

# **Theology and Life inside of the Holy Orthodox Church**



*by*  
*Fr. John Chavkin*

## Foreword

I asked Him to give me strength, peace of mind and love for God and He granted me weakness so I could learn about humility, uneasiness so I can learn how to fight fear, poverty so I could learn about compassion.

God educates us specially in this Great Lent time by making us walk alongside our Lord Jesuschrist and walk through the calvary leading to Mount Golgotha, therefore polishing our lifes '*like gold in the crucible*', inviting us to grow in faith in order for us to become real followers of Jesuschrist.

We're privileged since we can rediscover and find in ourselves that flame of life gifted to us by the Holy Ghost in our Baptism, the same flame of life that day by day this world tries to suffocate and kill, that strength which those who rule our human world and society try to weaken in order to dominate us.

Our beloved most holy Lady, Panagia theotokos, shows us how should we follow her beloved Son, silently by praying and deliverance.

How great can God's Love be that He gifted His Son to humanity in order to grant us salvation and our beloved Theotokos so we could understand it is actually feasible to follow Him.

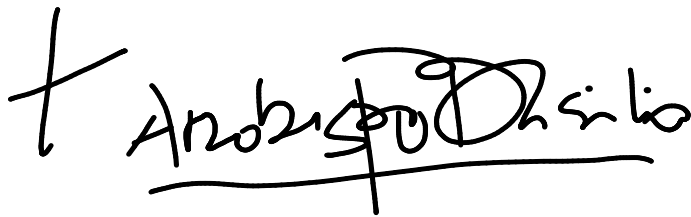
Growing in this most Holy Orthodox Church after being educated and having lived for over 40 years as a roman catholic is like being reborn and it is, in fact, coming back to Jesuschrist's true Church since it is a total paradigm shift between what I once was and

what I should aim to become. The Orthodox path is much more than just being a part of the flock of a church, it's a way to live your life, to think and an absolute oath with both God and ourselves.

The most Holy Orthodox Church is a life form that begins by being granted the Holy Baptism and beginning to walk the true path towards salvation, since there is no other besides this one. Being an Orthodox Christian is aiming to live as our Lord taught his Holy Apostles, it's being consistent with the teachings collected through the Apostolic Rules, the Holy Canons that were born from the first 7 Ecumenical Councils and the Holy Tradition.

This pages are a truly ambitious attempt to transmit to others what God through His Great Love has gifted me, it is nothing but a collection of life experiences and theoretical knowledge that tries to make Theology from life and life from Theology.

I thank my God and most beloved Theotokos for the great gift granted to me which allowed me to discover this path and I hope the following lines are useful for those patient enough to read them in order to show them how wonderful it is to live through this all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Basilio', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

## **The Schism of 1504, some history.**

The Church of the first millennium was divided along doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political and geographical lines. In 1054, Pope Leo IX of Rome and Patriarch Michael I Cerularius of Constantinople excommunicated each other. This act led to the great schism between East and West. One summer day in 1054, after a heated argument with the patriarch of Constantinople, the pope's representative, Cardinal Humbert, entered Hagia Sophia, the city's main place of worship, placed a document on the altar and left in haste. It was a libel of excommunication addressed to members of the Orthodox Church, of which the Roman Church had been a part up to that time. It is generally agreed that this radical gesture marked the beginning of the Great Schism, the moment when the Church, united in the first 1000 years of Christianity, splits, giving rise to the Roman Catholic Church.

The story, of course, is more complicated. By the end of the first millennium, the unity of the Church was already broken. Five hundred years earlier, complex disputes over the nature of Christ had led to a split following the Council of Chalcedon in 451. But even the moment commonly regarded as a turning point was, as a product of Cardinal Humbert's great ego, the breaking of the original Pentarchy.

# True Orthodoxy

At the end of the Greek-Turkish War in 1922, a military-controlled totalitarian regime was established in Greece, whose provisional head of government was the Greek general Nikolaos Plastiras, to be followed months later by the founding of the Second Hellenic Republic, during which the constitutional charter under which the Greek Orthodox Church operated its synods independently and freely had been abolished; the then Archbishop in office as primate was deposed by a new regent, Archimandrite Chrysostomos Papadopoulos now promoted to the rank of archbishop.

To achieve its ends, the new government required the concordance of the Church with the state, and this included a communiqué to the Greek synod in the month of December ordering that the civil and ecclesiastical calendars be made equal, thus forming one and the same calendar. Consequently, the Archbishop of Athens, having the task of reforming the calendar, with the influence of the ministries of the new government, succeeded in persuading the Patriarch of Constantinople at that time to accept the reformed calendar. He was immediately opposed by the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Alexandria, who wisely feared that this change would threaten the unity of the Orthodox Communion in the world. Shortly afterwards the position of the See of Alexandria would change in favour of reform when Meletios Metaxakis, an Orthodox prelate identified with Freemasonry and scientism, to the patriarchal throne in Alexandria (Egypt) who unilaterally pushes this "scientifically revised" calendar in a "pan-orthodox" council, and thus forces other orthodox hierarchs to

follow it. However, it should be noted that previously, the Patriarchs and hierarchs of all Orthodox Synods had condemned with anathema and excommunication anyone who used the Gregorian calendar or the "new calendar". The origin of this "new calendar", known as the "revised Julian calendar", is due to the studies carried out by a Serbian astronomer named Milutin Milankovich because of the gradual deviation from the old calendar. Thus, for the Orthodox communities that remained on the original ecclesiastical or old calendar, the churches that fell into serious canonical consequences were: The Orthodox Church of Constantinople, The Orthodox Church of Greece, The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Today, however, there are several other jurisdictions that continue to use the original calendar, but some of them are in communion with the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, such as the Moscow Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, among other autonomous Orthodox jurisdictions.

## Vetero-Calendarism

Old-Calendarist Orthodox, we are known by this name or as "Paleomerologitis", "Vetero-Calendarists" or "Traditional Orthodox" to a branch of Orthodox Christians who since 1924 have expressed their disagreement with some jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church, which after that date, abandoned the use of the original ecclesiastical calendar of

Julian basis or the Calendar of Julius Caesar, These Orthodox Churches which accepted such a change were condemned by the true Orthodox as "heretical", not in themselves for the use of such a calendar, but because of the ecumenical consequences it caused.

In 1925 the best known event occurred: A large luminous cross appeared in the sky above a Vetero-Calendarist church (the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Hymetus, Athens) hidden because of the persecutions, which was admired by hundreds of people on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, many of the witnesses being notables of society and even the police who went to arrest the tumult caused by this event, and of those present many were converted that night.

The distinguishing characteristics of the True Orthodox is the total respect and acceptance of the Holy Canons and the rejection of pan-ecumenism or false ecumenism.

## First steps

To speak of liturgy is to speak of icons and of eschatology, Christology and in general the relationships are always in both directions, the completeness is in the experiential aspect of our theology and can be summarised in "theology without living it is not theology", which automatically converts life into theology and source of spirituality, there is no

theology without life and in the same way there cannot be life that does not become theology. The simplicity of this statement hides a deep experience of what our holy fathers wanted to bequeath to us, prayer, deep life of faith, surrender, was what they lived when they first secluded themselves as hermits and then opened themselves to surrender what they had achieved in their period of hesychia in spiritual direction.

The importance of monasticism in our history of faith marks a path of introspection and prayer that is brought to life in the Divine Liturgy, implying that it is only in the experience of the Risen Christ that we find the strength to overcome any adversity and in the community where we find the support of our brothers and sisters and a helping hand (at least that is how it should be).

I think that all of us, and I want to emphasise all of us, are called to live to a greater or lesser extent the search for the inner silence where God speaks to us, to be hesychasts, thus being men with a heart full of desire for God, and, because of that, to seek how to free our hearts from their passions to find our God and the beauty of all this, is that God is here, the Kingdom is here, we do not have to wait to live it, we do not have to die to be holy, Christ has shown us the way. To live our faith is to make the Kingdom come alive, it is to enter into an inner temple and encounter a world of life and light that leads us to adoration and contemplation. Icons make us pray, they move us to pray, because in them we contemplate the purity of love, the light of God, the experience and reality of the Holy Spirit, who is present and alive in each one of them and in each one of us.



Our temples are a mixture of heaven and earth, they teach us that the living out of faith is a daily experience, that the Word is our bread and that the Word is our bread and our guide, that it is not just a matter of going one day to share with our brothers and sisters a Divine Liturgy on Sundays and then do what we want, but that life is a continuum of what we learn and receive in that time of and received in that time of encounter, and that the Body and Blood of the Lord the Body and Blood of the Lord that we have received in Holy Holy Communion is the beginning of a journey and not a moment. is to bring theology to life by turning life into theology and theology into theology. into theology and theology into life, into the image of Christ. We are living fountains of the Holy Spirit. we are called to catechise by example, words are seeds that may or may not seeds that may or may not fall on good soil and germinate, but the example germinate, but example makes its mark and even if we do not want to accept it, it leaves its mark.

Each one of us, having been baptised, is called to live the faith and to hand it on as the Church has done for years, faith is not something to be kept hidden, it is a lamp and it cannot be hidden, it must shine. The history of our faith says it, for centuries it was handed down from one to another by preaching and example, the death on the cross of Our Lord was an example of surrender and a catechesis of life, the humility and silence of the Theotokos were examples of how we should live our surrender, making the God-Man shine and dying to us so that He might live and move the world.

Mary's silence was, I believe, a clear example of the life of the hesychast, contemplation of her Son, listening to His Word and total surrender to Him, is this not how we should live? History shows us that our Church has lived and grown through persecution. It says in both the Old and New Testament and the Apostolic Letters, Christ was persecuted and His Church could not live differently, persecution and death have marked the path and growth of our Church. Our Orthodox faith has always followed this path, the persecutions and the death of priests and men of faith have marked the path, the internal attacks, the problems that have been separating paths within orthodoxy, are nothing other than the path initiated and marked by the example of Christ and the Apostles, it is written in Paul when he calls for unity, to live as true brothers, not to separate the communities, when he says: "The Church of Christ and the Apostles, the Church of Christ and the Apostles, the Church of Christ and the Apostles, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of Christ and the Apostles, the Church of Christ and the Apostles, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to carnal, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for ye were not yet able. But neither now can ye: for ye are yet carnal. For where among you there is jealousy and strife - are you not carnal, and do you not walk according to man? For when one says, 'As for me, I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are ye not men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-4), he likewise calls for unity when he says: "For what is Apollos? And what is Paul? Ministers by whom ye have believed, and to each as the Lord hath given. I have planted, Apollos has watered, but God has increased; so that neither he who plants is anything, nor

he who waters, but he who increases is God" (1 Cor. 3:5-7). (1 Cor. 3:5-7), sadly man is a sinner and power is a big issue, the lust for power is one of the sins where satan rejoices and perhaps the one he exploits the most because he knows it is the engine of humanity, he who has power can do anything is the motto of society.

