themselves students of the Holy Scriptures. Even a brief glimpse at the Holy Scriptures would show them not only the existence of the Holy Spirit but also His Divinity.

With the use of the word spirit, The Holy Scriptures frequently refer to the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son. Why? As Theodoritos the Compiler says, “To show us that the divine nature of the Three Persons is one and the same, spiritual and immaterial, unembodied and indescribable.” And he adds, “Nevertheless, the Spirit is Holy, and only the Third Person is called the Holy Spirit.”

There is much to be said in interpreting the many passages of the Holy Scriptures that refer to the Holy Spirit. However, it is not our intention to interpret all of these passages here. But we do find it necessary to look at a particular passage that is often misunderstood. St. Mark writes, “All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall

blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit it has never forgiveness but is in danger of eternal damnation” (Mark, 3:28-29). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin. The problem is that this passage seems to forgive blasphemy against the Son but not against the Holy Spirit. The passage can be very easily misunderstood to mean that the Holy Spirit is superior to the Son. The correct interpretation, as it is given to us by the Church Fathers, is this: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the denial by man out of hatred of God’s power to save him. Even more simply, the man who does not believe that the grace of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—can save him, closes his heart to the actions of the Holy Spirit; he does not accept Grace. He does not proceed to repentance. He fights against the sanctifying and saving act of God. He creates within himself a sorrowful and incurable condition.

**“Heavenly King and Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who are everywhere and fill all things, come and abide in us and cleanse us from every stain and save, O Good One, our souls.”
Relieve every man of sorrowful incurable non-repentance and the denial of Your sanctifying and saving action. Make us aware of our shortcomings and sins. Grant us faith in the Trinitarian God, sincere repentance, a returning to You. Grant us the salvation of our Souls and that of all the world.**



Some Attributes of the Holy Trinity

As we previously observed, it is difficult for us to understand the Holy Trinity completely. However, it is necessary to say certain things about the Holy Trinity and about the special attributes of the three Persons.

The first thing to keep in mind is that the Holy Trinity is always united. Christ in His high priestly prayer prayed for the unity of the world and gave us an example and a model: He said, “That they may be one, even as We are One” (John, 17:22). What does We mean? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

And what does this mean? Is it possible that the three Persons are really the same Person and that Person presents Himself, appropriately to the situation, as the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit? No. The Holy Trinity is one in essence and inseparable, one undivided Being. It is of one substance. The three Persons are undivided, but distinct. We must not confuse Them or separate Them. They co-inhere in one another; that is to say, One fits inside the Other. The Father fits in and is always inside the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son fits in and is always inside the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fits in and is always inside the Father and the Son. Can the human mind grasp this? No. That is why we previously said that there are things “beyond logic,” above our own logic. However, just because it is beyond logic and above our own mental capacities does not mean that what has been revealed to us by God is not true. It is precisely as

God has revealed it to us, because He alone knows Himself. This is seen more clearly in the words of Christ, when He said, “He that has seen Me has seen the Father. . . . I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John, 14:9-10).

Although this is the way things are, there are nevertheless certain individual qualities of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father is unborn. The Son is born of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Father is the beginning, but the Son is co-existent and the Holy Spirit, also. In other words, the Father did not exist before the Son and the Holy Spirit, nor is the Father superior to the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity. The three Persons are equal. This is all very difficult to comprehend with human rationality. St. John of Damascus manages to explain matters. He says that because the Son is born of the Father does not mean that He is separate, as the light is not separated from the fire. The fire gives birth to light simultaneously. That is why we cannot say that the fire existed before the light. The Son is born of the Father but simultaneously and eternally and is never separate. The same is true of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father but simultaneously and eternally and never separated.

Let us pay attention also to this. When we say that the substance of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity is the same, we do not mean that this substance is divided. It is not cut up into three pieces, for each Person to take one piece. No. The Father is infinite, and He has all of the infinite divine substance. And the Son is infinite and has all of the infinite divine substance. And the Holy Spirit is infinite and has all of the infinite divine substance. We cannot say that the substance of the Father exists up to a certain point and that it ends there; and that from there begins the substance of the Son; and that from where the substance of the Son ends, there begins the substance of the Holy Spirit. No. That would all be heresy. Wherever the substance of the Father exists [i.e., everywhere] there exists the substance of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Father exists [everywhere], there exists the Son and the Holy Spirit, and vice-versa. Where-

ever the Son exists [everywhere], the Father and the Holy Spirit exist. Wherever the Holy Spirit exists [everywhere], there exist the Father and the Son.

Such are the particular characteristics of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father is without beginning and is the beginning. The Son is co-existent with the Father, as we have previously explained, but is born of the Father simultaneously and eternally. The Holy Spirit is co-existent with the Father, but proceeds from the Father simultaneously and eternally.

Here we have to add that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father, not “and from the Son” as the Roman Catholics and the Protestants say. Christ has told us this: “The Spirit of Truth that proceeds from the Father” (John, 15-26). And so the Second Ecumenical Council decreed, “[I believe in] the Holy Spirit . . . Who proceeds from the Father.” The Third Ecumenical Council decreed that no one can add or delete anything from the Creed. Pope Leo III had the Creed engraved on silver plates without the addition “and from the son,” and at the bottom he added, “Let him be anathematized who adds even a small jot to this Creed.” However, the Roman Catholics and Protestants added “and from the Son” to the Creed, contrary to the teaching of Christ and the decision of the Second Ecumenical Council and the anathema of Pope Leo III. But they will return to the Orthodox faith.

Father without beginning, Son co-existent, born of the Father, Holy Spirit co-existent and proceeding from the Father, Trinity of One Essence, Undivided, United, Inseparable, and Distinct, hear our prayer and the groaning of our souls. Keep us in our Orthodox faith. Have those who have adulterated our faith recover and return. Make them accept the complete teaching of the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. Have them follow the infallible decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. Make all people become one flock under One Shepherd, Christ. Have us be one as You are, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One True God.

The Creation of The World

Our Orthodox faith teaches us, “I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible.” God is the Creator of all of the visible and invisible world. That is to say, He is the Creator of the spiritual world (angels); the material world (the sun, the earth, the stars, and whatever exists in them); and also the world of spirit-matter (man). Everything has been created “by The Father, through The Son, in the Holy Spirit.” Let us listen to what the Holy Scriptures tell us about this: “I made earth and man upon it, with My hand I founded the firmament of the Heavens, I order the course of the stars” (Isaiah, 44:24). The Psalmist and St. Paul repeat, “Thou, O Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the Heavens are the work of Thine hands” (Psalms, 102:25; Hebrews, 1:10).

Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition teach us that God created the world out of nothing. Absolutely nothing. The mother of the Maccabees says to her child, “I beseech you, my child, to look at Heaven and Earth, and see everything that is in them and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed” (II Macabees, 7:28). She is asking her child to look at the Heaven and the Earth and to see what there is in them, and to recognize that God made them from what had not existed; that is to say, from nothing. And the New Testament tells us, “That the worlds were framed by the word of God so that things that are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews, 11:3). All phenomena were made by the word of God out of things that had

not existed. Our Church and Holy Tradition assure us that God is “He Who created out of nothing.”

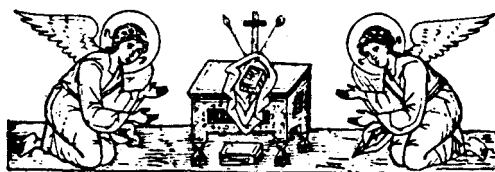
Everything was made by the word of God alone. As we said above, from the Letter to the Hebrews, “by the Word of God” (Hebrews, 11:3). We find in other parts of the Holy Scriptures, “By the word of the Lord were the Heavens made . . .” (Psalms, 33:6). And further down in the same psalm, “For He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalms, 33:9). In the Old Testament (Genesis, 1:3-6) we read, “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light . . . Let there be a firmament . . . And it was done.” And so there exists no doubt that it was only by the word of God that everything was created.

God created all of this world in six days, as it is told to us in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. But those were not days under the sun as we know such days today. How could there be days and nights inasmuch as the sun was created on the fourth day of creation? We must therefore regard those days as lengthy periods. After all, to God “a thousand years . . . are but as yesterday” (Psalms, 90:4). Why does God call the periods of creation days? We do not know. Why did He make the Creation in six days? We do not know. God could have created everything in a moment with a single word and a single motion. He preferred this way of creation. It is His privilege. We cannot say anything about this. We must emphasize here, though, something more important. When and at what time did God create the world? We are referring to the days of creation--but when did those days begin? What is time? Did time exist before the creation of the world? We have said in another section, that God is not subject to time. He is eternal; He is beyond time. And so we should understand that time was created together with the creation of the world. The beginning of the world becomes the beginning of time. Time and the world are synchronous.

Why, however, did God create the world? Hadn't He been happy by Himself as Trinitarian God? Did He perhaps need the world? Need us? We build a home out of the need to live in it. We

make automobiles because we need them for transportation. Is it possible that God had need of the world and that is why He created it? No. It is blasphemy to believe something like that. God has no needs. Speaking to God, David says, “O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord; my goodness extendeth not to Thee [i.e., Thou, O Lord, needeth not my goodness]” (Psalms, 16:2). Then why did God create the world? He created it out of love. He created it to make it a participant in His glory, joy, and bliss. God is not selfish. He wants His creation to have and to enjoy whatever He has. We can say that the cause of the creation of the world is God’s Love. The same God Who is Perfect Love. The purpose of creation is participation in the joy, the glory, and the bliss of God. Naturally, the creation of the world bears witness and gives praise to the Power and the Glory of God. We can even say that this is the purpose of creation; that is to say, the praising of God by His creatures. However, that is not a servant’s work. It is participation in the glory of God. The one who benefits from it is not God, but we ourselves.

Our Father and Creator, Who by Your Word alone and out of Love created us from nothing, we raise our voice to You humbly and respectfully. We glorify You. We thank You for creating us. For granting to us all Your earthly and material goods. We thank You for Your spiritual goods. For revealing Yourself to us. For Your Church. For Your sacraments that enable us to participate in Your Life and Glory even now as we live upon the earth. Hear our prayer. Do not deprive us of Your Heavenly Kingdom. Prepare us for “the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Romans, 8:18).



The Creation of the Spiritual World

The angels, demons, and the souls of men constitute the known spiritual world that God has created. We do not know whether there exist other creatures in the spiritual world. We should certainly not forget that God, too, belongs to the spiritual world, as the Holy Scriptures say. “God is a Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John, 4:24), but God is not part of creation. Here we shall write about angels and demons. We shall write about the soul of man when we discuss the creation of man.

Angels are beings--insubstantial, spiritual, immortal, and self-governed--that serve God and protect mankind. They are divided into nine ranks:

Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
Dominions, Powers, Authorities
Principalities, Archangels, Angels

They were created before the creation of the material world, but we do not know exactly when. We infer this from what God said to Job. He said, “When the stars appeared, all My angels praised Me with a great voice” (Job, 38:7). The Fathers of the Church agree with this opinion and teaching.

From the above passage from the Holy Scriptures, we know that angels are creatures created by God, and St. Paul also writes about this that through Jesus Christ “were all things created that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers”

(Colossians, 1:16). In this passage, St. Paul includes as creatures of God four of the nine ranks of angels.

The task of angels is to serve God, to praise Him, and to glorify Him. Many passages of the Holy Scriptures bear witness to this. We are mentioning only one here, which is sufficient: Isaiah tells us that he saw the seraphim around the throne of God glorifying Him and singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah, 6:3).

That is the primary task of angels. In their relationship to men, angels bring to them God's messages. So the Holy Scriptures tell us: the Angel Raphael brought messages to Tobias; Archangel Michael, to Joshua, the son of Nun; Archangel Gabriel, to Zacharias and to the Virgin Mary. These are the angels whose names we know. However, we should not believe that there are only three angels. No one knows the numbers of the angels. There are, however, many. This is seen by the fact that on the night of the birth of Christ, "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke, 2:12-14). The teaching of our Church is firm that we have "an angel of Peace, a faithful guide, protector of our souls and bodies." And so, therefore, our angels protect us, guide us, rejoice when we repent, bring us, as messengers, God's messages. Each one of us has a personal angel.

