



# Catechism

of the Coptic Orthodox Church



Vol.  
1

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty





**Catechism**  
*of the*  
**Coptic Orthodox**  
**Church**

Volume 1, Books 1 – 3

**2023**

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South Brunswick, NJ

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*

*One God Amen.*

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Bishoy Boshra Behnam

First English Edition, 2023

Published by St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria, and Queen St.  
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Cover Design: Miller Ezzat

Translation and Editing: Youth of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the USA, Canada,  
Europe, Australia, Arabian Gulf, and Egypt.

Printed by: American Pack, Cairo, Egypt.  
01552634444 – 01271500444 – 01271222700  
US Branch: +17326755551  
Deposit Number: 11419 / 2018







*H. H. Pope Tawadros II*





## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Fr. Antonios Kaldas and St. Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College in Sydney for their informed contribution in reviewing and editing this English translation of the Catechism. They have labored abundantly in making sure that this translation comes to light in the best form possible. May the Lord reward them for their services. I would also like to thank Fr. Daniel Abba Moses who also helped in editing this translation.

This translation was conducted by more than 100 Coptic youth from USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, Egypt and the Arabian Gulf countries. Those youth who came from all around the world truly embody our unity and oneness of heart in Christ Jesus. For them, I pray that the Lord may reward them for their labor.

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

1 / 1 / 2023

*Note: While the translators and editors have made every reasonable effort to find the sources cited in the Arabic manuscript and cite them more fully, unfortunately, some of them have proved rather difficult to pin down. Where this has occurred, the original citations from the Arabic have been left intact.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Book 1 (Questions 1 – 92): Introduction to the Coptic Catechism</b>	<b>1</b>
Egypt that is Within Us and the Open Heavens	3
1. (a) Catechism	5
1. (b) The Coptic Catechism Through the Ages	7
2. The Basic Principles of Catechism	23
3. Faith That Works Through Love	27
4. The Holy Bible	47
5. Holy Tradition	73
Conclusion	99
<b>Book 2 (Questions 93 – 448): Christian Dogma</b>	<b>101</b>
1. Christian Dogma	103
2. (a) The Creed of Faith and the Origin of the Canons of the Church	105
2. (b) Regarding the Coptic Orthodox Creed	109
2. (c) Exposition of the Creed	115
3. Faith in God and Our Knowledge of Him	143
4. The Holy Trinity	157
5. The Wondrous Creator, the Guardian of the World	181
6. The Exalted Nature of the Human Creation	195
7. Divine Providence	211
8. Divine Grace	227
9. The Fall of Humanity	247
10. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World	267
11. Titles and Names of the Savior that Witness to the Works of His Love	283
12. The Holy Spirit and Divine Salvation	315
<b>Book 3 (Questions 449 – 877): The Church: The Kingdom of God</b>	<b>359</b>
1. The Church: The Kingdom of God	361
2. The Heavenly High Priest and the Church	391
3. The Church as a Heavenly Wedding Feast	399
4. The Unique Work of the Church	415
5. The Church: House of Salvation	423
6. The Eminence of the Church	435
7. The Church and Daily Renewal	441

8. The Church and Society	445
The Role of Women in Society and Church	459
9. The Person of the Church	463
10. The Mystery of the House of God	467
11. The Iconostasis	481
12. Coptic Art and Symbolism	497
13. The Holy Utensils	503
14. The Church Nave	509
15. The Church Belfry	517
16. The Holy Sacraments	521
17. The Sacrament of Baptism	527
On the Rites of Baptism	535
The Rites of Holy Baptism	541
18. The Sacrament of Chrismation	561
19. The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession	575
20. The Sacrament of the Eucharist	597
On the Main Features of the Coptic Liturgy	617
21. The Sacrament of Priesthood	627
22. The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony	659
23. Unction of the Sick	681
24. The Coptic Church and the Monastic Movement	685
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>693</b>
1. List of Abbreviations	693
2. Patristic Sources	693
3. Contemporary Sources	703
<b>Index of Bible Verses</b>	<b>709</b>
1. Old Testament	709
2. Deuterocanonical Books	713
3. New Testament	713
<b>Index of Questions</b>	<b>723</b>