Power and wealth are what move many to fight for nothing, to die for nothing, but, they are what man wants and even more, he desires intensely, the Church is no stranger to this, the Schism was a product of ambition and to be able to share with our brothers a Divine Liturgy on Sundays and then do whatever we want, but that life is a continuum of what we have learned and received in that time of encounter and that the Body and Blood of the Lord that we have received in Holy Communion is the beginning of a journey and not a moment, it is to make theology come alive by turning life into theology and theology into life, into the image of Christ. We are living fountains of the Holy Spirit, we are called to catechise by example, words are seeds that may or may not fall on good soil and germinate, but example marks and even if we do not want to accept it, it leaves its mark.

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clear example of the life of the hesychast, contemplation of her Son, listening to His Word and total surrender to Him, is it not how we should live?

The history of our Church in countries where globalisation is their *raison d'être*, is another example of the above, materialistic men, blinded by absurdities, without vision of the future and who lived and unfortunately still live (there are still a few) of false theories that idealise man and leave God aside, wanted to destroy all traces of the Church, because of their obsession and short-sightedness they did not realise that faith was not in the temples, but that it was life and that no one could ever put an end to it, not even by ending some lives. They committed and commit massacres that only increased the search for God and the dedication in faith of the simple people who knew that everything was possible when God is with us and that without Him we can do nothing. As we said before, ambition and the lust for power mark the and the lust for power mark history, and within the Orthodox Church this Orthodox Church, there have been Patriarchs who simply sold out to communism and played a role of defending the indefensible. role of defending the indefensible, they lied through their teeth and set an gave an example of how not to live the faith. Fortunately, and as a divine action, there were Bishops and Metropolitans who left the homeland and came to America bringing the faith and the bringing the Orthodox faith and tradition.

In a chaotic society, which has overturned values, has lost its identity, has sunk into degeneration and depravity, it is good to stop and look back to seek the source that will allow us to make a radical change in our time, and I speak of looking to the source, because

only in tradition can we find valid answers. That tradition which is founded in the teachings of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the teachings of the Holy Apostles embodied in the Apostolic Rules and in the Holy Canons emanating from the first seven Ecumenical Councils where under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our holy fathers left clearly defined the path to be followed by the Holy Church of Jesus Christ.

Our Holy Church has for centuries followed the true path, bequeathed to us by the Lord. Sadly, in the last two centuries the great patriarchates have acted like Judas, the false ecumenism espoused by Bartholomew I and the aberrations he has committed in pursuit of his unhinged position, have reached a point where the Holy Canons are simply meaningless writing, His ego has covered everything that another egomaniac, head of a church lost in degeneration and depravity, called Francis is trying to achieve by uniting all the churches under his rule, in which even satanism has a place, this union can only be the inspiration of the devil. It is simple to accommodate everything so that it is most comfortable for me, to interpret the Holy Canons "according to the times", to convince ourselves that what I do is according to the "will of god" knowing that it is clearly our will that we follow.

he change that our Holy Orthodox Church has undergone, from one time to the present, has been truly worrying, we have lived trying to dodge the heresies that arise from within the church and that merge with those coming from other pseudo-churches wrongly called Christian and that are really satanic, in the last century Sergianism and Cyprianism are two clear examples of the sinister influence of the devil in our church and that endure to this

day. We could see a clear integration of the two major heresies of our times to the present day in what is happening with the wrongly called "modern ecumenism or pan-ecumenism", in this wrongly called union of the churches that leads to the false union of churches that are antagonistic in their essence, in the new world order, where it is pretended that we are all saved no matter what. that we are all saved no matter what faith we profess and that seeks to and that seeks to have one head, that of Francis, as the only guide. Francis, as the only guide, we can see the above mentioned heresies in heresies mentioned above in action, Sergianism with another nuance, for it is now papism that rules and to which many pseudo patriarchs have unfortunately ascribed, and cyprianism which is clearly seen in the acceptance of heretics as part of a whole and concelebration with them, advocating the salvation of all regardless of what they believe or think, as long as they obey the orders emanating from the Vatican.

We are facing very difficult times, times of spiritual misery and a of spiritual misery and a total loss of values, where those of us who seek where those of us who seek fidelity to the teachings of Our Lord of our Lord, will be persecuted and accused of treason to the of treason to the church, we will be outlawed as in the times of as in the times of Sergianism, as the followers of Franciscanism will start a "second holy war" in order to wipe off the face of the world to wipe the holy tradition from the face of the earth, which in Papism has already begun, Satanism will reign, false idols will Satanism will reign, false idols will be worshipped, attempts will be made to destroy the foundations of will attempt to destroy the foundations of Christianity, and all in the name of in the name of modernity, temples will

gather multiple religions in multiple religions in joint celebrations and under this new concept of "ecumenism this new concept of "ecumenism", there will be no heresy, because heresy will not exist, because, all will be brothers under the same faith, which in itself is heresy.

Our beloved and Holy Orthodox Church, will thus return to its origins, we will be a church of catacombs, of persecuted, of martyrs of the faith, but, this which is the True Church of Christ will never die and will last until the end of time, no matter what this "new alliance" of religions does, because, as St. Matthew 5: 11-12 says "Blessed are you, when they shall reproach you and persecute you and shall say all evil against you, lying for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets, those who were before you".

The atrocities we see in the world today are repeated in the church and all the degeneration and depravity is in the church and all the degeneracy and depravity is integrated into and all the degeneracy and depravity is integrated into the so-called "Christian churches", practising homosexuals and lesbians are accepted as part of the clergy as part of the clergy and made bishops, a patriarch who is supposed to be the is supposed to be first among his peers in the custody of the holy of holy tradition and faith, lifts an excommunication that could only be lifted by a could only be lifted by a Holy Ecumenical Synod, with the participation of all the Orthodox churches, this despicable act, which act, which reveals the immense ego of the patriarch of Constantinople of the patriarch of Constantinople and how he seeks to bring the the Holy Orthodox Church into a great

schism. patriarch has become, without a doubt, the greatest Cyprianist of today. Cyprianist of today, because he has taken heresy to levels that no one could to levels that no one could have imagined.

The path has always been the same, to achieve salvation, it is that of Mount Calvary, there is no other, the Holy Fathers repeat it over and over again in their texts, the Holy Church was founded as communities in the catacombs or in the underground, the Holy Apostles and our beloved Blessed Mother founded the first community and the Holy Spirit came to it, to give it strength and courage so that it could go out to preach the Teachings of the Lord, this has been and must be our path. Only in the Triune God, in our Blessed Mother and in the very rich inheritance that the Lord left us and which is the very essence of our Holy Church can we aspire to the Kingdom, totally rejecting ecumenism and everything that goes against the True Church of Christ, which is none other than the True Orthodox.

May the Good Shepherd bless us and protect us from falling into heresy. heresy and may our Blessed Mother cover us with her maternal love. maternal love.



# Great heresies of the last centuries

**Sergianism** weighs like a rock on the Russian Patriarchate from Sergius I to Alexis II. Sergius I was a collaborator of atheistic communism in the USSR, applauding its anti-Christian measures. Many priests became agents of the KGB, even using the secrecy of confession to betray opponents. Even Alexis II (1990-2008) was reportedly a former KGB informer.

Born Ivan Nikolayevich Stragorodski on 23 January 1867, Sergius I was Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia from 8 September 1943 until his death. Before that he had been de facto head of the Russian Orthodox Church (1925-1943). But his Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet Union (29.7.1927) provoked fierce controversy among the controversy among Russian churchmen, many of whom (including not a few bishops) were of whom (including not a few notable and respected bishops in prisons and respected bishops in prison and exile) broke communion with Sergius. communion with Sergius. Some were later reconciled, others continued to oppose him until the election of Alexis I in 1945.

With the Soviet Union invaded by Germany in 1941, Stalin began to scale down the anti-religious campaign, seeking the moral support of the Church during the war. In the early hours of 5.9.1943, he met with the three leading hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and promised, in return for loyalty, to open the Moscow Theological Seminary and

Academy, release imprisoned clergy and return some property, including the famous Laura of Trinity and St. Sergius.

The most important concession was undoubtedly to be able to become a patriarch. So on 8.9.1943, a Council of Bishops elected Sergius, who, enthroned on 12 September of the same year, already 76 years old and in poor health, died in Moscow on 5-15-1944.

The Soviet state used the Russian Orthodox Church for propaganda purposes. The Patriarchate was criticised for conceding so much and, above all, subjecting to itself all the Orthodox communities in the regions annexed by the Soviet Union, including the Greek Catholics, who were forcibly subjected to it at the Pseudo-Synod of Lviv (1946), the sad events of which thus fall within the time of the famous Major Archbishop Joseph Slipyj (1944-84), when all the bishops of his Church were arrested and he himself was himself in concentration camps. He was then Russian Patriarch Alexy I (1945-70), a total Sergianist.

On 3-7-2016, an intrepid group of Russian Orthodox Christians Orthodox Christians issued -to their great credit- a communiqué in which they state, among other things:

"It is urgent for orthodox Christians to recognise the terrible truth of 10.3.1946. terrible truth of 10.3.1946. On that day, in Lviv, the Russian Orthodox Church forcibly integrated the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church under the pressure of the Soviet power [...]. pressure of the Soviet power [...] The archives reveal that it was Stalin himself who it was Stalin himself who decided on the elimination of the Ukrainian Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in February 1945, twelve days after the Yalta conference

(4- 11/II/1945) by "the Soviet power". 11/II/1945) as an "ally of the Vatican", i.e. of an enemy power [...]. enemy power [...].

We appeal to the current Orthodox authorities in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere to in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere to recognise the nullity of the to recognise the nullity of the tragic decisions of the Council of Lviv. The Russian Orthodox Church as a whole Orthodox Church in Russia as a whole cannot be held responsible for the decisions taken by ecclesiastical authorities manipulated or terrorised by the manipulated or terrorised by the NKVD-KGB. We, however, as Orthodox Christians, living 70 years after those events 70 years after those events, feel responsible for the feel responsible for the guilty silence surrounding the destruction of this Church by the Soviet regime with the participation of the patriarchate with the participation of the Moscow Patriarchate [...].

Also, on this memorial day of 3.10.1946, and on the eve of Sunday 3.13.2016, Sunday of Forgiveness in the Orthodox liturgical calendar, we assure the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church of our solidarity, our prayers for all the innocent victims of this Church, who were imprisoned, tortured, deported and killed by the Soviet government with the complicity of the Moscow Patriarchate. We humbly ask their forgiveness for all the injustices of which they have been victims under the protection of the authority of the Orthodox Church, and we bow before the martyrs of this Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church" (Cf. Peter Langa, "The Pseudo-Synod of Lviv (10.III.1946). I. The terrible truth."