Although angels are spiritual beings and constantly in motion, they are not present everywhere. The same angel, that is to say, cannot be in two places at the same time. Only God is present everywhere. Angels are sent by God, in accordance with His Will.

Angels were created free. One, Lucifer, abusing his freedom, said, "I will ascend to Heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will make myself like the Most-High" (Isaiah, 14:13-14). He said this and attempted it. "I will ascend to Heaven. I will set my throne above the clouds. I will become the same as God." Many other angels followed him in his attempt. We do not

know how many. God punished them. From the righteous spirits that they had been, they became evil. That is to say, they became demons. Satans. They became entrenched in this condition. They will be forever miserable as demons. They are unable to change. However, as we shall see later on in another section, although God punished the man who disobeyed Him, and gave him a second opportunity to be saved by sending Christ to save mankind, He did not offer the demons a second chance. Why not? That is unknown. Perhaps because the demons had decided on their own to oppose the Will of God. Man himself also exercised his free will, but he had been tempted by the satanic serpent. Maybe that is why God gave him a second chance to be saved.

The demons work to tempt people. They feel guilty and seek others to share their guilt. They cannot tempt God. Nor can they tempt the angels, because angels are eternally entrenched as righteous spirits. Therefore, they turn to mankind. They tempt them. They lure them. They want to lead them to eternal hell. But if people have faith in God, the demons cannot succeed in their attempts. God does not permit this.

Some say that there are no demons. Satan is merely the personification of evil to them. It is a shame that there are people, especially Christians, who are unaware of the Holy Scriptures, which so clearly tell us about demoniacs, and how Christ drove out horrible demons. All such people have to do is to remember the legion of demons that was driven into the swine.

All Holy God, Who made the spiritual world, You created angels to praise You and to help us. You punished the rebels and they became demons, spirits of darkness. You create our souls, which belong to the spiritual world. Send each one of us a guardian angel. Do not allow us to fall into sin. Guide us to repentance and to a return to You. Grant us peace and serenity in our earthly life. Make us worthy of Your Heavenly Kingdom.

The Creation of Man

According to the description of creation in the Old Testament, in the Book of Genesis, man was God's final creation. That does not mean that God does not continue to create. It is written in the New Testament that Christ said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working (John 5:17)." This means that God continues creating. When we say that God's final creation was man, we are referring to the Creation that took place in six days.

Why was man the final creation of God? Simply because man belongs to neither the material world alone nor only to the spiritual world. He is comprised of two components: one, spiritual--the soul; the other, material--the body. And in this way, he is the connecting link between the spiritual and the material worlds. To understand this better, let us see what the Holy Scriptures say about how God created man.

God created all creatures with only one word. But in creating man, He followed a completely different method. God--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--said, Let Us create man. "And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life. And man became a living being" (Genesis, 2:7). We see that God used a different method for man. And he made a special effort. He gave him soul and body and made him sovereign upon earth, to have authority over all earthly things.

The soul of man, as the spiritual component, is of great value, so much so that Christ tells us, "What profit is there to a man if he gain the whole world and loseth his own soul, or what giveth a man in exchange for his soul?" (Mark, 8:36-37). And the body,

too, has great worth, because the soul acts together with it. The body is the temple of the spirit that dwells therein. “Do you not know that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you that you have from God?” (I Corinthians, 6:19) St. Paul asks. And the body, which is made of clay and is material, is destined not to be lost. It is sanctified by the Spirit of God that dwells within it. It receives the Body and Blood of Christ at the time of Holy Communion. With death it will return to the earth, but at the Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of all, it will be resurrected. Resurrected. Reunited with the soul. Incorruptible and immaterial, to live forever with the soul near God. The two, body and the soul, will comprise for eternity each man’s personal identity.

At this point we should pay attention to something. The Scriptures often speak to us about soul and spirit. They are one and the same. Man’s spirit is his soul. It should not be confused with the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, as the Holy Spirit is often called. Nor should we think that the soul and the spirit of man are two different things. The followers of Makrakis make this mistake, and think that man is tripartite. No. Man is comprised of two parts, not three. He is comprised of body and soul, or spirit.

That is how God created man. In order for man not to be alone, He gave him a helpmate and partner. He created Eve from Adam’s side. How unique is the way in which woman was created. It was done this way so that there would be no doubt that woman is of the same nature and substance as man and so that there would always be cooperation between them. Man complements woman, and woman complements man; the two complement each other. They do not live alone, but together.

Everyone is born of Adam and Eve. All who live today are their offspring. But it seems strange, then, that we can have whites and blacks, those of the yellow and red races. How could there be so many races and so many languages? Yes, it is true that we now have many races and languages. But this was not so at first. Even after the Great Flood, at the time of Noah, “All of the earth had one language and one voice” (Genesis, 11:1). This

means that there was one race of people on the earth, and that they all spoke the same language. Then what happened? How were we fragmented? People multiplied. They became proud and egoistic. They began not to respect God. They decided to build the Tower of Babel. Not for the Glory of God, but for their own glory. Perhaps they thought that they could gaze upon God from there. Who knows? Perhaps they had in mind to climb higher than God, or to tear God down. Like the nonsense that some say today, that God is dead. And so it was that God came down and confused their languages, and people became divided into nations. With climatological conditions, their appearance and colour slowly changed, and they became almost unrecognizable to each other. They certainly do seem so different from each other today. They certainly often dislike each other. They are from the same Ancestor, Adam. From the same couple, Adam and Eve. From the same blood. St. Paul makes this very clear to us in Acts. He says that God “created every nation of man from one blood to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts, 17:26).

God created man according to His image, intending him to be like Him. But we shall discuss this and other matters having to do with the creation of man in the next section.

Creator of the entire world, spiritual and material, the visible and the invisible, Creator of man, we praise You and thank You for Your creation and for sustaining and governing the world. It is You alone Who sustain and govern the world, with Your divine and eternal laws. It is You Who created man a dual-natured creature, a link between the spiritual and material world. It is You Who placed him a ruler over the earth. He disobeyed You, and has often continued his disobedience. He thinks that he is better able to care for himself than are You, although actually he is creating his own destruction. We fervently beseech You, intervene. Stop our downward rush. Raise us up. Through Your Holy Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, call us all to unity with each other and with You. You are our creator, our joy, and our ultimate goal.

The Origin of the Soul and the Condition of Primitive Man

First God created the human body, and then after that He breathed “a living soul” into it. With His breath, He created the soul of man and gave it life. But what did God arrange for the reproduction of man? Does God directly intervene and create a soul each time someone is born? If so, at what exact moment does God intervene? At conception? During the pregnancy? Or at birth? There is no clear answer to the question either in the Bible or in Holy Tradition. The fact that God made man His co-creator helps us find some answer. As the infant’s body is transplanted from the bodies of the parents’, so is the soul. The creation of the infant is an act of both God and the parents. And this creation, which takes place with the cooperation of both God and parents, is for the creation of soul and body together. The soul and the body are conceived and created at the same time. From the time of its conception, the embryo is fully human. That is why abortion is murder.

The original condition of man was not the same as it is today. When God created man, He said. “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (Genesis, 1:26). But what does that mean, “image and likeness”? “Image” does not mean the body of man; as totally spirit: God is not related to a material body. “Image” means that which is sovereign, and independent. That is, it is the freedom and the power of man to choose and do what he wishes. Man’s basic element “of supreme goodness”--meaning his perfection--is his freedom and his power of choice. With-

out this freedom and power, man would not have been created whole and perfect.

“Likeness” is the image in action. That is, it is the good use of man’s free will to improve himself morally so as to come closer and closer to the Divine, to God. This movement toward holiness and perfection of the first created man and woman was not a steady and irrevocable condition. It depended on man’s free will and his own authority, which was designed to have a tendency towards goodness. Man had the possibility of being perfected. With their fall, the first man and woman “blackened” the “image” and distorted the “likeness” to such a degree that they could no longer walk towards justice, holiness and perfection by themselves.

Part of the original condition of man involved Paradise, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life, and so a few words about them should be given.

The Bible tells us that when God created man, “the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East; and there He put the man whom He had formed (Genesis, 2:8).” And again, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat’” (Genesis, 2:15-16). This is not the same Paradise that we talk about today. This Paradise was an earthly garden in which were found all material and spiritual goods. It was a Paradise filled with luxuries. It was a place for material enjoyment and spiritual fulfilment. It was most delightful and beautiful.

The “tree of knowledge” was in this Paradise. It was the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God commanded man not to eat the fruit of this tree, although he was permitted to eat the fruit of all of the other trees. Why did God do this? What exactly does “the tree of knowledge” mean? What kind of tree was it? We do not know. Nor do we know why God gave this command and

the punishment of death. God said “for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Genesis, 2:17).

It seems that this command was the first form of fasting, to strengthen the character of man. This fruit was the fruit of a tree, and not the sexual relationship of Adam and Eve, as some ingeniously say. God blessed the reproduction of mankind, and would not punish them for it. Nor should one think that Adam and Eve had no knowledge of good and evil before they ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge. They had knowledge. Their knowledge was theoretical. With the tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, their knowledge became practical; their knowledge became empirical. The cause for the expulsion from Paradise was not the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The real cause was that they disobeyed and rejected the commandment of God.

The Bible also speaks about the tree of life, although we do not know anything about it. From one phrase that God spoke after the fall of Adam and Eve it seems that this tree bestowed eternal life. God took care lest Adam too should “put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (Genesis, 3:22). We know nothing else about the tree of life.

Our Father and Creator, we know that our bodies and our souls are Your creations. We know that we disobeyed Your command. We ate from the forbidden fruit. We were expelled from Paradise. We blackened the image. We distorted the likeness. We are condemned. Alone, we are unable to return to You. Thank You for sending us Your Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us. To set us free. To restore us. To raise us up to Heaven. We entreat You, help us to follow Him, and at His second coming grant us to be found standing at His right hand. To be steady in holiness and perfection. To live with You forever.



Original Sin and its Consequences

The disobedience and transgression of Adam and Eve is called Original Sin. What happened? As we have previously said, God gave Adam and Eve permission to eat the fruit of all trees except the fruit of the tree “of the knowledge of good and evil.” Here is what the Bible says: “You may freely eat of every tree of the Garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die”(Genesis 2:16-17). In other words, God said to Adam and to Eve, “You may eat the fruit of all of the trees that are in the Garden and that are edible; it is only the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that you should not eat. On the day that you do eat it, you shall die.”

A guilty person wants an accomplice. Satan, who had been an angel and had disobeyed God, becoming Satan, felt guilty and terribly alone. He could keep company only with the other Satans, the demons. His nature had been perverted; he was unable and is unable ever to think about goodness. He always thinks and desires evil. He always seeks evil for others. He was jealous of man. He saw that he was so very happy in Paradise in the company of God. So he put his evil plans into action. As the spirit that he is, he entered the body of a snake. Then he climbed the tree of “the knowledge of good and evil.” He waited there. Eve came and peered at the tree. Satan intruded upon her curiosity. He asked her, “Tell me, Eve, is it true that God told you not to eat the fruit of all of the trees?” Eve answered, “No. He told us to eat the fruit

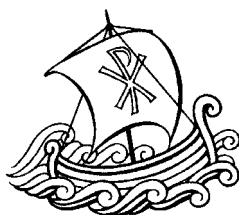
of all the trees except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because if we did we would die.” The serpent said, “You shall not die. God knows that on the day that you eat of that fruit, your eyes will open and you will become as gods. You will know good and evil.” Eve liked Satan’s sweet and slanderous words. She stretched out her hand. She took a fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She ate some, and she also gave some to her mate, Adam. They ate together. Immediately, “their eyes were opened” and they realized that they were naked (Genesis 3:1-7).