Book 1

# **Introduction** *to the* **Coptic Catechism**

Egypt that is Within Us and the Open Heavens

1. (a) Catechism
1. (b) The Coptic Catechism Through the Ages
2. The Basic Principles of Catechism
3. Faith That Works Through Love
4. The Holy Bible
5. Holy Tradition



## **Egypt that is Within Us and the Open Heavens**

Since vast numbers of Copts immigrated to America, Canada, Australia, and Europe, many of the natives of these countries ask about the Catechism of the Coptic Orthodox Church. My heart was inflamed with desire to paint a simple portrait of the Catechism. At the same time, I am using the name of “the Coptic Orthodox Church” as part of this work’s title, not because I am biased to the Coptic Church, nor am I asking any believer to give up their culture or nationality, but to highlight that what Scripture mentioned about Egypt calls onto every believer to fix his eyes on his inner depths, regardless of his nationality, that his heart may be filled with love towards all humanity and all nations.

Egypt was mentioned in Scripture approximately 600 times in both the Old and New Testaments (including the books in the Septuagint translation):

- a. It was the only nation from among the Gentiles, to which the Child Jesus fled away from Herod (Matt 2:13-19). By blessing Egypt, He called on all the nations to enjoy His blessings.
- b. Abraham fled to Egypt during the famine. Likewise, the believer opens his heart that is full of grace to attract many others to that which is divine.
- c. Joseph entered it as a slave, but he filled its warehouses with flour (Gen. 41:57). The Egyptians turned to him for food, as well as all the surrounding nations during the time of the famine. Thus, when the believer abides in Christ, he opens the warehouses of his heart that others may be filled with Christ who comes down from heaven.
- d. In the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah the prophet said, “Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst” (Isa. 19:1). Likewise, the Lord rides on a cloud to make every believer a dwelling place for Him that the believer may grow in the divine knowledge: “the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day.” (Isa 19:21)
- e. We read in the book of Isaiah: “And the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.” (Isa 19:22) Thus, we shall sing with St. Ephrem the Syrian saying: “Blessed be the Physician Who came down and amputated without pain and healed wounds with a medicine that was not harsh. His Son became a Medicine, that showed sinners mercy.”<sup>1</sup>
- f. Isaiah concluded his prophecy about Egypt, saying: “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance” (Isa. 19:24-25). Egypt that once enslaved the Israelites, and Assyria that took the Israelites captives, were both transformed so that the Gentiles became the Church of God which includes all

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<sup>1</sup> *On Nativity, hymn 2.*

the believers of the Old Testament together with those of the New Testament, as the heavenly bride of Christ.

Every believer can relate to this Catechism series, regardless of his nationality, that he might become a man of God and His beloved child, and that his heart may be filled with love for all the humankind; so that he prays for all even for those who persecute the church. This Catechism calls us to experience the heavenly life and the upright faith that we may grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Now, I hope in the Lord to present this Catechism in short. And I do hope for the new generations to re-write it, especially the youth in the lands of immigration, in a language and style that suits the culture of the church there, while staying faithful to the Orthodox mindset.

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

South Brunswick: January 2019



# 1

## (a) Catechism

### 1. What does the word catechism mean?

The word catechism is a Greek word that means a summary of religious teaching, presented either orally or through a book, of the principles and foundations of Christian teachings and values, generally in the form of questions and answers.<sup>2</sup> This Greek word has been used since the apostolic age (Luke 1:4). Early Church Fathers such as **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** and **St. Gregory of Nyssa** addressed catechumens through articles or lectures referred to as Catechetical Lectures.

### 2. What is the purpose of a catechism (teaching through questions and answers)?

**First: to present an understanding of the faith, with the goal of knowing God and His work of salvation.** **St. Clement of Alexandria** (second century) differentiated between the knowledge of the Gnostics, who believed that man can only be saved through his own rational knowledge; and the knowledge that is based on the sanctification of the mind through the divine grace of God, submitting to faithfully learn about God and build a relationship with Him, and asking for His grace in our lives. As St. Jude the apostle mentions “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and St. Peter, “receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:9). St. Paul also invites us to faith, saying “but without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). And “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). We therefore escape from the corruption that is in the world on account of lust (2 Pet. 1:4). St. Paul the apostle said, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13), so that we may enjoy the holy life by faith working through love (Gal. 5:6).