**Cyprianism.** The Metropolitan Cyprian taught that: 1) the ecumenical churches of the world's orthodoxy that have been anathematized for their ecumenical ecumenism still have the grace of God in their mysteries. mysteries, 2) he applies the label of 'sick' or 'diseased' to heretics 2) it applies the label of 'sick' or 'diseased' to heretics, which are terms only applicable to sinners who are members of the Church, and 3) it Church, and 3) teaches that councils, not heresies, separate one from the Church, separate one from the Church.

Thus he justifies his ecclesiology of taking communion and accepting the mysteries of heretics, regardless of whether they have fallen into whether they have fallen into ecumenism, modernism or even papism. even popery. For he taught that until an Ecumenical Council, assembled from all the orthodox groups, whether heretics or groups, whether heretical or schismatic, declares the churches of world orthodoxy to be invalid, he considers these organisations to be part of the Church.

This convoluted ecclesiology denies the existence of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and puts one in communion with heresy. in communion with heresy. Therefore, Cyprianism/Chyprianism Cyprianism/Cyprianism is rightly called crypto-ecumenism. Cyprianites, therefore, are heretics and schismatics. heretics and schismatics.

**The heresy of Ecumenism** is an anti-Christian doctrine that claims that 'all religions anti-Christian doctrine, which claims that 'all religions worship a single 'creator God' and all believers in "God", irrespective of their in "God", irrespective of their membership of a particular particular religion or jurisdiction, can be saved (have communion with God in

all things). In particular, in Christianity, the heresy of ecumenism is affirmed in the ‘theory of the branches of a single divided Church’, the recognition of the grace of the heretical heretical mysteries/sacraments, joint prayers and services, and allows the services, and allows for the salvation of heretics. Heretics.

The purpose of ecumenism - the unification of the followers of all religions in one ‘family followers of all religions into a ‘universal family’, overcoming the family’, overcoming “wrong” division for the sake of “peace and unification”. of ‘peace and unification’. In many ways, ecumenism ecumenism reflects the views of the heresy of millenarianism. millenarianism, it is part of the imposed anti-Christian current of the new age. imposed new-age current; the heresy of ecumenism is a spiritual type of globalism whose a spiritual type of globalism, the result of which is the establishment of the ‘kingdom of the beast’ - the Antichrist and the final spiritual death of mankind. the final spiritual death of mankind.

The heresy of ecumenism originated in the early 20th century in a Protestant environment. 20th century in a Protestant milieu (environment), one of the prominent prominent representatives of the ecumenical movement was the Freemason J. Mott. Under the guise of ‘dialogues with the heterodox, ecumenism penetrated the orthodox milieu. orthodox milieu. In Catholicism, the ecumenical movement movement intensified after the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965. II of 1962-1965.

We must confess that an essential impetus to the creation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, especially with the

message of 1920, where, as it has been as it turned out, constituted the basis and the map of the participation of the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. ecumenical movement.

This message was something that for the first time was known in the Church, because for the first time an official orthodox text qualified all heterodox Communities in the West as ‘churches’, ‘as kith and kin in Christ and also co-heirs and of the same body of God's promise’. Thus he abrogated Orthodox ecclesiology. And not to refer to ancient times, suffice it to remind us that a few years earlier (1895) the same Patriarchate, in a circular letter, put popery outside the Church, because it introduced heretical and novel teachings. That is why it called upon Western Christians to return to the bosom of the one Church, i.e. to Orthodoxy.

## Some ancient heresies.

**Docetism** (from Greek koiné δοκεῖν/δόκησις, *dokein* ‘to seem, to appear’, *dókēsis* “apparition, ghost”), in the history of the history of Christianity, designates a set of heterodox Christological heterodox Christological tendencies in the first centuries of Christianity Christianity on the true nature of Jesus Christ, his historical nature of Jesus Christ, his historical and bodily existence existence, and above all his human form, which was a mere appearance without any carnal nature. mere appearance without any carnal nature. At generally taken to be the belief that the sufferings and the sufferings and

humanity of Jesus Christ were apparent and not real, his human form was a mere illusion. illusion.

**Gnosticism** (from Ancient Greek: γνωστικός gnōstikós, ‘to have knowledge’) is a set of ancient religious ideas and systems that originated in the 1st century among ancient Jewish and Christian sects. These various groups emphasised spiritual knowledge (gnosis) over orthodox teachings and traditions and church authority. Viewing material existence as flawed and malevolent, Gnostic cosmogony generally presents a distinction between a supreme, unseen God and a lesser, malevolent deity (sometimes associated with Yahweh (Jehovah) in the Old Testament) who is responsible for creating the material universe.<sup>3</sup> Gnostics considered the main element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the supreme divinity in the form of mystical or esoteric intuitions. Many Gnostic texts discuss not the concepts of sin and repentance, but rather the concepts of sin and repentance, but rather those of illusion and enlightenment.

**Manichaeism** is the name given to the universalist religion founded by the Persian sage Mani, who claimed to be the last of the prophets sent by God to mankind, following Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus.

Manichaeism was conceived from its origins as the as the definitive faith, in that it claims to complete and invalidate all other faiths. In this sense, it rivals other religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Gnostic Christianity and Gnostic Gnostic Christianity and Islam, his contacts with them led to numerous with them led to numerous phenomena of doctrinal of doctrinal fusion.

**Patripassianism** (from the Latin *pater*, *patris*, father, and *passus*, to suffer) was a Christian monarchianist doctrine of the 2nd and 3rd centuries that denied the dogma of the Trinity by considering it as three manifestations of a manifestations of a single divine being, holding that it was the that it was God the Father Himself who had come to Earth and suffered on the Earth and suffered on the cross in the guise of the Son.

This doctrine, considered heretical after being condemned in 261 by the Council of Alexandria, is also condemned by the Council of Alexandria in 261, is also known as known as Sabellianism, its main proponent being the bishop advocate was the bishop Sabellius.

**Arianism** (Greek: Ἀρειανισμός, *Areianismós*) is a Christological doctrine attributed to the Alexandrian presbyter Arius Alexandrian Arius (4th century). Arianism held that Jesus is not properly God, but the first creature created by the Father, who does not by the Father, who did not enjoy divinity, and was used for the creation of the world. employed for the creation of the world. With this, Arian Arianism postulated the existence of God alone, and that of only one the existence of only one principle, the Father. On the other hand, the Word could not be linked with God-the-Father since he is not consubstantial with the Father, nor the Three Divine Persons, and therefore differences arise between them. At In principle, this heresy was supported, and the doctrines were spread by the Roman doctrines were spread throughout the Roman Empire, North Africa, Palestine Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor, Syria. Despite the fact that Arianism was considered a heresy, condemned at the



First Council of Nicaea at the First Council of Nicaea (325), and declared heretical at the First Council of heretical at the First Council of Constantinople (381), was maintained as a religion among some Germanic peoples Germanic peoples until the reign of Recaredo I who established Catholicism as the official religion of his kingdom. kingdom. This heresy is absolutely contrary to what is one of the pillars of the one of the pillars of the faith, which is the Theosis.

An extreme form of this doctrine is that of Eunomius, who held the total dissimilarity between the Son and the Father. Father.

**Apollinarianism** is a doctrine which takes its name from from Apollinarinus the Younger, bishop of Laodicea, who in the fourth century 4th century denied the human nature of Jesus Christ.

This doctrine, considered heretical by Christian orthodoxy, arose as a reaction against Arianism. orthodoxy and arose as a reaction against Arianism, affirmed that in Christ the spirit or intellect was not human, but divine, being human but divine, being incarnated in a body without a rational soul rational soul, which was replaced by the Word himself. On this assumption the human nature of the Redeemer was mutilated, since, by denying Him a human mind, His figure was reduced to a human mind, his figure was reduced to a kind of puppet manipulated by God. a kind of puppet manipulated by God.

**Nestorianism or Diphysianism** (from the Greek δύς, dys, ‘two’, and φύσις, physis, ‘nature’) is a religious doctrine within Christianity that religious doctrine within Christianity that considers Christ to be radically separated into two natures, a human and a

divine human and a divine, both complete in such a way that they form two independent two independent entities, two persons united in Christ, who is persons united in Christ, who is both God and man at the at the same time, but formed of two distinct (prosopōn) distinct.

**Pelagianism** is a Christian theological position theological position that was put forward between the 4th and 5th centuries and was considered heretical by the heretical by the Council of Carthage in 418.

He held that original sin did not taint human nature and that human beings, by divine grace, have free will to attain human perfection. Pelagius, an ascetic and philosopher from the British Isles, taught that God could not command believers to do the impossible, and therefore it must be possible to fulfil all divine commandments. He also taught that it was unjust to punish one person for the sins of another; therefore, in his view, children should be born without the sins of their parents. therefore, in his opinion, children should be born guiltless. Pelagius did not accepted no excuse for sinful behaviour and taught that sinful behaviour and taught that all Christians, regardless of their station in life, should lead blameless and sinless lives. lead blameless and sinless lives.

**Monothelitism** was a religious doctrine in the 7th century which admitted in Christ two natures, the human and the divine, and one divine, and a single will. Monothelitism sought to to be a compromise between Trinitarian Christianity and Monophysitism. Christianity and Monophysitism.

Preached by the patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, he was condemned at the third council of that city, held between 680 and 681, where the Catholic doctrine of the two wills was Catholic doctrine of the two wills was established.

**Iconoclast or Iconoclasm** (Greek: Εἰκονοκλάσμος [Eikonoklasmos], ‘Rupture of Images’) is a rejection of religious images (paintings, icons, statues). It is also the name of the heresy that disturbed the peace of the Eastern Church in the eighth and ninth centuries, causing the last of the many rifts with Rome that paved the way for the Photian schism. One example of iconoclasm was the Byzantine tradition, especially that of Leo III (Leo’s most important legislative reform was related to religious matters: namely iconoclasm. After an apparently successful attempt to compel the baptism of all Jews and Montanists in the Empire (722), Leo decreed a series of edicts against the worship of images that was called the ‘iconoclast reform’ or ‘iconoclastic reform’ (726-729), which ordered the destruction of all representations of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and especially the saints (Leo III the Isaurian (Greek: Λέων Γ΄ ὁ Ἰσαυρος [Leōn III ho Isauros]; c. 680-18 June 741), also known as the Syrian, was Byzantine Emperor from 717 until his death).

**Catharism** is the doctrine of the Cathars (or Albigensians), a Christian religious movement of a Gnostic nature that spread throughout Western Europe in the mid-11th century and took root around the 12th century among the inhabitants of the French Midi, especially in Languedoc, where it enjoyed the protection of certain feudal lords who were vassals of the Crown of Aragon.