Because many people say that the Bible is being metaphorical and that by the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil the Bible refers to the sexual relationship of Adam and Eve, we repeat here that this is not true. God had decreed the sexual relationship of Adam and Eve when he told them to “increase and multiply.” Then what shall we say is the original sin? It is the denunciation of God. If you will, it is the attempt of man to disenthroned God and to enthrone himself in His place, to become God in the place of God. It is not merely that he ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. St. John Chrysostom says about Eve, “She was filled with grandiose imaginings, hoping to be equal to God.” Hoping to be equal to God, she lost her senses.

That is original sin. And its consequences? A.) Spiritual death. That is, the separation of man from God, the source of all goodness. B.) Bodily death. That is, the separation of the body from the soul, the return of the body to the earth. C.) The shattering and distortion of the “image.” That is, darkness of mind, depravity and corruption of the heart, loss of independence, loss of free will, and tendency towards evil. Since then “the imagination of man’s heart is evil” (Genesis 8:21). Man constantly thinks of evil. D.) Guilt. That is, a bad conscience, the shame that made him want to hide from God. E.) Worst of all, original sin is hereditary. It did not remain only Adam and Eve’s. As life passes from them to all of their descendants, so does original sin. We all of us participate in original sin because we are all descended from the

same forefather, Adam. This creates a problem for many people. They ask, Why should we be responsible for the actions of Adam and Eve? Why should we have to pay for the sins of our parents? they say. Unfortunately, this is so, because the consequence of original sin is the distortion of the nature of man. Of course, this is unexplainable and belongs to the realm of mystery, but we can give one example to make it somewhat better understood. Let us say that you have a wild orange tree, from which you make a graft. You will get domesticated oranges, but the root will still be that of the wild orange tree. To have wild oranges again, you must regraft the tree. This is what Christ came for and achieved for fallen man, as we shall see in the following sections.

Our Creator and Maker, ours is the fault. Adam and Eve, listening to Satan, blasphemed. Out of egotism, they allowed themselves to be misled. They distorted the “image.” They darkened the beauty of the soul. They weakened the nature of mankind. Because of them, we became unrecognizable. “The imagination of our heart is evil.” We constantly think of evil. We feel so guilty. We are so far away from You. We have been grafted to evil. We have lost our self-control and our free will to do good. We thank You for Your love, and for sending Your Only-begotten Son to regraft us to goodness. For giving us the possibility of returning to You. You, Lord “want every man to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Do not deprive us of this. Do not deprive anyone of salvation. We thank You Lord.



The Salvation of Fallen Man

As we have previously said, man was able to be saved because God gave him a second chance, since he had not sinned on his own initiative. He was influenced by Satan. The Salvation of the fallen man was promised by God when He said to the devil inside Paradise, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis, 3:15). The essential phrase here is “He shall bruise your head.” He will crush your head. Who is he? Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the only-begotten Son of God, the seed (descendant) of woman.

God kept His promise. He did not fulfil it immediately. He had to prepare things. He prepared the world to accept the “salvation to come.” He prepared the nations by the teaching of many wise men for the expected coming from Heaven and the salvation from on high, and by the Old Testament, which “was our custodian until Christ came” (Galatians, 3:24). And “when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians, 4:4-5).

The salvation of man through Jesus Christ is a basic doctrine of our Church. It is expressed beautifully in the Creed: “I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. Light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, one in essence with the Father, through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

This is proof of the perfect love and continuous care of God for man. Even when he has sinned and has fallen, God loves man. He tries to raise him; to save him; and to make his return to Heaven and his salvation possible.

Many ask whether it was necessary for God to become man to save the sinful man? Could not another man save man? Of course not. Because every man was and is sinful and cannot save himself. How could a sinful man save all humanity? Impossible. Only someone who was without sin was able to save mankind. And that was and is Christ. Others ask whether an angel could not have saved humanity? Perhaps so, if God wanted it that way. But God decided differently. Who are we to question God on His decision? If we think that we can question God, are we not putting ourselves above Him? Are we not even more egoistic and proud than the Devil? And consequently, are we not continuing our sinful condition without repentance?

The salvation of man is a recall from the fall and a return to the house of God. It is a return to the arms of God from that separation which man suffered by his disobedience and fall. Since it is a recall and a return, this could be accomplished only by Him Who had originally created man: God. This is why man had to be saved by Christ. He had to stretch out His hands on the cross and to unite “what before was separated.” The second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, becomes the saviour of the world through His Incarnation, through His sacrifice on the cross, His descent to Hades, His Resurrection, and His Ascension into Heaven.

With what we have said here, no one must think that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, is the only saviour of the world. As “the Father created the world with the Son, together with the Holy Spirit,” so is the salvation of man an act of the entire Holy Trinity. An act of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Father “consented.” The Word “became flesh.” The Holy Spirit “coordinates the institution of the Church,” and abides in the Church and in the sacraments that

save and sanctify the faithful. The works of the Holy Trinity are inseparable.

Triune God, with love as Your only objective You created the world and man. You were saddened by his fall and his disobedience. And You never ceased to love sinful man. Out of love for him, You promised him salvation, to give him a second chance. Out of Your love You consented for Christ to be born. To become man. To take on human nature. His only purpose, to raise human nature to Heaven, restoring the “image” and “likeness.” We thank You for all of Your love. For Your continuing care for us. For the fulfilment of Your promise. For the Incarnation of the “Word.” Because You made our salvation possible. We respectfully entreat You, open the eyes of our souls so that we may enter into our salvation. Help us not to lose the chance, and to return close to You. Not only us, but the whole world, Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers. Make it so that all will believe in You. Let no one be lost. Let everyone find salvation through Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer. Glory be to Your Holy Name.



The Incarnation of the Logos

When the time was ripe, God sent His Son to become man “through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” When was the time ripe? When man had suffered enough through his disobedience and the Fall; when man himself sought salvation; when the ancient wise men had prepared humanity for the Heavenly Redeemer; when the Old Testament had educated man to accept Christ; when there was one empire in all the known world, established by Alexander the Great and his descendants and continued by the Roman Empire; when there was a common language, the Greek language, spoken even in Rome—then the Logos was incarnated. Then the second Person of the Holy Trinity left Heaven and came down to earth as God and God-man. Archangel Gabriel brought the message to the Virgin Mary. He told her that through the Holy Spirit she would give birth to a son. Then Christ was conceived, 1991 years ago. With His birth as man, history was divided into two divisions—before and after Christ. The counting of time started all over again.

“The Word became flesh” (John, 1:14). From the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, the second person of the Holy Trinity was incarnated. While He remained perfect God, He became perfect man. And one might ask, How could a true God be born of a human mother? It is an unexplainable phenomenon. It is only understood as a miracle. “Whenever God wishes, the order of nature is overturned.” The order of nature is twice overturned here: we have a virgin birth and the infinite God filling a woman’s womb, and being born as a whole and perfect man. There is no logical explanation for these happenings. Christ is a God-man.

He is perfect God and perfect man. And at the same time He is one person; that is, one essence with two natures, the Godly and the human. “Dual in nature but one in essence.” These two natures are unconfusedly united, so that they form one person but at the same time are not confused.

This God-man, “dual in nature but one in substance,” the “fulfilment of embodied divinity,” was born in time and place as a human being, in Bethlehem of Judea, under the most unexpected conditions. The Roman Emperor had decreed that everyone was to return to his place of birth for the census. The elderly Joseph set out with his bride. They arrived at Bethlehem, their village. They knocked at doors, but none were open to them. “There was no room at the inn.” They took refuge in a cave, a manger for animals, to escape the night cold. There, on that “night filled with miracles, night filled with charms,” the God-man was born, the Redeemer, the Saviour of the world. The Heavens shone brightly. Angels descended and ascended singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will among men” (Luke, 2:14). The angels proclaimed it to the shepherds, who ran to worship Him. A star guided the Magi from the East. They discussed it with Herod. He, who hated God, guilefully pretended that he wanted to worship the new-born King. Actually, he wished to kill Him. The Magi found the God-man. They worshipped Him. An angel revealed Herod’s plans to them. Secretly, they departed. They returned to their own lands. Herod realized that they had left without saying anything to him. He was enraged. He slaughtered fourteen thousand children, two years and under, hoping to kill the God-man. But he was outwitted. Another angel warned Joseph of Herod’s plans and suggested that he take Mary and the child and depart for Egypt, which they did. They returned when Herod died. And this is how Christ was born.

However, why was He born in such a simple way? Why in such humility? Why not in a way that would have made Him accepted as King? Why was it necessary for Him to be hidden from Herod? Had he ceased being God? No. However, He was born as perfect man, and behaved as a man. He had the natural needs of

man. The divine nature did not overwhelm the human nature, nor the human, the divine. How could it have been otherwise? The infinite God could not be overwhelmed by His creation, finite man. He condescended to humble Himself, to become man, to put on human flesh, as man in baptism puts on Christ. As Christ descended, man ascended. As God was incarnated, man was able to become God-like.

Whatever we write, it is impossible to explain the mystery of the Incarnation. "The mystery does not lend itself to research." The Incarnation of the Logos is and shall remain a mystery. It was brought about mysteriously through God's love for man and His desire to save him.

Son and Word of God, Who through Your love for man became man to save him, You accepted extreme humility. You came without glory and honour. You came to Your creation and Your creation did not know You and accept You. It did not receive You. They closed the door to You. They compelled You to be born in a manger. They compelled You to flee to Egypt, to survive the rage of Your servant Herod. And You accepted it all without protest, even though You were God and man, almighty. We express admiration for Your humility. We have Your meekness and tolerance as examples. Together with the angels, shepherds, and Magi, we glorify and worship Your birth. We accept Your divine and human nature. Hear our prayer. Overlook our ingratitude, our inhospitality, and the animalistic behaviour of a few. You "wish all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." You, O Christ, "on Your shoulders carried our deceived nature and ascending to Heaven brought it before God the Father." You, O Lord, take every deceived nature, every man, and raise him to Heaven. Bring him to the One Who is God and Father.

The God-Man

There is a single, unique, and unprecedented event in the world's history: the incarnation of God. God and man were united in the person of Christ and became the divine and extraordinary person of the God-man. Never before has another such person existed, nor will again, in the history of the world and of humanity. In Christ the God-man, two natures have been united: the divine and the human, without confusion, distinct, separate, and independent, each unchanged by the other. Christ, the Son of God, is also the Son of Man—perfect God and perfect Man. He is truly the God-man in the full sense of the word. As God, He is born of God the Father “before all ages.” As human, He was born “of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” the place being Bethlehem in Judea.

The event of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God and His retaining both His divine and human natures have made a profound impression, resulting inevitably in much debate. The Third, Fourth, and Sixth Ecumenical Councils dealt with this matter. The Third Ecumenical Council decided with its infallibility to call Christ “Perfect God and perfect man, with a rational soul and body . . . one in divine essence with the Father and of the same essence as humanity.”

The hymnologists of our Church express beautifully all that pertains to the God-man Christ. The Theotokion of the stichera of the third tone (Saturday Vespers) speaks about the human birth of Christ, that “He never underwent change or mixture or division, but He guarded the attributes of both natures.”

Whereas, the Theotokion of the stichera of the eighth tone

(Saturday Vespers) speaks on the same subject more clearly, saying “He that was born of the Father out of time, His Only-begotten Son, He Himself was born of you [i.e., the Theotokos], assuming flesh, God by nature and becoming man in nature for us, not being divided into two persons, but His two natures remaining unconfused.”

A few words should be said here about the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God. It is very simple. With the disobedience of Adam and Eve, man fell and lost Grace. He was alienated from God. He was expelled from Paradise. In order for fallen human nature to be restored, the Son and Word of God had to assume the whole of human nature completely, to restore it to Heaven through His Resurrection and Ascension. “Carrying deceived human nature upon Your shoulders, O Christ, through Your Ascension You brought it before God and Father.” This was the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God. As St. Athanasios writes, “God became man in order for us to become godly.” No one should think that we humans can become gods and be given a divine nature. No. We can become godly in the moral sense. We return to our first state. The wall of animosity has been torn down between God and Man and communication between them is free.