Influenced by Manichaeism in its Paulician and Bogomila stages, Catharism affirmed a creative duality (God and Satan) and preached salvation through asceticism and the strict rejection of the material world, which the Cathars believed to be a the material world, perceived by the Cathars as a demonic work. demonic work.

There are many heresies to which the Holy Church has been and continues to be exposed. the Holy Church, I have tried here to present those which I consider the most which I consider to be the most relevant.

## Theosis

Theosis (in ancient Greek: θέωσις), or deification, is a transformative process whose purpose is the likeness or union with God, as taught in the Orthodox Church. taught in the Orthodox Church. As a process of transformation, theosis is brought about through the effects of catharsis (purification of mind and body) and theoria (contemplation, or ‘illumination’ with the ‘vision’ of God). According to Eastern Christian teachings, theosis is the purpose of human life. It is considered attainable only through the synergy (or cooperation) of human activity and energies (or human activity and the uncreated energies (or operations) of God. uncreated energies (or operations) of God.

## **Apostolic Succession**

Apostolic succession is the succession of bishops, in uninterrupted lines, which goes back unbroken lines, which can be traced back historically to the to the original twelve apostles. It can be understood as the authorisation given by Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Holy Apostles to work in His Holy Name and which they, in turn, left as a legacy to the Holy Church. Holy Church.

### **Foundation of Apostolic Succession.**

We can find it most clearly in the Bible where it shows the apostolic succession in Acts 1, 15-26. In verses 15-19 Peter explains the death of Judas and in verse 20 he says ‘ For I tell you, unless your righteousness abounds more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.’ In verse 21-23 Peter is explaining what qualifications a person must have to take the place of Judas and in the final verses Acts 1:24-26 reads ‘And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who knowest all men, declare whom you have chosen out of these two: one, to take the place of this ministry and apostleship, from whom Judas went astray to go to his own place. And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was chosen and numbered with the eleven apostles.’ So very clearly we see that the apostles had ministries that were to be succeeded. St. Paul instructs Timothy on apostolic succession in 2 Timothy 2:2 ‘And the things which thou hast heard of me, by many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach

others also.’ So in this last verse we have 4 generations of apostolic succession. Beginning with Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men, and from faithful men to others.

To prove the necessity of apostolic succession it is useful to look in the Holy Bible.

John 20, 21-23 ‘Then Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent me, even so I send you”. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’ The Lord gives authority to forgive sins.

Matthew 16, 16-19 on confession.

Matthew 18, 18 about confession.

Matthew 28, 18-20 authority to teach and baptise.

Luke 10, 16 ‘He who hears you hears me, ...’ and 1 John 4, 6 ‘We are of God; he who knows God hears us. God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.’ authority is given to speak in the name of the Lord.

Jesus gave authority to the apostles, which we can see in Acts 15, 24-29 ‘Since we have heard that some among us have troubled you with words, ruining your souls, whom we have not charged, it has seemed to us, as we were unanimously agreed, chosen men, to send to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have given their souls for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## What do the holy fathers tell us?

### St. Ignatius of Antioch

It is necessary, therefore - and this is what you are already doing - that you should do nothing without the bishop, and be submissive also to the presbytery also to the presbytery, as if to the apostles of Jesus, our hope, in whom Jesus, our hope, in whom we shall be found, provided we live with be found, provided we live with Him.... In the same Let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ. respect Jesus Christ, just as they respect the bishop as an image of Jesus Christ. respect the bishop as an image of the Father, and the priests as the presbyters as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Apostles. Without these, it cannot be called 'church'. I am I am sure you will understand these things, since I have received the good example of your love, and I have it with me in the person of your bishop...

### Eusebius of Caesarea

Testimony of Egesippus (ca. 180 AD): Egesippus, no doubt, in the five books of his Memoirs that have come down to us, has made clear what his opinion was. In these books he shows that he travelled as far as Rome, and met many bishops, and that of the many bishops, and that from all of them he heard always the same and only the same and unique doctrine. It is interesting to see what he he says, after making some comments on Clement's

letter to the Corinthians. of Clement to the Corinthians; he says: And the church at Corinth has continued in sound doctrine. has continued in sound doctrine up to the time of Primus, who is the bishop of Corinth, and with whom I have conversed at length on my way to conversed with him at length on my way to Rome, when I spent a few days with the Corinthians; during those conversations we conversations we encouraged one another in the true doctrine. true doctrine. When I arrived in Rome I made a list of the succession (of bishops of Rome) down to Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherius. And after Anicetus was succeeded by Soler, and after him by Eleutherius. In every succession and in every city there is a continuation in what is proclaimed in the Law that is proclaimed in the Law, the Prophets and the Lord.

## **Saint Cyprian of Carthage**

The Church is one, and as she is one, one cannot be both inside and outside the Church. For if the Church is with the doctrine of (the heretic) Novatian, then she is against (Pope) Cornelius. But if the Church is with Cornelius, who succeeded to his office the bishop (of Rome) Fabian by a lawful ordination, and to whom the Lord, besides the honour of the priesthood bestowed on him the honour of martyrdom, then Novatian is outside the Church; he cannot even be considered as a bishop, since he considered a bishop, since he did not succeed one, and despising the evangelical and apostolic Tradition, he arose on his own account. For we already know that whoever was not ordained in the Church does not belong to her in any way.



## **Firmilianus of Caesarea, Letter to Cyprian (ca. 256).**

*‘So the power to forgive sins was given (by Christ) to the apostles, and to the churches. given (by Christ) to the apostles, and to the churches founded by them, and to the bishops founded by them, and to the bishops who succeeded them when they were being ordained in their stead (qui iis ordinatione vicaria successerunt)’*

## **Irenaeus of Lyons [120-180 A.D.] Adversus Haereses (Book IV, chapter 26)**

*‘It belongs to the presbyters who are in the Church to be obeyed the Church, those who, as I have shown, possess the succession of the apostles succession of the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth, according to infallible charism of truth, according to the Father’s good pleasure. But [it is also proper] to have suspicion of others who depart from the primitive succession, and gather in any place, either as heretics either as heretics of perverse mind, or as swollen and puffed-up schismatics, or as puffed-up and self-complacent schismatics, or also as hypocrites, who act thus for the sake of gain and vainglory. profit and vainglory. For they have all fallen from the truth.’}*

## **Jerome, Letter 14:8 (396)**

*‘Far be it from me to speak against a single one of these clerics who, belonging to the succession that comes down from the apostles, make up by their holy words the Body of Christ, and by whose Body of Christ, and by whose efforts we have become Christians. to be Christians’.*

It is through apostolic succession that the Orthodox Christian Church is the spiritual successor to the original body of believers in Christ which was composed of the Apostles. This succession is manifested through the unbroken succession of its bishops to the apostles.

The continuity of the apostolic succession is significant because of Jesus Christ's promise that the ‘gates of hell’ (Matthew 16:18) will not prevail against the Church, and His Church, and His promise that He Himself will be with the apostles until ‘the apostles until ‘the end of the world’ (Matthew 28:20). According to this interpretation, a complete interruption or the end of such an apostolic succession would mean that these promises were not promises were not fulfilled as would an apostolic succession which, though formally apostolic succession which, though formally intact, abandons the teachings of the Apostles the teachings of the Apostles and their immediate successors; as, for example, the immediate successors; as, for example, if all the bishops of the world were to agree to open bishops of the world were to agree to abrogate the Nicene the Nicene Creed, to repudiate Holy Scripture, or to pass over tradition by tradition in violation of the Holy Canons.

## A glimpse of ecclesiology

According to Orthodox ecclesiology, the Church and Orthodoxy are identified. Undoubtedly the Church is also Orthodox, it is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Body of Christ. of Christ. And as the Christ is One, so also the Church is One. Church is One. That is why there can never be any division in the Church. We only have separation from the Church. That is to say, at specific moments in history, heretics and schismatics separated from the Church schismatics separated from it and thus ceased to be its members. Members.

The Church contains the fullness of truth, but not an abstract truth. abstract truth, but a way of life that heals and saves man from death and makes him saves man from death and makes him 'God through the jaris (grace, uncreated energy)'. On the contrary, heresy is a total or partial denial of the truth, a splitting of it, and thus of truth, a splitting of it, and thus takes on the character and pathology of an ideology. pathology of an ideology. It separates man from the from the form of existence given by God to His Church and kills him spiritually.

Dogmas also contain the transcendental truths of our faith transcendental truths of our faith, they are not conceptions of intellectual concepts, far from being an obscurantism of the obscurantism of the Middle Ages or theological scholasticism. theological scholasticism. They express the experience of the Church. Church. Therefore, when there is a difference in the dogmas, there is undoubtedly also a difference in the way of living. way

of living. And he who underestimates the accuracy of the faith cannot live the fullness of life in Christ.

Christians must accept all that has been revealed by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Not a portion, but the whole. For in the wholeness and integrity of the faith the catholicity-universality and orthodoxy of the Church are saved and maintained.

This explains the struggles, even with blood, of the holy fathers for the preservation of the faith of the Church, as well as their efforts, by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, for the formulation of the ‘terms’ of the Ecumenical Synods. These ‘terms’ mean nothing else than the boundaries, which are boundaries of truth, so that believers can discern the Church as Orthodoxy from heresy.

The heterodox, by denying the fullness of truth, have separated themselves from the Church. Therefore they are heretics. Therefore, they are deprived of the sanctifying jaris (grace, uncreated energy) of the Holy Spirit, and their sacraments are invalid. For, the baptism they perform cannot introduce them into the Church of Christ.

Canon 68 of the Holy Apostles tells us: ‘...for, it is not possible for those baptised and ordained by heretics to be believers or clerics’. And St. Nicodemus the Aghiorite adds: ‘The baptism of all heretics is impious, blasphemous and has no connection with that of the Orthodox’.

The Holy Orthodox Church is the Unity of Faith and Love (St. Ignatius of Antioch). of all (local) Churches, which have preserved Orthodoxy, the tradition of Faith Order, Liturgy and Devotion, as it was confessed in the beginning ‘everywhere, always and by all’.

Although historically its territories have been Eastern, after the Great Schism Eastern, after the Great Schism, the Holy Orthodox Church, emphatically Orthodox Church, emphatically rejects the idea of being a ‘partial’ or partial’ or Eastern expression of the Christian faith. At on the contrary, it confesses its full, universal, catholic faith. She is the Church, One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

The Tradition of Faith: It comes from the Divine Revelation recorded in Sacred Scripture and interpreted by the Church in the continuity of her magisterium; by her councils, Fathers, Doctors and Saints; by her liturgy and by her divinely inspired life as a whole. Of fundamental normative character are the normative and canonical decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, the local Councils, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the witness of the liturgical and iconographic tradition and the universal consensus of doctrines and practices.