This section of our Catechism is quite long, important, and difficult to comprehend. We must continue in the next section to see correctly how the Incarnation took place, and what its meaning is. We shall look at quotations from the Gospel and the Holy Fathers concerning the divine and human nature of Christ, in order to understand the relationships between them. It is not possible of course, to deal with this exhaustively, but at least enough can be said that the teaching of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not seem to be arbitrary, but rather based upon Holy Scripture and the truth that the Incarnated God has taught.

Incarnate Christ, we thank You that You accepted to leave Heaven and Your place next to the Father to descend to earth. To be so humiliated. To take human nature upon Yourself and

as human, to undergo the Passion and death upon the Cross. We know that You had no other reason to do this than to do it for us. For our salvation. You took upon Yourself all of our sins. With Your Holy Blood, You washed them away upon the Cross. We have not power enough with which to thank You properly. Accept our simple and humble gratitude. Hear our prayer. Make us worthy and enable us to take advantage of Your Incarnation to change our way of life so that we may be raised up with You and come to the Jerusalem Above in the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us always live near You.



The Divine and Human Nature of Christ

The Holy Scriptures speak of the divine nature and divinity of Christ in many places, but we will refer to only a few. Let us begin with Thomas, who had doubted His divine nature. However, in John, 20:28, Thomas proclaims without any reservations or doubt, “My Lord and my God!” Christ is Lord and God. St. John characteristically states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Son and Word of God is truly God. We will make only one more reference, to St. Paul, who states, “God was revealed in the flesh” (I Timothy, 3:16).

With absolute faith, the Church Fathers preached the divinity of Christ. St. Eirinaeos, emphasizing that his faith was received from the holy Apostles and their disciples, believes, “in one God, Father almighty, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation.” And he confirms that the Son of God is truly God. And he continues, “If man had not been joined to God (i.e., united in Christ), he would not have been able to partake of incorruption.”

We find the same teaching about the divinity of Christ—His divine nature—in Gregory of Nyssa, in Basil the Great, in John Chrysostom, in Cyril of Alexandria, in Athanasios the Great, and in many other Fathers of the Church. The Fathers explain that the Son is not the same Person as the Father, and that with His Incarnation, the Son did not suffer “change or alteration.” He remains perfect God.

Let us now look a bit at the human nature of Christ. We must first emphasize that He is the Son and Word of God made man. St. John clearly tells us, "The Word was made flesh" (John, I:14). St. Paul tells us, that the Incarnate Word is in all things like us human beings, with a soul, body, rationality uncorrupted passion, hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc. "similar in all things to us" but "without sin" (Hebrews, 4:15). Christ Himself calls Himself "the Son of Man," in this way declaring that He is perfect man. He also acknowledges that He is descended from David. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:10-15), St. Paul tells us, among other things, "since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death He might destroy him who had dominion over death, that is the Devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." Since human beings are comprised of flesh and blood, so likewise the Son and Word of God assumed the same elements. St. Paul tells us further that Christ assumed flesh and blood so that by His death as man, He could defeat the Devil, who has the power of death; so that He could destroy death, "by death trampling down death."

The Church Fathers Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, and Athanasios the Great in their teachings agree that Christ "became man in nature and in truth and assumed human nature with all of its properties." "Not another kind of flesh, but the same with which we are all afflicted."

This scriptural teaching about the human nature of Christ and His condescending to humanity is summarized in the Third Article of the Nicene Creed, which states, "Who for us and our salvation descended from Heaven and became Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man."

We must state here in very simple terms that although the Son and Word of God became Perfect Man, He became truly perfect, which means He became man without sin, just as Adam and Eve were originally created as sinless beings. Christ has no connection with sin, which entered man through the intervention of

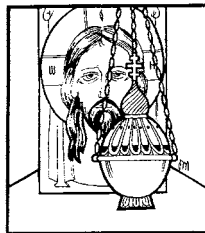
Satan.

Although the Son and Word of God became man and is God-man, His two natures remain distinct. One does not absorb the other. The two natures are distinct and separate, united in the same person, Christ. He is “dual in nature, but one person.” Two natures, one person.

His human nature united with His divine nature becomes itself divinized, without, of course, passing beyond its limits or ceasing to be human. In this way, united with Christ we become divine in the moral sense and are saved. Our human nature becomes divine, without, of course, it being altered, or participating in the divine nature.

Keeping the above in mind, and in particular that the divine nature remains unchanged, we understand why the Virgin Mary is called Mother of God. She truly gave birth to God. How could this be? Only through a miracle. “Whenever God wills, He overthrows the order of nature.”

O Jesus, You Who are God-man, Your mercies are unfathomable. Great is Your condescension to us. Unfathomable is Your Incarnation. We accept all of these as Your true children. Only our faith—and even this is Your gift to us—brings us to the beginning of the comprehension of this great Mystery. With faith and humility, we beseech You to receive us. Take us with You. Cleanse us of every stain and impurity. Restore us to our ancient glory, to be like Adam before his disobedience and fall. Make us godly. Make us Yours. Grant us eternal life in Your Kingdom.



The Three Offices of Christ

Original sin brought a general deterioration and collapse to mankind. This distortion had three main characteristics: a) It brought a certain darkness of mind, making us unable clearly to see truth and understand what is correct and proper, unable to distinguish good from evil. b) Conquered by sin, the will became enslaved to sin, unable to resist and overcome. c) With the Fall, mankind became guilty before God, and was condemned to eternal death.

Christ had to save mankind from this general deterioration and collapse. As Prophet, he had to cleanse the mind and teach it truth. As High Priest, he had to sanctify and justify it. As King, he had to redeem it. St. Paul presents these three offices of Christ briefly when he states that, He “was made to be our wisdom [the Prophetic office], our righteousness and sanctification [the office of High Priest], and our redemption [the Royal office]” (I Corinthians, 1:30).

Therefore, Christ has three offices: the Prophetic (that of Prophet), the Archieratical (that of High Priest), and the Royal (that of King).

However, no one should believe that these are three separate offices. They are indissolubly intermingled and united in the One and Same Person, the God-man Redeemer.

The Prophet Isaiah is referring primarily to the Prophetic office of Christ when he says, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives and to make

the blind see again” (Isaiah, 61:1). Christ Himself preached “as One having authority” so that His enemies admitted that “no one ever spoke as this man.” And He said of Himself that He is “the Way, the Truth, and the Light” and “the Light of the world”, and that whoever follows Him “will not walk in darkness but shall have the Light of Life” (John 8:12). His Disciples characterized Him as “a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke, 24:19).

Fallen man was unable to perfect himself, however, only by the teaching of truth and the enlightenment of the mind. He required a High Priest to sacrifice Himself upon the Cross in order to lift up and crucify our sins and sanctify us. This High Priest was and is Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, Who “died for our sins” (I Corinthians, 15:3). As High Priest, “He Himself bore our sins in His Body on the Tree, that we might die to sin and live unto righteousness” (I Peter, 2:24). “Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things that have come, that through the greater and more perfect Tent (not made with hands) (Hebrews, 8:1-2) . . . not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His Own Blood, He might enter once and for all into the Holy Place, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9: 12).

However, the redemption of man required a redeemer with authority, with a Royal office. As the Only-begotten Son of God, Christ is truly a King with authority, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” As God-man upon earth, He used His Royal Authority when He preached; when He performed miracles and overturned the natural order of things; when He triumphantly entered Jerusalem; and when He drove out the moneychangers.

The humility of the God-man found culmination upon the Cross with the words, “It is fulfilled.” And then His Royal Authority shone forth and as Triumphant Victor, Christ descended to Hades. He destroyed its gates. He shattered the kingdom of Hades and the realm of death. “He resurrected the dead who were there for ages.” He was resurrected as the All-Powerful God and the Lord of Life and Death, because “it was not possible for

the Author of our life to be held by corruption,” and He proclaimed that “all authority in Heaven and earth has been given to Me” (Matthew, 28:18). He ascended to Heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Father and as a true King He governs the entire Church, which is triumphant in Heaven and militant on earth. Mankind will have full evidence of His Royal Authority at the time of His second coming, when He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The successors of the Apostles, that is, the Bishops and the Priests, continue in the Church the pedagogical, sanctifying, and redeeming work of Christ.

Saviour of the world, God-man Christ, we acknowledge that You are the Great Prophet, the sole High Priest, and the true King. Teach us the truth. Enlighten our minds. Take out of our minds the cobwebs and rust of our sinful ideas. Bathe us with Your redeeming Blood and wash us clean. Sanctify us. Free us from the bonds of sin. Restore us to our original condition. Come quickly in Your Second Coming to judge us and justify us. Judge and condemn us not, even though that is what we deserve. Forgive us and grant us Your Eternal Kingdom.



The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God. He is equally God with the Father and the Son. He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Only once in the Holy Scriptures is the Holy Spirit explicitly and categorically called God, as follows: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . .? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts, 5:3-4). What further proof does a Christian need to believe that the Holy Spirit is truly God?

It is demonstrated in many verses of the Old and New Testament that the Holy Spirit has divine attributes. We shall give only two examples.

“The Spirit of God moved upon the waters” (Genesis, 1:2). This means that the Holy Spirit has divine attributes and authority to give form to and to perfect the creation.

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (II Corinthians, 13:13), St. Paul says, thus placing the Holy Spirit in the same order and position as the Father and the Son.

“. . . and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who, together with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets” (The Creed of Faith, Article 8). This Article of the Creed contains the entire teaching of our Church concerning the Holy Spirit. He is Lord. He is life-giving; that is to say, He has the attributes of the Father and the Son. The Lord--the Master--the Father; the life-giving Son; the life-giving Holy Spirit. He is truly God. He proceeds from the Father, just as the Son is born from the Father. The Father is the source of divinity. The Holy

Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person in the order of divinity, and is equal to the other two Divine Persons. He is co-worshipped and co-glorified with the Father and the Son. And He is the same Spirit referred to in the Old Testament and Who spoke through the mouths of the Prophets.

This section of Article 8 of the Creed is exactly the way the Second Ecumenical Council of 381 in Constantinople decreed and dogmatized it. The addition “and from the Son” was made much later and is a falsification of the original document and is unorthodox. That the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father is also proven from the passage, “But when the Comforter comes Whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, Who proceeds from the Father” (John, 15:26). The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, Who is the Godhead, and is sent by the Son, Who is the “creative and joining force of the wisdom and power of the All Mighty God.” Basil the Great well describes the matter when he says, “the Godly source is One (i.e., the Father), Who creates through the Son and completes it through the Holy Spirit.”

Our Church places things in correct perspective when it chants, “We worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity undivided, one in essence.” One triune God. Three persons, but one God, all of one essence.

“The Holy Spirit is the Giver of all; He is the spring of the prophecies; He perfects priests, teaches wisdom to the unlearned, elevates fishermen to theologians, and holds together the institution of the Church,” notes the hymnographer. He abides in the Church. He guides it in all truth. He works through the sacraments and sanctifies the faithful.

All Christians must know the Holy Spirit and believe in Him, Who is true God, equal with the Son and the Father, Who proceeds from the Father, is sent by the Son, and holds together the institution of the Church and perfects everything.

“Heavenly King and Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who are

present everywhere and Who fill all things, the treasury of all good and the giver of life, come into our lives and cleanse us from all stain and, O Good One, save our souls.”



Redemption

As we have stated in previous sections, man has sinned. He has disobeyed God. He has broken His commandment. He was driven out of paradise. He became a slave to sin. He lived far removed from God. He had to be set free from the chains of sin. He had to be redeemed. It is for precisely this reason that the second person of the Trinity, the Son, was made incarnate, was crucified, descended into Hades, was resurrected, ascended into Heaven, and sent us the Comforter. He took upon Himself and bore all the sins of humanity, atoned for man, and reconciled him with God.

For this purpose, however, the initiative and effort of Christ is not enough. Man must cooperate as well. God, of course, "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy, 2:4): "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked might turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel, 33:11). At the same time, Christ says that "if any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mark, 8:34). This means that although with the incarnation of Christ, His crucifixion, His descent into Hades, His resurrection, His ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of man became strong and accessible, in order for it to become the property of man it must be pursued by man himself. God respects the freedom of man and does not compel, pressure or force anyone, but rather calls. He asks, if you will. He waits. He waits for man to open his heart and receive divine grace, redemption, sanctification, and glory.

Man alone cannot accomplish anything regarding his salvation. With the cooperation of the devil he accomplishes his condemnation. With the cooperation of God he accomplishes his salvation. Christ himself said that “apart from me you can do nothing” (John, 15:5). Then what can man do? What can he offer? St. John Chrysostom says that man can only offer a good disposition. It is only this that man can offer: the disposition to open our souls and to accept the grace of God.

In future sections, we will look at the meaning of divine grace, what it is and how we acquire it.

Most gracious God, for many years until the fulfilment of the age You heard the groanings of condemned humanity. Then You sent Your Son to save the world. Most of humanity has yet to know the Good News. They have not heard the Good News. And many of us that have heard and have been taught the Gospel do not have the strength to accept redemption, with Your Grace. We fervently ask You: Make everyone really know that he needs the salvation that flows out from the redemptive work of Your Christ. That is our wish. Help us to open our hearts. Make Your Grace fall upon us as the dew of salvation to redeem us, to sanctify us, to justify us, to glorify us, to unite us with Him.



Divine Grace

Divine Grace is the good will of God that is made manifest and given to man. Gift, Love, Assistance--all of these are offered freely to man, without his deserving them. How can man be worthy of God's grace, since he disobeyed God, and left Him and departed from Him? He is not worthy of it. Divine Grace is so necessary to him, but he cannot ask for it. He cannot demand it as though it were his wages. He needs Grace in order to be redeemed, and it is given to him richly and as a gift. St. Paul tells us that, "It is by grace that you are saved," and that, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace"(Romans, 11:6). And this Divine Grace, a gift, is offered to man through Christ and results from His incarnation, His sacrifice on the Cross, and His Resurrection. St. Paul explains it wonderfully when he says that, "Much more have the Grace of God and the free gift in the Grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many" (Romans, 5:15).

We said earlier that Divine Grace is indispensable for the salvation of the sinner. It is necessary. Without it, man cannot attain salvation. Christ Himself says that, "No one can come unto Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him" (John, 6:44). "God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure"(Philippians, 2:13). Again, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John, 3:5). These scriptural verses reveal to us that we need Divine Grace "which is always the cure of the weak and fulfils what is lacking." Without it we cannot work out our repentance and our return

back to our God and Father.

Man has an absolute need of Divine Grace. And God grants it freely and richly, but He does not impose it. He does not force man to accept His Grace. He created man as a free being, and He respects his freedom. "He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy, 2:4), but God waits for man by his own free will to accept the divine Grace which will save him. The apostle of love, St. John, puts it so beautifully in Revelation, 3:20 when he says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me." He knocks at the door of man in order to save him. He does not open it Himself. He respects the freedom of man and He waits.

Divine Grace, which is freely offered by God without being imposed, and for which man has absolute need, but which he must use his own freedom to accept--this Divine Grace has many fruits that are offered to man through the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians, 5:22-23).

In particular, the fruits of Divine Grace are the awakening of man from the lethargy of sin and the call to repentance. "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light"(Ephesians, 5:14): these are the words of Divine Grace calling out through the voice of St. Paul.

After the "awakening" and the "call" comes regeneration through water and the Spirit, that is to say, through baptism; for "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John, 3: 5).

Following "regeneration" comes sanctification; in other words, the full and perfect cleansing of man from all sin, through which man attains to being in God's "likeness."

Justification follows this. Man, who had been sinful, guilty, and condemned, becomes justified through his repentance, regeneration, and sanctification. He finds peace and rest. He no

longer has a guilty conscience gnawing at him. St. Paul assures us of this when he says, “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”(Romans, 5:1).

All of these elements of our salvation lead to the glory that even here on earth is enjoyed by those called to repentance, and who have been regenerated, sanctified and justified, although in the eternal life it will be even better enjoyed, when they are fully united with God and “look upon the unspeakable beauty of His face,” for indeed with the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Christ “we have entered into communion with Divine Nature.”

For man to attain this justification and glory, only one thing is needed: Faith. However, let no one be deceived. This faith cannot be theoretical. It has to be real. It has to be “faith working through love” (Galatians, 5:6). It has to be faith that is proven to be real and alive by the works of love. Consequently, both faith and works are needed to show a faith which is real and alive.

Thrice holy, triune God, You created us in Your “image.” You ordained us to be in Your “likeness.” With the Incarnation of the Son and Logos You again made strong our journey towards “the likeness.” You pour out Your Grace so richly and freely. It is in our hands to accept this Grace, to be saved and justified. Do not allow us to be deceived. We all want to be saved. You know this. “What blind man does not want his sight?” Sometimes, though, we do not know what the light is, what true Grace is. We do not know how we can walk more steadily towards You. And this is why we ask You today: Help us and everyone understand how to accept Your Grace.



Church

The Church is the mystical body of Christ. In other words, Christ is the head and the members of the body are those who have been baptized in accordance with the Orthodox faith in the name of the Holy Trinity; or those who, having been already baptized in another Christian confession and who live the Orthodox faith, have been accepted into the Orthodox faith through the sacrament of Chrismation. A hierarchy exists in the Church: Christ; the Bishop, who is the representative of Christ on earth; the Priest; the Deacon, and the people. All together they comprise the Church, the mystical body of Christ. “Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its saviour” (Ephesians, 5:23), says St. Paul. He also says that “you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it, (I Corinthians, 12:27) and that “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans, 12:5).

However, let no one believe that the Church is comprised solely of Christ and those who live on earth. No. The Church includes those who now live on earth and who have been baptized in an orthodox way, and is called the militant church; but the Church also includes all of those who lived in an orthodox way and who are now in Heaven, known as the triumphant church.

This Church is the treasury of truth and divine grace. It is the ark of the salvation of man. It is the kingdom of God on earth. Christ Himself told us this: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Matthew, 4:17), meaning the Church. Did you ever think that by our Baptism in the Orthodox faith we enter the kingdom of God and become members of the mystical body of Christ? The

Church Fathers say that outside the Church there is no salvation, and rightly so, since whoever is not a member of the mystical body of Christ cannot have a spiritual life. Christ said this: "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. . . ." (John, 15:5). When the branch of the vine is cut off at the trunk it withers. So it is when someone leaves the Church, cut off from the mystical body of Christ--he dries up spiritually.

Christ Himself established the Church. When? With His Incarnation and the calling of His disciples. To be sure, Pentecost is considered to be the founding day of the Church, because on that day the Holy Spirit descended as tongues of fire and taught the disciples all of the Truth, as Christ had promised. "The Comforter, Whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, Who proceeds from the Father. . ." (John, 15:26). "He will guide you into all the truth" (John, 16:13). The Church has Christ as its foundation. St. Paul says that it is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians, 2:20). It is illumined and guided by the Holy Spirit, Who "grants all things . . . causes prophecies to abound, perfects the priests, sustains the whole institution of the Church." This Church "the powers of death shall not prevail against" (Matthew, 16:18); It will be always invincible.

As we confess in the Creed, the Church has its characteristic marks. It is "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic."

The Church is One because one is her head--Christ. There are not many heads. Just one. Consequently, the true Church is only one. Everyone must become a member of this Church to be saved. Everyone, without exception. Whites, blacks, yellow-skinned and red-skinned, all are equal children of God and all have to be members of the One Church--the mystical body of Christ. Everyone must have the true faith. Whoever does not follow the true faith is a heretic and is cut off from the Church.

The Church is Holy because Christ, the head, is holy and without sin. Christ Himself sanctifies her. Here is what St. Paul says: "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He

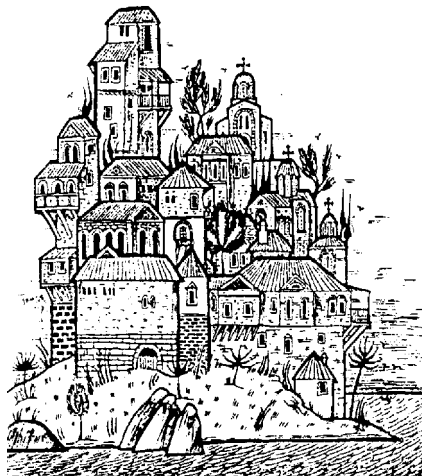
might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians, 5:25-27). Although those who become members of the Church are sinners, within the Church, through divine grace, they are purified and sanctified--that is the purpose of the Church.

The Church is Catholic. This means two things: First, that it accepts all people (as many, of course, as want to become members) from all over the world without discrimination. The commandment of God to His Disciples was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you. . . .” (Matthew 28:19-20). Second, “catholic” means that the Church has the “Catholic” faith, that is, the fullness of faith in Christ and in the Triune God, the true faith, the Orthodox faith.

The Church is Apostolic because the first representatives of Christ on earth were the Apostles. Their successors, that is, the Bishops, must have apostolic succession, but also apostolic faith and teachings, and they must govern the Church as did the Apostles. In the true Orthodox Church there exists canonical and uninterrupted apostolic succession. It is only by means of apostolic succession, which is given through the sacrament of ordination, that the Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, the true body of Christ, the treasury of divine grace and truth, the ark of man’s salvation.

Christ, You Who are the founder of the Church, the head of the body, and the vine of truth, we thank You because You accept us as members of Your mystical body. We glorify You because with Your great love You are willing to justify and glorify us as well. We ask that You make us, who were baptized as Orthodox Christians and who have become members of Your mystical body, never to go away from You; that our sin never become a cause of our separation from You. We also ask

that You enlighten the heretics to return to Your Orthodox Church, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Lord, help everyone--all the people of the world--to hear Your Gospel and to become members of Your Church, Your mystical body. Lord, we thank You.



Sacraments

Our Church has seven sacraments, and they are the following:

1. Baptism
2. Chrismation
3. Holy Eucharist
4. Repentance and Confession
5. Priesthood
6. Marriage
7. Holy Unction

We have to say here that the great sacrament of our Church is the salvation of man through Christ. These things that we have called sacraments are holy ceremonies through which divine grace is transferred to man and which cleanses, sanctifies, and guides him to his salvation. Among the seven sacraments of the Church the first four are obligatory for everyone. They are necessary for the salvation of man. The next three are optional; in other words, they are received if the person wishes them for himself. An explanation is needed here. It is not necessary for someone to become a priest in order to be saved, but if someone is a priest, all the members of the Church are obliged to accept him as a priest. It is not necessary for someone to marry in order to be saved, but if Christians want to live with a partner they have to accept the sacrament of marriage or else they sin. And it is not necessary for the salvation of man to receive Holy Unction, but when all Christians are ready to die, they must accept it and respect it as a sacrament.

The sacraments are sent from God. Their beginning is found in the Holy Scriptures and in Tradition. When we write about each individual sacrament we will also refer to the Scriptural passages which established them.

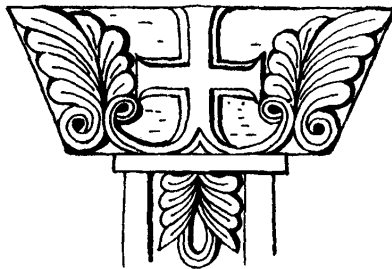
When we speak about sacraments we have to know that the doctrines of the Church are also called sacraments. These are the supernatural and godly truths that remain incomprehensible and mysterious to the limited mind of man, and it is only with faith that man makes them a property of his soul.

We said that with the seven sacraments divine grace is imparted to man, cleansing, renewing, sanctifying him, and guiding his salvation. This does not mean that there are no other ways in which divine grace is imparted to man. There are prayer, sermons, study of Holy Scripture, blessing of water, venerating holy things and many other ways. Divine grace is imparted through all these ways, but these are not enough for the salvation of man. The seven sacraments, and especially the first four are absolutely necessary for his salvation.

We should also know that among the four compulsory sacraments, the first two, that is baptism and chrism, are never repeated. In other words, they are performed one time only for each person. Moreover, ordination is also never repeated. It is done only one time for the individual. Holy Communion, Repentance and Confession, and Holy Unction are repeated, and man should often partake of the Holy Eucharist, often repent and confess, and often approach Unction. Holy Matrimony is permitted to someone up to three times. This does not mean that a man can have simultaneously three wives. No. If he loses his first wife he may marry another, and if he loses the second he may marry a third. The same applies to the woman.