Orthodoxy presents itself as an optimistic solution to conflicting ideologies and creeds in the 20th century. The West suffers from a number of dilemmas such as the opposition between nature and grace, works and faith, Scripture and Tradition, Clergy and Laity, etc. Our Church has no such dilemmas and confusions. She emphasises a natural revelation in harmony with revealed grace, faith and good works.

On the other hand, in contrast to the pessimism and false anxiety which is widespread in some regions, Orthodoxy shows its optimism by its conception of the dignity of man, by its doctrine of the deification of human nature under God, by its belief in God's love for

humanity, and man's love for man. The Gospel of our Church is one of resurrection, triumph and victory. In Orthodoxy, man is not alone.

The Christian teaching system is based on God as a supreme being of life and existence, on man as the image and likeness of God, the masterpiece of his creation, and on Christ, who united the divine with the human.

Christian Doctrine is guidance and orientation for man, showing him the true way.

Christianity is a spiritual life system, but this does not imply denial of the body or absolute neglect of material needs. Rather, it is a matter of putting each element in its proper place. Material progress must be properly channelled so that it does not lead to violence, nor to the dehumanisation of man and society, nor to their ruin or spiritual misery, but rather to the progress of the human race, to a healthy and peaceful coexistence, and to the Kingdom of God. Eternity is the foundation of the values that human life requires in order to exist. Human beings must therefore revive eternal values within themselves, for which it is necessary to have faith in them and above all in God.

## **The meaning of bodily and physical fasting**

It can be rooted in one thing: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). Bread itself, from a formal, canonical perspective, is an entirely appropriate food for fasting-it is not meat or a milk product, both of which are excluded in fasting. It is clear that, in a broader sense, bread can be understood as any food. It is another matter whether the food may be fatty and tasty--

clearly undesirable for fasting--or whether it may be frugal and simple; the bread itself undoubtedly corresponds to the latter. But when an Orthodox person puts all five senses into what is permissible and sweet during the fast, preoccupying himself with all kinds of delicacies from the 'Lenten menu', and at the same time even manages to gain weight, something is obviously wrong with the fast. Ascetic fasting is directed towards the spiritual side, which presupposes a partial overcoming of bodily needs! So that the human being, who bears the image and likeness of God, overcomes himself, even in a small way, and for one goal only: to hear and listen to the Word of God better!

The period of fasting is the most appropriate time to try to overcome various kinds of dependencies, and not only on certain types of food. If someone feels within himself not one, but several different hobbies, let him make every effort to overcome what is troubling him most! For as the proverb says, 'if you chase two hares, you will catch neither'.

What is the meaning of the word 'fasting'? On the outward plane fasting involves a physical abstinence from food and drink: without this outward abstinence fasting is not preserved: however, these rules of eating and drinking cannot be understood as an end in themselves because ascetic fasting always has a more relevant inner purpose. Man is the union of a body and a soul, 'a living creature made up of visible and invisible natures', as the book of the Triodion describes it, and our fasting must involve both natures. The tendency to emphasise external rules about food in a legalistic manner, and the opposing tendency to make no sense of such rules and call them unnecessary, are deplorable when

one seeks a true orthodox sense of fasting. In both cases the proper balance of both fasts is necessary.

The first aim of fasting is to make us aware of our dependence on God. If we practise it seriously, abstinence from food during Lent, especially the first few days, means a considerable measure of real hunger as well as a feeling of weariness. The purpose of this is to bring us to an inner sense of contrition, that is, to bring us to the point where Christ's words become a reality 'without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). As we are always eating and drinking, we easily become confident in our abilities and acquire a false sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency. The observance of a physical fast touches this complacency that is building up in our lives. The inner meaning of fasting is best summed up in the threefold practice of prayer, fasting and alms-giving. Divorced from prayer and the reception of the Holy Sacraments and without acts of compassion, our fasting becomes pharisaical or even demonic. This kind of fasting does not lead to contrition or joy but to pride, inner tensions and irritability. Fasting is worthless and can even be counterproductive when it is not combined with prayer. In the Gospel, the devil is cast out not only by fasting but by 'prayer and fasting' (Mt 17:21). The early Christians, the Acts of the Apostles tells us, 'fasted and prayed'. In both the Old and New Testament, fasting is not seen as an end in itself but as an aid to more intense and lively prayer. Fasting is always seen as preparation for a decisive act or for a direct encounter with God. In the same way our Lord fasted forty days in the desert as a preparation for the beginning of his public ministry. 'Then Jesus was led up in the wilderness by the spirit to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted



forty days and forty nights, at the last He was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him: 'If thou art the son of God, command that the stones these loaves be made.' And he answered and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Then the devil took him with him into the holy city, and set him on the eaves of the sanctuary, and said to him, 'If you are the son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written that he will command his angels to take you away, and they will carry you away in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, 'Again, it is written, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God". Again the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said to him, 'These things I will give you all, if you will bow down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, 'Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'. Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him'. (Mt 4:1-11), we also fast like this. Mission in the Orthodox Church was inseparable from the lives of those who preached, for example, throughout the Christian East, monastic communities were agents of evangelism. This applies to the early Christian missions, even in fourth and fifth century Ethiopia, to the Byzantine missions of the eighth and ninth centuries and to many of the Russian missions in later periods. Their success was not the work of well-paid missions on a contract basis, preaching something and then going home, but of men who loved God and the people to whom they wanted to teach their faith. This witness of brotherly love is the real solution for

our day and age in which we constantly see the failure of organised ‘professional’ Christianity.

Precisely because mission is inseparable from life, it is also inseparable from the progress of theological thought, Christian thought and life. The missionary, the theologian, the Christian must then understand what the Holy Fathers taught that the Lord himself can proclaim the Good News in a way that is clear to people all over the world, in their own time.

Finally, a fundamental aspect of how the Orthodox Church understands mission was expressed by the great Russian saint St. Seraphim of Sarov: ‘Save yourself and around you thousands will be saved’. I think that, to some degree, personally, the experience of coming closer to the knowledge of God, to the Christian faith, is the key to a Christian approach to mission.

## **Paradise and Inferno (Hell).**

The general teaching of the holy fathers of the Church is that paradise and hell do not exist according to God, but according to man. It is true that both paradise and hell are found as a way of life, but it is not God who made them. It is very clear in the patristic tradition that there are two ways, but God Himself is paradise for saints, and He Himself is hell for sinners.

This relates very much to the teachings of the fathers on the reconciliation of man to God. Nowhere in the Bible does it speak of the reconciliation of God to man, but it mentions that Christ reconciled man to God. Likewise, the entire patristic tradition shows that God was never against man, but on the contrary, man turned against God by not participating with Him and not being in communion with Him. Thus man makes God his enemy, but God never makes man his enemy. Man, through the commission of his sins, sees God in an image of anger and enmity.

St. Isaac the Syrian, who speaks about what is paradise, and what is hell. When he refers to Paradise, he says that it is the love of God; and it is a normal thing that when we talk about love, we refer mainly to the uncreated forces of God. He writes: 'Paradise is the love of God, where there is the enjoyment of all blessings'. But also when he mentions hell, he says more or less the same thing; that hell is the scourge of love, and he writes: 'I also assure you that those who are punished in hell are being scourged with the lash of love; for is there more bitterness or more sorrow than that which the pain of love gives?'

Hell then is the torment of God's love. Moreover, according to what St. Isaac says, the pain that occurs in the heart because of sin against the love of God 'is more grievous than any fear of punishment.' It is a real punishment when we reject and oppose the love of another. It is horrible to be loved while acting inappropriately. By comparing that with God's love, we can understand the torment of hell. This is also related to what St. Isaac says, that it is a painful thing for a person to think that 'sinners in hell are separated from the love of God.'

According to the interpretation of Theophylact of Bulgaria, this is related to the nature of man and not to the work of God. St. Theophylact says: ‘Just as the sun softens the wax, but hardens the clay, not by preference, but because of the difference between wax and clay. So also God mentions that He hardened Pharaoh's heart of clay.’ So the grace of God, which is His love, which is going to shine upon all, is going to work according to man's spiritual condition.

St. Basil the Great adds to this opinion. For he explains the words of the psalm: ‘φωνὴ Κυρίου διακόπτοντος φλόγα πυρός’ ‘The voice of the Lord divides, he cuts out flames of fire’ (Psalm 29:7), and says that this miracle occurred with the three young men in the fiery furnace. In this case it was the fire divided in two, for it was burning for those outside, and it was cool for the three young men as if they were in the shade of a tree. St. Basil notes that the fire, which was designed by God for the devil and his angels ‘is cut by the voice of God.’ Fire has two forces: that which burns and that which illuminates, and this is what makes fire, burns and gives light. Those who are worthy of fire, feel by its burning nature, and those who are worthy of light, enjoy by its illuminating nature. Thus St. Basil ends his explanation by saying in a very expressive way: ‘The voice of the Lord divides and cuts out flames of fire, and in this cutting and dividing, the fire of hell is left without light, and the light of peace remains without burning’.

Paradise and hell are not two different places. This is idolatrous. They are two situations or modes that arise from the same uncreated source and are lived as two different as two

distinct experiences. Or rather, it is the same experience lived differently by man, according to his inner conditions. This experience is the vision, the expectation of Christ in the uncreated light, in His uncreated glory. From the Second Coming and throughout all men will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. And then ‘and they that have done good shall go forth into the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment’ (Jn 5:29). Before the Christ men are separated, ‘And when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. (Matthew 25:31-33).

In the light of the above, it is good to offer a short definition of what the Holy Orthodox Church is. It is the right doctrine, contained in Sacred Scripture without adding or subtracting anything, in Tradition and in the 7 Ecumenical Councils. It is the doctrine taught and preached by the Orthodox Church to glorify God and save souls, according to the will of Christ. He is Orthodox who follows the doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. More precisely, he who follows the right doctrine of Jesus Christ.

The sources from which we draw our Orthodox faith are two: Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. The revelation made by God to man as to what he must believe and practice in order to please God and obtain his eternal salvation is found only in these two sources. This

revelation is interpreted and taught only by the Church, for it is so established by Our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is a proof of assurance that we are in the truth, for Jesus Christ promised His assistance to His apostles and His Church. The Bible is the word of God, revealed to man through the patriarchs, prophets and apostles, and written in it.

## Sin

Orthodoxy's approach to sin and how to deal with it shuns the perception of Western 'legalism'. Strictly following the rules without it being a motivation of the heart does not help the believer in his salvation. Sin is not fundamentally about transgressing a divine law; rather, it is a label attributed to any behaviour that 'misses the mark', i.e. fails to meet the higher goal of conforming to God's nature.

In the Orthodox tradition, therefore, sin is not seen as a reprehensible stain on the soul that must be removed, but rather as a pervasive disease or failure to achieve the goal of truly human life, fulfilling our divine design and function as a creation in the image of God. Sin, therefore, does not merely imply the guilt of disobeying a commandment, but rather the impetus to become something other than what we really are. Because each person's experience is unique, conquering sinful habits requires individual attention and correction. The ultimate goal of this salvific process is to become divinised, to reflect the Divine likeness by becoming Christ-like in both behaviour and thought.

A traditional practice of Orthodoxy is, as in other apostolic Churches, to have a spiritual director and guide to whom one confesses and who deals with sin on an individual basis. An experienced and spiritually mature spiritual director (geronta (Greek), starets (Russian)) will know how and when to apply rigour in dealing with sin and when to administer mercy; it is this director who directs our steps through daily life, obedience being the great task of ‘spiritual children’.

Confession is the expression of the penitence done beforehand in the soul. Man repents in the depths of his being, and this stimulates him to full confession. St. John the Evangelist says: ‘If we say: “In the same way, in truth, even these also dreaming, they defile the flesh, but they reject the sovereignty, but they blaspheme the glories; when Michael the archangel contended with the devil about the body of Moses, he did not dare to interpose blasphemy, but said: ‘Be unbelieved, Lord’ (1Jn 1: 8-9).

In the early Church, confession was practiced before the whole assembly; but later, for pastoral reasons, following an order of the patriarch of Constantinople, Nectarius, the communal practice of confession was diminished in that city, and gradually in the other patriarchates; and it was definitively concluded that the confession of sins should be made before the priest in an individual manner, because the presbyter, besides hearing the Confession, guides and instructs in a way that makes the confession a renewal or prolongation of Holy Baptism. ‘I venture to say that the spring of tears that arises after Baptism is even more important than Baptism itself: we, who received Baptism as infants, defile it again; however, by means of tears we restore it to its original purity’, says St. John

Climacus.

Confession is not to be seen in the perspective of punishment and justification, but rather as relief and healing. Man alone is unable to achieve salvation (justification) by his own effort - whether it is called 'confession' or by any other name - so penance is never a means of atonement but a medicine, and confession is a surgical operation that seeks to bring the sick person to full healing. It is a question, then, of positive and not negative attitudes: not of breaking down the wall that separates the sinner from God, but of building a bridge that connects him with Him.

## What is the foundation of the Orthodox faith?

A compendium of our Orthodox Faith is found in the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which lists our main beliefs. We also find a magnificent compendium of our entire Orthodox Theology in the Holy and Divine Liturgy, which is chanted in the language of the people and which has served as the best preaching throughout the centuries.

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*I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.*

*I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Father before all ages: God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not created, of the same nature as the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of*



*Mary, the Virgin, and became man; And for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father and is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the prophets.*

*I believe in the Church, which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.*

*I confess that there is one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

*I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.*

*Amen.*

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In these twelve points our faith is summed up, the teachings contained therein arise from Revelation, that is, the manifestation of an unknown truth. Revelation is the illumination of the understanding. Revelation has three phases or manifestations which form three degrees of supernatural revelation: 1) primitive revelation: this is the revelation made by God to the first fathers and patriarchs and handed down by tradition to their descendants. It is also called patriarchal. Later Moses recorded it in writing in the Pentateuch; 2) the Mosaic revelation: this is the revelation made to the Israelite people through Moses and the other prophets. It lasted until the promulgation of Christianity; 3) Christian revelation: it is the revelation made by God to mankind through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Divine revelation was spread among men in two ways: 1) By oral transmission from father to son, known as Sacred Tradition; 2) By Sacred Scripture, known as the Bible. By

Sacred Tradition we must understand everything that our forefathers passed on to their children concerning the true faith, the mysteries, etc.; these, in turn, told these truths to their descendants, and so it was continued, reaching down to our own day in this way. All true believers, united by the Sacred Tradition of the Faith, in perfect union and inheritance, according to the Divine Laws, form the Holy Church, which is justly the eternal preserver of the treasure of the Sacred Tradition: ‘And if it tarry long, that thou mayest know how it is right in the house of God to converse; which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ‘(1 Tim. 3:15). St. Irenaeus says: ‘Truth is not to be sought in other ways, since it is so easy to find it in the bosom of the Church. For, like a very rich treasure-box, the Apostles had deposited in all its fullness all that pertains to the Truth; anyone who desires it can obtain the Water of Life’ (Treatise Against Heresies - Book 3:c. 4).

The earliest means of disseminating Divine Revelation was Sacred Tradition. From the time of the first man, Adam, until Moses, there was no Holy Scripture. The Saviour Himself, Our Lord Jesus Christ, transmitted His divine teachings to the Apostles by words and examples and not by books. In the same way the Holy Apostles proceeded in the beginning, spreading the Truths verbally, thus building the foundations of the Holy Church. The necessity of the existence of Sacred Tradition is obvious, for a much larger number of people can profit from it than from the Holy Scriptures, since not everyone knows how to benefit from it.

The first and fundamental truth of Christianity is the existence of one eternal and infinite God, the creator of all that exists: the angels, the world and mankind. He is the uncreated

and first cause of all things. God is one in essence, but triune in person. In God there are three divine persons, distinct as persons, but possessing the same essence or nature: Father-Son-Holy Spirit. Their explanation is a mystery unfathomable to human reason, but this mystery is not in opposition to reason itself. The Son, the second person, is born of the Father, and from the Father also proceeds the Holy Spirit, but each is God. God created man in the earthly Paradise, totally happy, composed of a mortal and material body, and of a spiritual and immortal soul. Every human soul is created directly by God.

The drama of sin, described in the first chapters of Genesis and interpreted by St. Paul and by the Fathers of the ancient Church, gives the solution to the enigma of Pain and Death, as it is found in man, yesterday as today. Adam and Eve sinned and this sin brought about their death, as well as the death of all their descendants. The Fathers of the East, who read St. Paul in the original Greek, never tried to prove the responsibility of Adam's descendants for the sin of their ancestors: they only stated that all men inherited corruption and death by inheritance, and that they all committed sin. They interpreted this de facto state, inherited from Adam, as a slavery to the Devil who, after the fault of Adam and Eve, exercises over mankind a tyranny, usurped, unjust and merciless. God, on the contrary, throughout the history of Israel sought to lead men towards salvation by preparing them progressively to freely and consciously receive the Messiah, the Deliverer. After the 'fullness of time,' this Messiah, the very Word of God, incarnate of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit - out of the corrupt inheritance of Adam - has defeated the Devil on the Cross, has risen on the third day and has restored to mankind life.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, God as the Father and the Son, in whom is the sanctification of souls through His 7 gifts: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of God (Holiness). ‘And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father and is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who spoke through the prophets’ (Creed). The Holy Spirit was visibly manifested in the form of a dove at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River and on the day of Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire upon the Apostles. The Holy Spirit will remain with the Church to guide and assist her in the way of truth and holiness.

The Life-giving God, the Holy Spirit, and His origin from the Father, manifests Himself in the Church and in souls through His seven gifts. To Him is due all the work of sanctification of souls, and without which no sanctification is possible.

Jesus Christ, son of God, true God and true man, as God consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit, neither made nor created, begotten from all eternity, proceeding from the Father as the eternal Word. Eternal and equal to the Father, eternal and equal to the Holy Spirit, eternal and equal in essence, distinct in person, born as man in space, in time and in a certain place, by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin Mary, without the work of any man. Identical in essence to the Father and the Holy Spirit, distinct in person, God as well as Man, infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, immortal and mortal, all in one person.

The greatest proof of the divinity of Christ and of the truth of His doctrine and of His Church is His resurrection from the dead on the third day, which is amply attested and proven in the Holy Gospels. After His resurrection He was seen by the Apostles, disciples and many people. Forty days after His resurrection He ascended into heaven by His own power, body and soul, from where He is to come in glory to judge the living and the dead at the end of the world. St. Paul tells us: ‘Our faith is vain unless Christ is risen’.

## The Holy Spirit

Orthodoxy proclaims that the Father is the eternal source of the Godhead, from whom the Son is eternally begotten, and also from whom the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds. Unlike the Roman (Papist) Church misnamed Catholic and Western Christianity in general, the Orthodox Church does not adopt the use of the Filioque (‘and the Son’) in describing the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Filioque was first mentioned at the Third Council of Toledo in 589 and was added by the Catholic Church to the Creed in the 11th century. It is believed that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father, as Christ says in John 15:26 ‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me’, and not from the Father and the Son, as the Catholic and Protestant Churches claim.

## A Word on Patristics

Orthodoxy interprets truth based on three witnesses: the consensus of the holy fathers of the Church; the ongoing teaching of the Holy Spirit guiding the life of the Church through the nous, or mind of the Church (also called the ‘Universal Consciousness of the Church’); and the praxis of the Church (including, among other things, asceticism, liturgy, hymnography and iconography).

Some of the greatest theologians in the history of the church come from the fourth century, including the Cappadocian Fathers and the Three Holy Hierarchs. However, the Orthodox do not consider the ‘patristic era’ to be a thing of the past, but continues in an unbroken succession of enlightened teachers (the saints, especially those who have left us theological writings) from the Apostles to the present day.

## Holy Scripture

Many modern Christians regard the Bible and its interpretation as the sole authority for establishing their beliefs about the world and their salvation. From the orthodox point of view, the Bible represents those texts approved by the church for the purpose of conveying the most important parts of what was already believed. The Church more or less accepted the pre-existing Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures handed down to them by the Jews; but the New Testament texts were written for members or congregations of the Church that already existed. These texts were not considered universally canonical until the church revised, edited, accepted and ratified them in 368.

The Greeks, who had a highly sophisticated and philosophical language, always understood that certain sections of Scripture, while containing moral lessons and complex truths, need not necessarily be interpreted literally. The orthodox also understand that a particular passage can be interpreted on many different levels simultaneously. However, interpretation is not a matter of personal opinion (2 Peter 1:20). For this reason, we rely on the consensus of the Holy Fathers to provide reliable guidance for the accurate interpretation of Scripture.

Our Orthodox Church is a strongly biblical church. A large part of the Divine Office is composed of direct Scripture portions (Psalms, readings) or allusions to Scripture passages or themes (hymnography such as that contained in the Octoechos, Triodion, Pentecostarion, etc.) The entire Psalter is read in the course of a week (twice during Great Lent). The entire New Testament (with the exception of the Book of Revelation) is read during the course of the year, and numerous Old Testament passages are read at Vespers and other services.

The Gospel is considered an icon of Christ, and is placed in a position of honour on the Holy Table (altar). The Gospel Book is traditionally not covered with leather (the skin of a dead animal) because the Word of God is considered to be life-giving. Traditionally the Gospel is covered with gold or cloth.