Lord Jesus Christ, You became man, were crucified, died as man on the cross, descended triumphantly into Hades, were resurrected and ascended, bringing human nature with You and You have made possible the mystery of our salvation. You also established the seven sacraments of our Church through

which we especially receive the divine grace for our purification, cleansing, sanctification, and salvation. We thank You for all these. We give You as much praise and glory as our weak human powers permit. We fervently beg You, to open the eyes of our mind, heart, and soul to understand the great mystery of our salvation that comes from You and the seven sacraments. And not only to understand them, but to receive from them Your divine grace like the sap that nourishes the vine of our spiritual life, and through the sacraments to live united with You. Make us understand that this is the alpha and omega of our lives.



Baptism

The first of the seven sacraments of our Church is Baptism. It is sent from God. Christ Himself commanded it when he said to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew, 28:19); elsewhere He said “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark, 16:15-16).

In these words of Christ we see firstly that He established baptism, and secondly that baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

It should be noted here that, even though He was sinless, Christ was baptized. He was baptized so that He could teach us in a practical way that we benefit from being baptized.

The command and example of Christ were applied by the Apostles, and are and will continue to be applied till the end of the world by the Church.

Actually, baptism should take place after catechism. The person who will be baptized is first of all catechized. He is taught the Orthodox faith. He accepts the faith and is then baptized. Infant baptism has prevailed, however, even from the first centuries of Christianity. Why? The reason is that no one should die unbaptized, since there is no salvation for him who is not baptized. You may ask what happens to a little baby that dies before it is baptized? We cannot answer this question. What we do know is

that the baptized person is saved. What will happen to the person who apart from his own will, dies unbaptized is a matter for God and He will judge. We cannot know the will of God, nor can we become judges of God. What happens, though, with the catechesis of an infant? All the responsibility of the catechesis falls on the godparent and the parents of the baptized. They must catechize the baptized infant.

Baptism is performed with three immersions in water, just as Christ ordained, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Orthodox Church does not accept baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water, unless there is absolute need for it. It does not accept these other forms of baptism because the very word baptism means immersion, plunging in water. Christ said "baptized" not "sprinkled."

He who is baptized is cleansed from original sin and from all other sins that he has committed up to the time of his baptism. His immersion in water symbolizes death. The sinful man dies. The baptized person is reborn and becomes a member of the Church, the mystical body of Christ. He puts on Christ. "Those who are baptized in Christ, put on Christ." After baptism, or rather with baptism, he enters the Kingdom of God. He is saved. This creates a problem, however. Because he has entered the Kingdom of God, because he is saved, does this mean he will remain there? No. That will depend on the individual and the effort he puts into not soiling the new garment again with sin, and not dirtying the beauty of the soul. We say that it depends on the individual because "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy, 2:4). Although with baptism he is cleansed from all sin and from original sin, the Christian does not cease to be free, and not unlike his forefathers who disobeyed God, so too after his baptism he may not follow God or do His will, but rather do his own will. St. Paul tells us "Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by

the glory of the father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans, 6:3-6). This is how it is. We should not be serving sin and working for the sake of sin after baptism. Unfortunately, though, many of us return to our old ways. Though we entered the Kingdom of God through baptism, it is possible to be driven out from the Kingdom of God by the sins that we commit, just as Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise.

Baptism is also called illumination because with it man comes out of the darkness of sin and into the light of righteousness—the light of Christ. He is illumined. He becomes wholly light and life, and radiates divine light and spirituality. In the past, the catechumens were called the “illumined.” Baptism is also called the fountain of renewal because man is reborn through baptism.

Christ, You are the true light Who illumines and sanctifies every man who enters the world, You who by deed and word taught and established the sacrament of baptism in order for man to be cleansed from original sin, from all sin, Who gave baptism for the death of the old man, and for the reborn man to become a member of Your Church—Your mystical body—and to work no longer in sin and for sin, make, O Lord, everyone accept this great gift of baptism. Make the baptized and reborn return no more to the old deception, nor become slaves of sin. Make them remain in the light, in freedom, and in Your grace, love, and kingdom. Make them remain holy, honourable and healthy members of Your mystical body as long as they are on earth, and after death grant them eternal life and Your kingdom. Accept O Lord our thanksgiving and doxology, for to You belongs all glory, thanksgiving, praise, and worship.



Chrismation

Chrismation is also known as Holy Chrism. As we said in the lesson on Baptism, the baptized person is cleansed from original sin and from all other sins that he has committed up until that time. He is reborn and becomes a member of the Church—the mystical body of Christ. He begins the new life. This new life, however, has its temptations. Satan does not stop working. The way Satan deceived Adam and Eve, so too does he try to deceive us everyday. Moreover, man does not cease to be free. He still has choice—the choice to follow God or to be deceived and follow the devil—the choice to do the will of God or to do his own will. The road is uphill and difficult. Man is a soldier who belongs, as we have already said, to the militant Church and so he struggles. For this battle he needs the armour of the Holy Spirit, and this is what chrismation provides. It gives the baptized person the armour, the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that he may continue his battle as a soldier.

Chrismation is a God-sent sacrament. It is based on the practice of the apostles whereby they would place their hands on those who had believed and had been baptized so that by the laying on of the Apostles hands these would receive the Holy Spirit. The two Scriptural passages that support this practice are as follows: “Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit,” and “when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them” (Acts 8:17;19:6). There is no doubt then that the sacrament of chrismation is God-sent and is an apostolic practice.

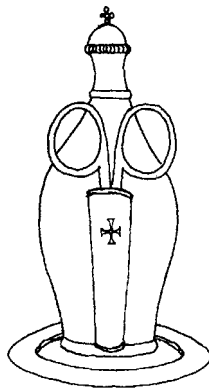
Chrismation is done immediately after baptism. In the past, in its attempt to closely follow the practice of the apostles, the Church practised chrismation performed by the Bishop. Because this was not always possible, the Church established the custom of preparing the Holy Chrism to be used by the priests. The Holy Chrism is prepared at the Ecumenical Patriarchate from forty different aromatic substances that symbolize the many gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is prepared with the participation of many hierarchs (many of whom are from the autocephalous Orthodox Churches) and is then distributed to all the Churches.

With this Holy Chrism the priest, immediately after baptism and having read the specified prayer, anoints the baptized person on all the members of his body and repeats the following phrase: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen." And so the baptized person is anointed with the Holy Spirit in his renewed life and receives the gifts—the armour—of the Holy Spirit as he begins his spiritual battle. The phrase "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" that is repeated by the priest is based on the words of St. Paul when he says that "it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us His spirit in our hearts as a guarantee"(2 Corinthians 1:21-22). In other words, it is God who anoints us and seals us to remain faithful to Christ by putting in our hearts the Holy Spirit.

Even though chrismation is a God-sent sacrament, an apostolic practice, and is found in Holy Scripture, the Protestant churches have nonetheless done away with it, viewing it as non-sacramental and unnecessary for the salvation of man. The Roman Catholic Church accepts the sacrament of chrismation but performs it at a later age, between seven and twelve.

Heavenly, triune God, You—Who never wished to see the destruction of Your creation, Who gave to strayed Adam and humanity a second chance to be saved with the incarnation of the Son, Who with baptism cleanse us from original sin, Who sanctify us as honourable members of the mystical body of Christ, Who with the sacrament of chrismation—grant us

the gifts–the armour–of the Holy Spirit so that we may struggle in our earthly battle. Lord strengthen our will so that we may always follow You and do Your will. Do not allow us to be induced by Satan to do our own will. Lead us safely to our theosis and salvation. We fervently thank You.



Holy Eucharist

It can doubtlessly be said that the central sacrament of the Church is Holy Eucharist. It is the sacrament of sacraments. It was established by Christ Himself: “When it was evening,” Jesus “took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body, broken on behalf of all for the forgiveness of sins,’ and “He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Christ added, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Matthew, 26:20-9; Mark, 14:17-25; Luke, 22:14-38; John, 6:27-69; 1 Corinthians, 11:23-26).

From these words of Christ we see that the Holy Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Christ. It is not a symbol. It is truly the body and truly the blood of Christ. Christ did not say that “this symbolizes My body” and “this symbolizes My blood.” He said, “this is My body” and “this is My blood.” Of course, even after the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, all we see with our human eyes is bread and wine. Even the taste on our tongues is that of bread and wine. In reality and in essence, though, that which we see and that which we taste is truly the body and blood of Christ. How does this happen? How does this change occur? No one can say. It is done in a mysterious way with the intervention of the Holy Spirit. As the celebrant says: “And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ, and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ.”

Therefore, from the above words of Christ we see that this sac-

rament was established by Christ “for the forgiveness of sins.” The main purpose of the sacrament then is the forgiveness of man’s sins. Along with the forgiveness, though, come the sanctification and glory, eternal life. This is why when the celebrant gives Holy Communion, he says to each person: “the Body and Blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins and life eternal.”

Even from the words of Christ it appears that this sacrament of Holy Eucharist is preeminently the sealing of the New Covenant between God and man. It is the testament of reconciliation and friendship.

Beyond the above statements, the very words of Christ reveal that this sacrament has to be repeated “in remembrance” of Christ, of His incarnation, sacrifice on the cross, burial, resurrection, and of His ascension into Heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, and His second glorious coming.

In other places in Holy Scripture, Christ has assured us that His Body is “truly food” and His Blood is “truly drink.” Moreover, this is shown by the fearsome saying that “whoever does not eat My body and does not drink My blood, has no life in him.” This proves that the Holy Eucharist is the spiritual nourishment of man. Just as man cannot live without natural nourishment, so neither can he live without spiritual nourishment—the body and blood of Christ—without Holy Eucharist. Christ makes this very clear. He says that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (John, 6:53-54).

Holy Eucharist unites man with God. It deifies him. Since man unites with God, he also unites with other people. St. Paul says that “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the One Bread” (1 Corinthians, 10:17). This unifying of the people among themselves into one body is like the unity of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We could say that the fruits of Holy Eucharist are the following: forgiveness of sins, cleansing, sanctification, justification,

unity with God and with each other, spirituality, eternal life, glory, theosis.

In order for man to have all the fruits and benefits of the Holy Eucharist, he needs first to partake of it often. How often? Every time he attends the Divine Liturgy; and secondly, he needs to “approach with the fear of God, faith, and with love.” In other words, to approach worthily, with reverence and faith in God, and with total love towards God and man.

Holy Eucharist is celebrated in the Church, but it can be celebrated in an open space or anywhere for that matter in times of necessity. It can be celebrated once per day. It is performed during the Divine Liturgy. Bread and wine are offered. This bread and wine are sanctified and, though they are physical substances, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit they are transformed into spiritual things—into the body and blood of Christ. God created, out of nothing, the visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) world. From physical things—bread and wine—He makes the body and blood of Christ.

O God, how much amazement and delight we receive from Your great deeds. Your deeds are unfathomable, and Your wonders are incomprehensible. The way of our salvation is impossible for our limited minds to understand. I gaze with wonder and fear at the mystery of mysteries, the Holy Eucharist. We approach with faith and with love, yet we are unworthy. Make us worthy of this great gift. Do not allow us to partake “in judgment or condemnation” but for cleansing and sanctification, for forgiveness of sins, for glory and holy communion, and for life eternal. We thank You. O Lord, “Abide in us.”



Repentance and Confession

Christ established the sacrament of repentance and confession after His resurrection. Directing Himself to His disciples, He said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (- John 20:22-24).