## **Our beloved Mother of God and of us all**

Theotokos (Ancient Greek: Θεοτόκος) is a Greek word meaning Mother of God (literally, ‘she who gave birth to one who was God’). Theotokos is the title given to Mary

by the early Christian Church in reference to her divine motherhood, a title that was dogmatically defined at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

The Council of Ephesus was held between 22 June and 16 July 431 in Ephesus, an ancient Greek port in modern-day Turkey, and is considered the third of the first seven ecumenical councils.

The main text of the Council's decision is as follows: 'For we do not say that the nature of the Word, transformed, became flesh; but neither do we say that it was transmuted into the whole man, composed of soul and body; but rather, that the Word, having united with Himself, according to hypostasis or person, the animated flesh of the rational soul, became man in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner, and was called the son of man, not by will or pleasure alone, but not by the assumption of the person alone, and that the natures which are united in true unity are distinct, but that from both there results one Christ and Son; not as if the difference of the natures were destroyed by the union, but because the divinity and humanity rather constitute for us one Lord and Christ and Son by the ineffable and mysterious concurrence in unity...For He was not first born a common man, of the holy Virgin, and then the Word descended upon Him; but, united from the womb, He is said to have submitted to fleshly birth, as one who makes his own the birth of the flesh itself.... 'In this way [the Holy Fathers] had no objection to calling the Blessed Virgin the Mother of God.

The Solemnity of St. Mary, Mother of God (Theotokos) began in the Eastern Churches around the year 500.



Our Lady is also called Panagia, the ‘All Holy One,’ indicating her closeness to God by her obedience.

A deeper understanding of the mystery of the Theotokos deepens the understanding of the mystery of Christ, of the Church, and of the vocation of humanity. With regard to Mary, everything is relative to Christ; only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery totally clear. On the other hand, it can generally be said that knowing Mary illuminates our appreciation of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.

The paucity of theological reflection may seem to some to be a deficiency in Byzantine theology. How can the Byzantine Church, which never prays to God or Jesus Christ without, at the same time, also addressing its prayers to Mary, and which constantly glorifies her as the one who ‘...is more honourable than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim...’, neglect theological work with regard to her?

In the Byzantine mentality, this apparent absence of theological study and reflection is seen as an integral part of the ‘mystery of Mary’ in the experience of the Church. Byzantine scholars question whether theology as a rational investigation of the truths of faith is adequate to transpose into precise terms the actual content of such a mystery. Perhaps the proper place of Mariology is in liturgy and prayer, that is, in worship.

In Eastern Christianity, worship and liturgy are paramount. Liturgy is not seen as a community action. It is the procession or entrance into the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God. It is the meeting place between this world and the fully realised Kingdom of God. Worship is not the commemoration of a past event; it is participation in the very

events of salvation, for, although these occurred historically, they also take place beyond the category of time.

In the Byzantine liturgy we find four main Mariological expressions: Marian liturgical prayers, Marian feasts, Marian iconography, and paraliturgical Marian piety.

Each cycle of prayers concludes with a special prayer addressed to Mary. For example, the group of hymns called *stijiras*, in the structure of the daily offices, always conclude with the *theotokio*, which follows the doxology: ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages’. This rule applies to every set of liturgical prayers: daily, weekly, and the annual cycle, and also to the saintly cycle. Whatever the theme of the liturgical celebration, the seal and the last word will be for our beloved Theotokos.

## **Monasticism.**

To be a monk is to live the way of the Lord, to climb Calvary every minute, every second of every day. It is to offer all that one lives for the souls of those who do not know the way of salvation and who live ‘enjoying a life’ that only leads them to perdition. It is to suffer with joy and weep with a contrite soul for one's own sins and for the sins of those who have chosen to follow the path of pleasure and do not know God and His Love. To be a monk is to live in total surrender, to live the Lord's Prayer and to feel the pain of the world.

To be a monk is to fast with the joy of offering to God that small sacrifice for a humanity lost in the false gods that the devil gives them.

To be a monk is to live while dying, certain that resurrection is the great prize that awaits the chosen ones, to look death in the eye, because it is our friend.

To be a monk is to live in the fear of God, to know that we are sinful filth and that if we do not repent at every moment when the end comes we will be cast into eternal fire.

To be a monk is to live for, by and with Christ, embracing His Holy Cross and certain that only self-denial will lead us to humility, and humility is the first step on the ladder to the Kingdom.

To be a monk is the greatest gift the Lord can give us.

One of the great treasures of the Orthodox Church is monasticism. Although it was born in Egypt, it soon took root in the Byzantine Christian communities, so that many Byzantine monasteries were erected in the early centuries, especially in Palestine and Asia Minor.

Orthodox monasticism is based on the ancient rules of St. Pachomius and St. Basil. To this fundamental and basic outline is added the foundational charter of each monastery. This charter describes the customs and practices of each monastic nucleus.

The orthodox monk observes very strict schedules of prayer, liturgical celebrations and work, while still practising charity and helping others in most cases, but completely devoted to chastity, poverty and obedience. In some cases there is a stricter visiting regime, although not entirely enclosed, as for example in the monasteries of Mount Athos. Individual monks and nuns may also choose to withdraw completely from the common life

of the monastery as hermits, in prayer, fasting and penance, but always under the custody of the abbot and their confessor.

In addition, everyone has his or her own tasks and duties in the life of the monastery, carrying out various tasks for the common subsistence.

The clothing is black, symbolising their death to this world, and meat is missing from the recipe book of many monasteries, although there is no lack of generosity and hospitality for anyone who visits them.

In Orthodox monasticism, art was the exclusive work of monks and nuns. Generally very crowded even today, monasteries have always been a strong nucleus and workshop for writing, painting and embroidery, as well as housing theological seminaries, boys' and girls' schools and homes for the sick and/or elderly.

Orthodox monasticism has, and has always had, a single monastic body, according to the spirit of the rules of St. Basil. In contrast to Western monasticism, where there are various monastic orders, in Eastern monasticism there is unity, although there are many different dedications among the monks and monasteries, depending on the particular circumstances of each monastery.

**The grades of monasticism in the Holy Orthodox Church** refer to the stages through which an Orthodox monk or nun passes in his or her religious vocation.

Unlike Western Christianity, in which different religious orders and societies arose, each with their own rites of profession, the Orthodox Church has only one type of monasticism. The profession of monastics is known as tonsure (referring to the ritual cutting of the

monastic's hair that takes place during the rite) which, at one time, was considered a Sacred Mystery (sacrament). The Rite of Tonsure is printed in the Eucologion (in ecclesiastical Slavonic: Trebnik), as are the other Sacred Mysteries and rites performed as needed, such as funerals, blessings and exorcisms.

Those who wish to join a monastery begin their lives as novices (Greek: δόκιμος, dókimos, lit. 'one under obedience'). Once the candidate arrives at the monastery and lives as a guest for no less than three days, the abbot or abbess may bless the candidate to become a novice. There is no formal ceremony for a novice to be clothed in the habit; they simply receive permission to wear the habit of a novice. In the Eastern monastic tradition, novices may or may not wear a black inner cassock.

If the novice continues on the path to becoming a monk or nun, he or she is clothed with the first degree of monasticism in a rite in which he or she receives the tonsure and is called Rasophoros (Greek: ῥασοφόρος, rasoforos; lit. 'one who wears a tunic or cassock'). Although no formal vows are taken at this point, the candidate is normally required to affirm his or her commitment to persevere in the monastic life. The abbot performs the tonsure, cutting a small amount of hair from four points on the head, forming a cross. Novices receive the outer cassock.

The next level for Eastern monks takes place some years after the first tonsure, when the abbot feels that the monk has reached an appropriate level of discipline, dedication and humility. It is called stavroforo (Greek: σταυροφόρος, stavroforos; lit. 'one who carries the cross'). This degree is also known as the Little Scheme or the Lesser Scheme, and is

considered a ‘marriage commitment’ to the Great Scheme. At this stage, the nun or monk takes formal vows of stability of place, chastity, obedience and poverty.

Monks and nuns whose abbots feel they have reached a high level of spiritual excellence reach the final stage, called the Great Scheme (in Greek, μεγάλοςχημος, megaloschimos). The tonsure of a schema monk (schemamonk) or schema nun (schemamonja) follows the same format as that of the stavrophoros, and he takes the same vows, and is tonsured in the same manner. In addition to all the garments worn by the stavrophor, on reaching this degree they are given the analavos, which is the article of monastic vesture emblematic of the Grand Scheme. The analavi themselves are sometimes called the ‘Great Schema’. They fall over the shoulders and hang down the front and back, the front part being somewhat longer, and are embroidered with the instruments of the Passion and the Trisagion.

### ***Saint Basil the Great***

St Basil the Great (c. 330 - 379) is one of the most influential figures in both Byzantine and Western monasticism. Before forming his own monastic community, he visited Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria, observing monastic life and learning from both the positive and negative examples he encountered on his journey. He later wrote his Asketikon for the members of the monastery he founded around 356 AD on the banks of the Iris River in Cappadocia. St. Basil's work included two sets of monastic regulations: the Lesser Asketikon and the Greater Asketikon. There is a degree of correspondence between Basil

and St. Gregory Nazianzen that gives a better understanding of the type of monastic life he established.

Before embracing the monastic state St. Basil the Great made a careful study of monasticism in Egypt, Palestine, Celesiria, and Mesopotamia. The result was a decided preference for the cenobitic life. He founded several monasteries in Pontus, one of which he himself presided over for a time, and very soon monasteries modelled on his own spread throughout the East. His monks gathered for ‘psalmody’ and ‘genuflections’ seven times a day, according to the ‘Septies in die laudem dixi tibi’ (Ps. 119(118),164); at midnight (‘Media nocte surgebam’- Ibid., 62), in the evening, in the morning and at noon (Ps.55(54),18), at the third hour, at the hour of Pentecost, and at the ninth, the sacred hour of the Passion. To make the total of seven, the midday prayer was divided into two parts separated by the communal meal.

St. Basil's monastic ideal is set forth in a collection of his writings known as the ‘Asceticon’, or ‘Ascetica’, the most important of which are the ‘Regulae fusius tractatae’, a series of answers to questions, numbering fifty-five, and the ‘Regulae brevius tractatae’, in which three hundred and thirteen questions are briefly answered. It is not to be supposed that the ‘Regulae’ form a rule, although it would possibly be a good idea to constitute one out of them. They are answers to questions which would naturally arise among people who are already in possession of a framework of customs or traditions. Sometimes they deal with practical matters, but not infrequently they deal with questions concerning the spiritual life.

St. Basil's authority was equal to that of St. Anthony among the leaders of Palestinian monasticism; yet they took it as a matter of course that the life in the Laura was the most perfect, although under normal circumstances one should not enter it before having received apprenticeship in a monastery. The paradox is not as great as it may seem at first sight. The inhabitant of the Laura was under the rule of an archimandrite or abbot and thus was not exposed to the dangers of the purely eremitical state.