The words of Christ are very clear. They leave no room for doubt. His disciples, and afterwards their successors, alone—no one else— have the right to forgive or not to forgive the sins of man. In essence they are instruments of Christ. It is Christ Who forgives the sins of man. The contemporaries of Christ—Pharisees, Sadducees, and others—doubted that Christ could forgive sins, or that He had this authority. We see this in the healing of the paralytic. Christ said to the paralytic: “Your sins are forgiven.” They doubted His authority. And replying to them, “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” He said to the paralytic: “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet, and go home”(Mark 2:10-11). The healing of the paralytic was used as proof to those who opposed Christ that He indeed had authority to forgive sins. Of course, this authority arises from His divinity and His sacrifice on the Cross. He gave this authority to the Apostles and to their successors, the Bishops and Priests. He did not give this authority to anyone else, not even to the angels. Let no one say, then, that he can confess to God Himself, or to a saint, or to an icon. No. It can be done only to a Bishop or to a Priest, and to no one else.

Do we need the sacrament of repentance and confession? It

would not be necessary if man did not sin. Man, however, sins even after baptism, and so this sacrament is absolutely necessary for our cleansing from sin, our purification, and for the washing of our spiritual selves. It is for this reason that it is called a second baptism.

In order to understand how the sacrament should be performed we need not look further than the meaning of the words repentance and confession. Repentance means a changing of the mind, of thoughts, attitudes, and feelings. It is a recognition of the responsibility and the guilt for committed sins, but also of man's sinful nature. This recognition must be followed by a willingness to change our ways, yet even this is not enough. This attitude needs to be accompanied by a continual will and effort not to remain in a state of sin, but to continue in the sphere of grace, to live in a state of righteousness, and to climb continually to the spiritual ladder that never ends. This is why repentance is not a momentary matter. It is a way of life. It is a progressive state. This element is totally necessary for the forgiveness of sins, cleansing, purification, justification, sanctification, and glory.

Confession means that what a man has in his heart, he reveals to the representative of Christ, the Bishop or the Priest—whatever wrong he has done, whatever evil thing he has thought—all this is a necessary element for the forgiveness of sins. How can the Priest forgive if he does not know? And how can it be true repentance without confession?

Many people say, "I am embarrassed to speak about it." Naturally, sins are shameful. But a person should be ashamed when he commits a sin, not when he is confessing. Unfortunately, when we commit our sins not only are we not ashamed but we enjoy it at the time. Later we realize that this is spiritual poison coated with honey. Sin is the spiritual poison that withers the soul and brings about spiritual death.

Repentance and confession are not a trial or a court. It is a shelter for sinners, a hospital. The one who confesses is not judged or condemned. He is surrounded with love, comfort, sin-

cere interest; he is taken care of, healed, assisted, treated by the physician, instructed, and forgiven.

The confessor is not a judge. He is a doctor, a loving father. He is not a warden, but an angel of freedom and forgiveness.

When there is true repentance and confession, remission is granted. The penance that the confessor gives is not a ransom for sins, but rather a pedagogical means for the learning of the one who confesses. It is the crutch of the paralytic, until his feet strengthen and he is able to continue freely. No sin is unforgivable except for the sin of unrepentance, which is, in essence, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In other words, the one who will remain unforgiven is the one who does not believe that God can forgive and save.

Christ, You Who were crucified for us and for all people, Who took on our sins and were tortured, through Whose wounds we are healed, You Who are the physician of our souls and bodies, Who are so lenient and understanding that You established the sacrament of repentance and confession for us to take refuge there, and to be healed at that clinic and in that bath to be washed and cleansed every time we become spiritually unclean, how can we thank You deservedly? The most appropriate way is to take advantage of this opportunity, to repent for every sin and to confess, so that we may be forgiven. We understand this Lord, but we do not do it. Help us to live in a constant state of repentance, purification, and ascent.



Holy Priesthood

This sacrament is also sent from God. It was established by Christ with the calling of His disciples, giving them the authority to loose and bind the sins of the people, and sending the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost. The Apostles were the only ones to receive the priesthood. The Holy Spirit, which descended “as tongues of fire,” did so only upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.

The Apostles have since then given the authority of the priesthood to their successors, as can be shown in many passages in Holy Scripture. Let me refer to some here: The Apostles “prayed and laid their hands upon them (Acts 6:6;13:3). St. Paul writes to Bishop Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you”(1 Timothy 4:14). To the clergy at Ephesus, St. Paul writes, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

All these prove that the priesthood is God-sent and an apostolic practice.

The priesthood has three ranks, namely: the diaconate, the presbyterate or priesthood, and the episcopate or hierarchs. These are the three ranks of the priesthood; all other names are mere titles and do not affect the rank.

Man has every right to desire the priesthood, but he cannot take it by himself. St. Paul tells us this very clearly when he says that “one does not take the honour (the priesthood) himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4). How is one

called by God? First he receives an inner call. He loves the priesthood, and wants to become a cleric. Secondly, he has the call from God which reveals itself through the call to priesthood that comes from the priest of the community or from the bishop. The priesthood cannot be taken. It is given. It is given freely. Priesthood by bribery is not priesthood, but simony, which is a great sin. Those who pay for and sell the priesthood are condemned and unworthy of the priesthood.

The sacrament of ordination is celebrated for all three ranks during the Divine Liturgy. It can be celebrated only by a bishop. As a matter of fact, for the ordination of a bishop three celebrating bishops are required. It is celebrated by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

The priesthood is indelible. A clergyman is always a clergyman. The Church has the right to suspend the priesthood and limit it. An idle or defrocked clergyman, although he does not cease to be a clergyman, cannot be a steward of the sacraments of God. He cannot perform any sacrament. He cannot impart divine grace as long as he is being punished.

Regarding the issue of the indelibility of the priesthood, this teaching is a theologoumenon (i.e., theological opinion). When a priest is defrocked, he returns to the rank of monk or laity according to the wording of the letter of defrocking. Is this reality, however? Is the priesthood totally removed? It does not appear to be so. This can be seen from the fact that only by *oikonomia* is the defrocked priest allowed to marry, and in situations where the defrocking is lifted, the clergyman is not reordained but rather by decision of the Holy Synod he is returned to the rank of the priesthood from which he was defrocked. In my opinion, this is the indelibility of the priesthood. This is the practice of the Church and the practice of the Church is always the criterion.

The Priesthood is celebrated and is active here on earth. It has, however, a divine origin and works upon divine things. In essence, there is only one archpriest, Christ. The priesthood of Christ is, as it were, made present by all clergy, and especially by

the bishop. The deacon and priest derive their priesthood from the bishop, just as the bishop derives his from Christ.

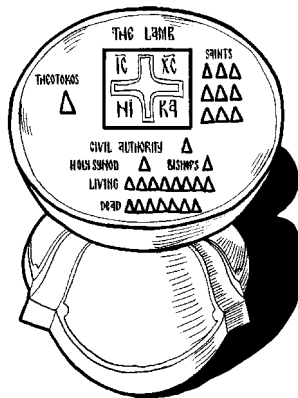
Priesthood does not exist when there is no canonical apostolic succession. Every priesthood that does not draw its source from the Apostles, and as a result from Christ, is not a true and genuine priesthood, but rather counterfeit. It is a false priesthood. It does not have grace and cannot give grace. It cannot sanctify and save. It is a pity and crime. False priests blaspheme the Holy Spirit and condemn their own selves and bring the naive to damnation.

Through ordination the bishop receives the offices of Christ: prophetic, royal, and priestly. With the prophetic office he teaches and correctly so the word of truth. With the royal office he administers and governs the Church. With the priestly office he celebrates the mysteries, sanctifies, and guides the faithful towards salvation.

Here we must repeat, as we said before, that the bishop has the fullness of the priesthood. This is why he is the only one who can celebrate all seven sacraments. The deacon and the priest derive their priesthood from the bishop and that is why they must be in canonical and continuous dependence on the bishop; otherwise their priestly works are not valid. The priest celebrates all the sacraments except ordination, while the deacon cannot celebrate any of them on his own. The deacon is the helper of the priest and bishop in the celebration of the sacraments and in the execution of the responsibilities and practices that originate from the Priesthood.

Christ, great Archpriest, sacrifice and sacrificer, only Messiah, true and only benefactor of man, we acknowledge that without the sacrament of the Priesthood, which celebrates and completes all the other sacraments, our salvation would not be possible. We thank You for this great gift of Yours. We thank You in the knowledge of our sins, with humility, and with true repentance. We Your clergy especially thank You, knowing our unworthiness. We ask You to open our souls and

hearts to accept Your grace, to respect the priesthood, to respect the clergy, and to assist them in their salvific work. Do not withhold our purification. Lead us to our salvation. Your will be done. Glory be to Your Name, now and forever.



Matrimony

The sacrament of matrimony is also established by God. As a matter of fact, its establishment was announced in the Old Testament. God created Adam and from the side of Adam He created Eve. When Adam saw the woman, He said: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”(Genesis 2:23-24). God blessed the first-created and said: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”(-Genesis 1:28).

This divine establishment of the sacrament was reaffirmed by Christ by His presence at the wedding at Cana, and through what He said to the Pharisees who tested Him. Christ said to them: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Matthew 19:4-6). With these words of Christ two things are reaffirmed. First, the physical unity of male and female gender supports the sacrament of matrimony. Secondly, no one should separate those whom God has joined.

This sacrament is an icon and likeness of the mystical unity of the bridegroom, Christ, with the bride, the Church, and this is how St. Paul presents it to us when he says: “This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church”(Ephesians 5:32).

Therefore, the Old and the New Testaments directly tell us of the sacrament of matrimony. Regarding Holy Tradition, it suffices to refer to the words of St. Basil the Great: “The nature of the bondage is a bond based on a blessing” and St. Photios says that “what makes the betrothal a leading into marriage acceptable by God is not the coming together, but the ceremony based on prayers.”

Our Church recognizes obstacles to marriage. In other words, it does not allow marriage between certain people. Specifically, it does not allow marriage between people related by blood and those related in spirit. Prohibited marriages are:

1. Parents with their own children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren.
2. Brothers-in-law with sisters-in-law.
3. Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews.
4. First cousins with each other.
5. Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.
6. Godparents with godchildren or godparents with the parents of godchildren.

According to the teaching of Christ, the sacrament of matrimony is indissoluble. For only one reason is marriage dissolved and divorce granted. Let us listen to Christ: “But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress” (Matthew 5:32).

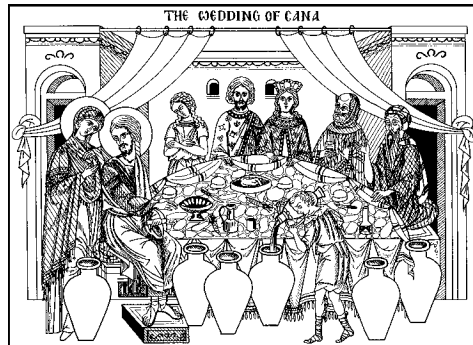
For the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony, two elements are required. First, it is required that there be free consent on the part of the groom and the bride. Secondly, a religious ceremony is required, performed by a bishop or priest with canonical, apostolic succession.

A civil marriage or one by common law is not recognized by the Church.

Christians should keep all the laws of our Church regarding the sacrament of marriage so that they do not sin, and so that they have the blessing of God for the betrothed to live honour-

ably and happily, and to raise children in “the knowledge and teachings of the Lord.”

Creator of all, Triune God, You Who commanded that people be joined through the sacrament of matrimony, and in this way mutually complement each other and multiply. You, Lord, protect the family, for it is the nucleus of society. On it are supported so many things. Do not allow the dissolution of any marriage. Bless, Lord, all couples. Make them be mystically united in the bond of sincere love and in the sacrament, just as Christ, the Bridegroom, is with His Bride, the Church. We thank You, Lord.



Holy Unction

“Is any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-5). These are the words of St. James and he leaves no doubt that the sacrament of Unction is established by God. Historically, it is proven that the sacrament of Unction was celebrated in conjunction with Repentance and Confession.

From these words of St. James the purpose of the sacrament is vividly clear. It is bodily healing and forgiveness of sins. And as the priest anoints with Holy Unction, he says that this sacrament is for the “healing of the soul and the body.”

The sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated every time a Christian needs it. As we noted in a previous lesson, the sacrament is not an obligatory, but a voluntary sacrament. It is good, though, for all Christians to draw near to this sacrament. This is why our Church has laid down that the sacrament be celebrated in Church every Holy Wednesday.

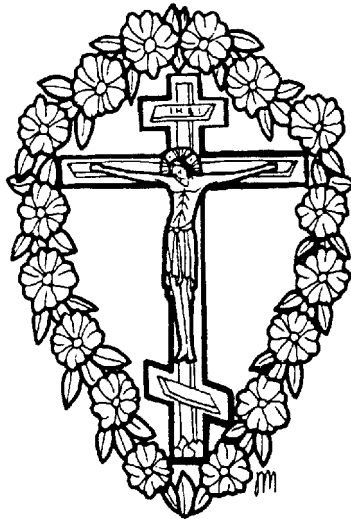
Just as with all sacraments, so too here, if we expect to have the proper results we must accept the sacrament with faith. Of course, an ill person is not always healed, because God may have another plan for him.

Holy Unction does not replace Repentance and Confession. In essence, the forgiveness of sins comes through faith in God, sincere repentance, and confession of sins.

The sacrament is celebrated with olive oil, reading of Holy Scripture, blessings, prayers, and anointing in the form of the

CROSS.

Holy and Heavenly Father, Who are the perfect physician doctor of our souls and bodies, Who sent Your only begotten Son—our Lord Jesus Christ—to heal every illness and redeem us from death, hear our prayers. Touch us with Your fatherly hand and with Your divine grace. Heal us from every bodily and spiritual illness. Give us life. Give our bodies life, freeing them from every illness. Give our souls life, cleansing them from every sin. Guide our steps to the sacrament of Holy Unction. Make us receive it with true faith, repentance, and be filled with life, physically and spiritually. O, Lord, how greatly we thank You for the sacraments of our Church, through which our salvation is accomplished.



Concerning Death

“And just as it is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews, 9:27). These words of St. Paul and the history of all humanity teach us beyond any doubt that we will all die. Exceptions such as the case of the Prophet Elias, who was taken up to the heavens, can only occur by a miracle or by divine intervention. The law is death for all. This, of course, is a result of sin. Man was created immortal. Sin made him mortal. “The wages of sin is death” – spiritual death and physical death (Romans, 6:23).

Everyone thinks about and fears death, for obviously different reasons, but this is the truth. Let us see, though, what death is, and then see if we should fear death or life or even ourselves.

When people think of death they put in their minds catastrophe and the end. This is not how things are. Death is a stage and a starting point. It is neither the end, nor a catastrophe. It is a change of circumstances. It is birth.

Just as the embryo grows in the womb of its mother for nine months and is then born, so too man in his earthly life works for his salvation, and then he dies. In other words, he is born into eternity. The child that is born is born crying. Why? The reason is that it does not know where it is going. It fears the unknown. We who know the reality of the situation do not cry when a child is born, but are happy. The same applies to the person who dies. He cries and thinks about death because he is afraid of the unknown. Christ who “has become the first born from the dead” has told us everything. But then why are Christians afraid of death?

Christians are afraid of death for three main reasons: a) they

do not have enough faith in Christ, b) they do not live a holy, but rather a sinful life and are therefore afraid, and c) they know that after death repentance for salvation no longer exists and so they are afraid of death and the uncertainty that it brings for them personally.

Non-christians are afraid of death for the same reasons, if they have some faith, but also because they do not know the things that follow after death. Non-believers are afraid of death because they consider it catastrophe and the end. But it is not. It is, as we said, a stage and a starting point.

Christians should not be afraid of death. More than death they should fear their earthly life. In essence and actuality they should not be afraid of their earthly life. They should fear their bad selves. They should fear their unrepentance and disbelief.

Christ, Who became man for us, were crucified and died on the cross, descended to Hades and were raised up and became “the first born from the dead,” Who told us “he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”(John, 11:25), You, Lord, help us. Give us faith. Teach us about death. Make us not to fear death. Give us Your grace so that we may work out our eternal salvation in our earthly life, be victorious over our sinful selves, and not remain in our sinful state—our unrepentant state. Help us to live and grow in a state of repentance, to think of death for what it is, a stage and starting point for eternity, a birthday in Your heavenly Kingdom, and a return to our fatherly home. We thank You, Lord.



What Happens after Death

With death comes the separation of the soul from the body. The body returns to the earth from which it was taken. It decomposes but it is not lost. The time will come when it will be resurrected, spiritualized and made incorruptible, at the time of the just judgement. And then it will be united with the soul to be judged along with the soul. In the meantime, the soul which was separated, through death, from the body, lives in a middle state. It undergoes the particular judgement. “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes the judgement”(Hebrews 9:27). This means that immediately after death the soul is judged individually. It remains after this particular judgement until the final judgement, at the second Coming of Christ, having a foretaste of paradise or of hell.

At the final judgement, which will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, all people will be presented before Him to be judged. The evangelist Matthew tells us the following: “Before Him will be gathered all nations”(Matthew 25:32). At the final judgement, the souls will not be the only ones to be presented. We will be presented wholly, with our body and soul—with all our personhood. Body and soul will be judged. St. Paul tells us: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

At the final judgement everyone will be judged according to their faith and their works. Christ will then separate the just from the unjust or sinners. “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the

world” (Matthew 25:34), and to the sinners He will say: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Then “they [sinners] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”(Matthew 25:46). This will be the final judgement. After the final judgement, there will either be eternal life or hell—eternal punishment. There will be no changes after the final judgement. The just will be grounded in their righteousness and will always be righteous, and will live eternally. The sinners will be stabilized in their sin. They will not be able to change. They will live in hell. They too will live. They will not vanish, as some fools say. The above verse makes that vividly clear.

This will occur to man after death. In order for this to happen, two things must come first: the resurrection of the dead by which the soul will be reunited with the body, and the Second Coming of Christ. We will write about this in the next sections.

Triune God, Who out of love created man, on whom in his disobedience and sin You had compassion, and out of love Your Son became man to save man, You, Lord, know our problems and weaknesses. You also know our love for You and our longing for our salvation. We do not want our condemnation. We want eternal life near You. And still, we continue to sin. Show, Lord, upon this also Your understanding and love. Now, help us to be stable in faith—to prove it with works of love. Give us a Christian ending to our earthly lives, a good defense at Your Second Coming. Do not allow any of Your creatures to be lost. We know that we are responsible for our future. We are not throwing the burden on You. We are not blaming You. We are not making You responsible for our mistakes. But we ask You, help us. All of us, without any exception. Help us to do works of repentance. How dreadful it would be for You to have prepared Your Kingdom, for us and then for us to inherit eternal punishment apart from You. Creator, do not allow such a thing for anyone. We thank You, our Creator.

The Resurrection of the Dead

With death, the soul is separated from the body. It receives a particular judgement and remains separated until the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgement. At the final judgement, man will be presented before Christ as a full person, with a body and soul. For man to be presented like this, his body must be resurrected and be united with the soul. This will happen immediately before the final judgement. Holy Scripture absolutely assures us of this. Let us see some of its passages.

“The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement” (John, 5:28-9).

St. Paul says “Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians, 15:51-52).

St. Paul says elsewhere, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always

be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians, 4:14-17).

From the above passages of Holy Scripture we are clearly taught beyond any doubt that:

a) The dead will be resurrected before the Second Coming of Christ and final judgement. “All who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and come forth” (John, 5:28).

b) The resurrected body will be immortal. “The dead will be raised imperishable” (1 Corinthians, 15:52).

c) Before the Second Coming or during it, the living will be changed; in other words, their bodies, like those of the dead, will be spiritualized and made immortal: “The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians, 15:52).

d) The living and the dead will proceed to eternal life or eternal hell. “And come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John, 5:29).

With the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement, death is abolished. The end of the world also comes, but this does not mean the catastrophic end to the world but rather change and finality. Sin will disappear.

Thrice-holy God, Who with Your infinite love created and sustain us, You admire and bless us whenever we do good, You tolerate us when we sin, You forgive us when we repent. You deigned that Your only begotten Son should become man, to be crucified, to die as a man, to be resurrected and become the first-born from the dead, and to make possible our own resurrection. We thank You for all these things. We ask You please to give us repentance. Make it so that we will proceed to the resurrection of life and not to judgement. Grant us eternal life. Do not allow our eternal punishment. Do not deprive us of the joy of Your everlasting presence.



Eternal Life and Eternal Hell

The resurrection of the dead, the change of the living and the final judgement will be followed by eternal life or eternal hell. Hell means punishment.

Some, like the believers in the millennium, believe that after the final judgement the sinners will be destroyed. Considerably more believe that after the final judgement the sinners will be punished for a certain period of time, will repent and be saved. Neither one is correct. Holy Scripture teaches very clearly that the righteous will enjoy eternal life and happiness, whereas the sinners will be being punished. Reading the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew we see that all the dead and the living will be presented before the unbribable Judge. We will be divided into the just and the sinners, just as the sheep are separated from the goats. Then Christ will say to the just, who will be on His right-hand side: "Come, O blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). And these will inherit the kingdom of God. Then He will turn to His left towards the sinners and He will say to them: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). And behold the result. "And they [the sinners] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). Behold then that the just will live in eternal life and happiness. The sinners will live in eternal punishment and despair. These are the words of Christ. Those who believe and teach otherwise do not profess the truth. They do not present things as Christ, "Who is the truth and the way and the life," said.

No one knows exactly what the after-life will be like. No one knows quite how the just and the sinners will be living. St. Paul, who was taken up to the heavens and wanted to describe those things that he saw and heard (1 Corinthians, 2:9; II Corinthians, 12:4), said: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

The Holy Scriptures in describing hell, use frightening images. They call it “the outer darkness,” “the worm that does not die,” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of the teeth.” This state of the punished will be eternal, without any change or amelioration. Without end. As a result it is indescribably frightening.

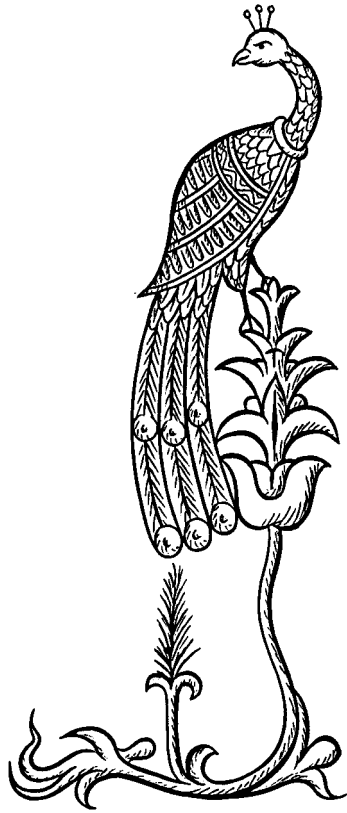
Let us be careful here. All that the Holy Scriptures say regarding hell should not be understood physically, as we know these things today. We should always keep in mind that with the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgement everything will change. Everything will become “new.” The whole universe. The Fathers of the Church explain this very well, particularly, St. Gregory of Nyssa, who writes the following: “Because you learned to understand something different from what exists in reality, when you hear the words fire or worm, you should not think of the earthly fire or insect.” In other words, when you hear of fire and worms do not understand it as the fire and worms that you know of here. St. John Damascene also writes the following: “eternal fire is not a material thing such as we are familiar with; rather it is something that only God comprehends.” In other words, the fire of hell is not physical as we know it, but will be fire as God knows it.

Our Heavenly Father and Creator of all, we marvel at Your grandeur, infinite love and wisdom. Before You we kneel and express our gratitude for all Your good things. We know Your teaching, the truth as Christ, Your only begotten Son, has revealed it to us. We have no excuse for our sinful life. We alone are responsible for our plight. We think of the just judgement and tremble, but we also do not use our brains. We know what

is good for us but we do not look after it. Thoughtlessly, we continue on the path of sin. We do not want it, but that is where we end up. Before You call us through our death, call us near You with true repentance. Do not, Lord, allow us to inherit eternal damnation. Do not allow anyone to end up in that excommunicated state. Find in Your kingdom the space for everyone. Lord, we thank You.



Glory
be to God



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