Monasticism had thus become so much a part of the life of the Church that it was legislated upon especially at the Council of Chalcedon. Monasteries could not be erected without the permission of the bishop; the monks were to receive due honour, but they were not to mix with the affairs of Church or State. They were to be subject to the bishop, etc. (Can. IV). Clerics and monks were not to serve in war or to embrace a secular life (Can. VII). Monasteries were not to be secularised (Can. XXIV).

### ***St. Theodore the Studite***

As a rule, monks enjoyed the favour of emperors and patriarchs, but during the iconoclastic persecution they suffered terribly for the orthodoxy of their faith; the position they took on this aroused the wrath of the imperial powers and many were martyred for the faith. Monasticism itself (and not simply individual monks) became the target of heretical emperors. Many of them were exiled, and some took advantage of this condemnation to reorganise their religious life in Italy. Ironically, St John Damascene, who lived in a Muslim nation, was independent of the iconoclastic emperors and was thus able to defend the faith from afar.



The second half of the 8th century seems to have been a time of widespread decline; around 800, St Theodore the Studite (c. 758 - c. 826), who was to be one of the most creative thinkers in Eastern monasticism, became abbot of the monastery of St John the Baptist, called 'Studion' (founded in Constantinople in the 5th century). Theodore set out to reform his monastery and restore the spirit of St. Basil to its original vigour. To achieve this, and to give permanence to his reforms, he saw that a more practical code of laws regulating the details of daily life was needed to supplement the teachings of St Basil. He therefore drew up constitutions, later codified, which became the rule of life in the monastery of Studion, and which gradually spread from there to monasteries in the rest of the Eastern Roman Empire. At the same time, the monastery was an active centre of intellectual and artistic life and a model that exerted considerable influence on monastic practices in the East. To this day, the Asketikon of Basil and the Constitutions of Theodore, together with the holy canons of the Councils, constitute the main part of the Greek and Slavic monastic tradition.

Monastic life on Mount Athos began in the late 10th century with the help of Emperor Basil the Macedonian and the mount became the largest and most celebrated monastic centre of any in the Eastern Roman Empire. The peninsula is in fact an independent monastic republic, governed by twenty 'Sovereign Monasteries', with their own elected president (protos) and governing council. Mount Athos is the site of countless priceless cultural and spiritual treasures, and is considered to this day the capital of Orthodox monasticism.

## Priesthood.

The Orthodox Church may ordain married men. Only monks are subject to celibacy and monastic vows. However, celibates can no longer marry after ordination, and bishops are elected only from among monks.

Through the sacrament of holy orders, the bishop performs an ordination to the priesthood. But this requires the consent of the whole people of God, so that, at one point in the service, the congregation acclaims the ordination with the cry of ‘Axios’ (‘He is worthy!’).

If a single, unmarried or celibate man is ordained, he must remain celibate in order to retain his service. A celibate priest is not necessarily the same as clerics who are monastics, since celibacy does not automatically imply monasticism, although orthodox monasticism denotes a call to celibacy. A monk-priest is called a hieromonk.

The sacrament of Holy Orders has three stages: diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate. Only bishops must be celibate, while priests and deacons may be married men, but only if their marriage predates their ordination to the diaconate. They are not allowed to remarry if they are widowed.

Orthodox priests are grouped according to a hierarchy: the patriarchs, archbishops or metropolitans are at the head; then come the bishops (from Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*, i.e. overseer, inspector), the priests (from Greek *πρεσβυτέρους*), finally the deacons (from Greek

διακόνους, helper or assistant). The hierarchy also includes subdeacons, lectors and cantors without a specific sacrament.

Women cannot be ordained, but the wife of an Orthodox priest is a παπαδία ( papadía ) in Greek and a попова or поповка ( popova or popovka ) in the Slavic languages.

Orthodox priests wear the cassock, epitrakelion and kamilavkion (from the Greek καμιλαύκιον: cylindrical headdress, usually black in colour) when serving in the hierarchy.

It is the doctrine of the Church that the priesthood should strive to fulfil the grace given to it by the gift of the ‘laying on of hands’ as perfectly as possible. But the Church teaches that the reality and efficacy of the Church's sacraments, administered by priests, do not depend on personal virtue, but on the presence of Christ at work in His Church through the Holy Spirit. As with the bishops, it is Christ, through his chosen ministers, who acts as teacher, good shepherd, forgiver and healer. It is Christ forgiving sins and healing the physical, mental and spiritual ills of humanity. The priest is an icon of Christ.

Priests normally exercise the function of pastors of parishes, a function normally performed by bishops in earlier times. They are rectors of local congregations of Christians. They preside at the celebration of the liturgy and teach, preach, counsel and exercise the ministries of forgiveness and healing.

## **On canonicity**

### **Orthodox Jurisdictions without communion with Constantinople**

These are Jurisdictions which have their communion interrupted with most or all of the misnamed ‘World of Official Orthodoxy’, first of all, they do not recognise the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, whom they accuse of holding a neo-papist or Franciscan position, or of holding modernist positions which compromise the ‘orthodoxy’ of the Church. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, in turn, refuses to recognise these Churches as canonical, even if they scrupulously comply with canonical provisions; for this reason, it often recognises the validity of the Mysteries and Orders dispensed by these jurisdictions.

Many of these Jurisdictions are not in communion with each other, and operate in isolation from the Orthodox World, while others, such as the Synod in Resistance, try to federate or to strengthen ties with other jurisdictions, as is also the case with the Synod of Milan, or the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile.

The misuse of canonicity must be treated as a very important point, because it is very often used by some Orthodox Churches: the self-proclaimed ‘CANONICAL’ or ‘OFFICIAL’ ones, to discredit other Orthodox Churches which are firmly anchored in the Faith and in the apostolic succession, but whose presence is embarrassing to them for

reasons that affect their particular interests. For this reason such Churches try to ‘stigmatise’ the Churches which respect the Holy Canons with the epithet of ‘NON-CANONICAL’ (giving it an implicit meaning of ‘FALSE CHURCH’) without realising, or else realising, that what they are saying is a great mistake. Those brethren should first explain what the concepts of ‘CANONICAL’ or ‘NON-CANONICAL’ mean to them, and what is the reference point taken to define canonicity.

The word ‘CANONICITY’, derives from the term canon, therefore, ‘canonicity’ alludes, as we all know, to what is in conformity with the Holy Canons (the apostolic canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils). There are two types of canons: 1- Canons that deal with matters of faith, which are dogmatic pronouncements, and 2- Canons that deal with disciplinary and administrative matters. So when a Church observes the aforementioned canons perfectly, it is absolutely canonical. The only canon that does not really exist is the one that gives the right to an Orthodox Church to define another Orthodox Church as NON-CANONICAL; however, for some Churches to attribute such a right to themselves is completely different, an absolutely anti-canonical matter.

Precisely the so-called ‘Canonical Churches’ in the West (and not only there) create absolutely irregular situations with regard to the observance of the aforementioned canons, for example: they have bishops residing in Western cities with titles of episcopal sees in the East, in ‘cohabitation’ with one or more bishops belonging to other ‘canonical’ jurisdictions. These are thus contradicting the canon which forbids a bishop to reside outside his Eparchy, and what is even worse, contradicting those canons which forbid

overlapping jurisdictions. Another example is the famous ‘Episcopal Conferences’ on the basis of which canon were they created?

More such examples could be cited, to name but one: according to canon 36 (a rather forgotten canon) of the Council of Trullo, called the ‘quinisext’, a council that all so-called canonical Churches must or should observe on the basis of their self-defined canonicity, it holds that the patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches that arose or had been recognised from the year 692 onwards were NOT CANONICAL. Those Churches violate the famous canon that defines the principle of the ‘Pentarchy’; in fact, the canonically correct way to define the existence of another patriarchate outside the ‘Pentarchy’ would be the necessary call for an Ecumenical Council, while history teaches us that all the Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches were born after the Great Schism (Moscow, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Georgia to name but a few).

## Content Index

Foreword.....	1
The Schism of 1504, some history.....	3
Some ancient heresies.....	21
Apostolic Succession.....	28
Foundation of Apostolic Succession.....	28
What do the holy fathers tell us?.....	30
St. Ignatius of Antioch.....	30
Eusebius of Caesarea.....	30
Saint Cyprian of Carthage.....	31
Firmilianus of Caesarea, Letter to Cyprian (ca. 256).....	32
Irenaeus of Lyons [120-180 A.D.] Adversus Haereses (Book IV, chapter 26).....	32
Jerome, Letter 14:8 (396).....	33
A glimpse of ecclesiology.....	34
The meaning of bodily and physical fasting.....	37
Paradise and Inferno (Hell).....	41
Sin.....	45
What is the foundation of the Orthodox faith?.....	47
The Holy Spirit.....	52
A Word on Patristics.....	53

Holy Scripture.....	.53
Our beloved Mother of God and of us all.....	.54
Monasticism.....	.57
Saint Basil the Great.....	.61
St. Theodore the Studite.....	.63
Priesthood.....	.65
On canonicity.....	.67
Orthodox Jurisdictions without communion with Constantinople.....	.67
Closing words.....	.72
About the author.....	.73



## Closing words

I have tried, in these few pages, to give my vision of some theological and life aspects of my beloved Holy Orthodox Church. The beauty of it is that, in Orthodoxy, Theology is life and therefore, life is Theology.

The coherence between what is preached and what is practised is something that has an impact on this way of living the faith. God gave me the gift of discovering this source of grace when I had left the papist church, thanks to the study of papist theology I found the way, which, I am certain, is the one that Christ bequeathed to us for our salvation. It is not a simple path to follow if one is comfortable and lives the faith only on certain days, because it is a permanent climb to Calvary, accepting that without God's help we are nothing.

To be Orthodox is to live the Divine Liturgy every day; always keeping death in mind, but, without fear, as a reminder that our struggle against sin must be permanent so as not to hurt or offend Our Lord.

It is sad to see how some churches have united under the misnamed ecumenism and pretend to form a church of men alien to what Our Lord Jesus Christ left us, leading the faithful to fall into error and heresy, abandoning the teachings of the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rejecting tradition and outlawing it, thus turning their church into a modern Sodom.

To God, Triune and One, be all honour and glory now and forever.

## About the author



Bishop Basilio (K.K. Salvador Gandulfo T.), belongs to a Synod of the Old Greek Calendar, also known under the acronym GOC, studied Orthodox Theology at the Ateneo San Marcos and Roman Catholic theology, with 69 years old he has as a self-imposed mission to bring Orthodoxy to all and for this

he relies on Social Networks and writing these little books of quick reading.

Having been part of the papist church has allowed him to have a much deeper insight into the difficulties that exist today for the papist church to become one again with the Holy Orthodox Church, as it was before the schism of 1054.

He currently resides in Chile, in his monastery consecrated to St. Basil.