**Second:** the principles of catechism are not based on a set of rules that are memorized dryly or in discussions bereft of the spirit of love. **St. John Chrysostom** says that **the fruit of an ounce of love** is better than that a ton of discussion. I hope that the effect of this book will be to spread the spirit of love and to invite the spirit of joy and humility to work in the lives of all the faithful all over the world, from the little children to the elderly. As the son of Sirach says, a believer does not cease from his labor till the last breath of his life. “Stand fast in your covenant and become familiar with it and grow old in the work of your commandments” (Sir. 11:18).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catechism>

**Third:** I urge that the youth, especially those who live in the lands of immigration, revise this work in a way that suits all ages as they ask the Holy Spirit to work in them and in us.

**Fourth:** I hope that this work may facilitate the creation of Church Education programs that would benefit every individual in the Church.

**Fifth:** to present the richness of Church life and its potential in Jesus Christ, and the spirit of hope looking forward to the future under the guidance of the divine Holy Spirit; and to connect the process of learning to the spirit of fatherhood or brotherhood that everyone who encounters God the Lover of Mankind experiences.

**Sixth:** to enjoy the fiery Spirit that knows neither sluggishness or lethargy but lifts us from glory unto glory (2 Cor. 3:18), with constant renewal and growth in true knowledge.

**Seventh:** to spread the spirit of evangelism and to witness the work of the Holy Trinity in every believer, regardless of age or background, with a spirit of wisdom and discernment.

**Eighth:** to confirm that education, worship, evangelism, and service in all their forms represent different instruments harmonizing to create a symphony of love, which gladdens our God and makes the heavens rejoice, along with the heavenlies and the saints who departed from this world and are yet still members of the One Christian Church.

**Ninth:** to demonstrate that adherence to tradition (that which is delivered) does not imply stagnation and falling under the slavery of the letter; but the spirit.

**Tenth:** to bring the work of the Holy Trinity into contact with every aspect of our lives, so that we recognize the divine presence, even in our dreams, which are not subject to our will.

# 1

## (b) The Coptic Catechism Through the Ages

### 3. How did the Church preserve the correct faith through the ages?

I greatly desired to present a Coptic Orthodox Catechism to reveal our Christian understanding concisely and briefly; particularly because, due to ecclesiastical and political circumstances, our Church was isolated from Western churches in the fifth century A. D. and remained so to a large extent up until the twentieth century, when she was accused by many in the West of adhering to Eutychianism. The Coptic Church, therefore, did not have the opportunity to reveal her true teachings through the writings of her Fathers and her liturgies. Despite the Church's participation in many international theological conferences in recent years, insisting upon her rejection of Eutychianism, some sources continue to attribute this heresy to our Church, of which the Church is completely innocent and strongly opposes through her liturgies and praises.

In a certain dialogue with the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches, theologians were surprised to observe that the liturgies and praises that we enjoy to the present day lack even the slightest hint of Eutychianism, but rather, positively oppose it in a beautifully Christian manner; especially the daily *Theotokias* and those of the festal celebrations. Some of the theologians observed that they harmonize with the thought St. Cyril, or that perhaps he was their author.

A Greek theologian once asked me whether we use the word "Theotokos" to describe St. Mary and was astonished to learn that it is a term beloved in Coptic texts in every age.

### 4. What are the stages of development of Coptic Catechism through the ages?

It is worth laying out the circumstances through which the Coptic Church has endured, from her foundation till the present day, that we may grasp the truth of her teachings, and benefit from her long experience over twenty centuries.

Our Coptic Church has continuously faced persecution since the middle of the first century and until the present time. Thus, Mrs. Butcher, a Professor of History at Oxford University, expressed her amazement when she stated that the endurance of the Copts to this day is one of the wonders of the world.

In the eighth century B. C., Isaiah the prophet anticipated the Coptic Church and wrote with the spirit of prophecy of her marvelous beginnings.

The Church suffered many persecutions, even from fellow Christians. Such were the persecutions by the Emperors of Constantinople who persecuted her and appointed patriarchs

with the power and authority to continually oppress even the monks in their monasteries and deserts, pressuring them to accept the Tome of Leo.

We are indeed thankful to God who allowed our Egypt, blessed by Isaiah the prophet, to endure these long-lasting periods of extremely bitter persecution. And yet, they have afforded us opportunities to praise the Crucified One, together with the Apostle Paul, saying, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

A friend once showed me a letter that someone had sent to several influential companies and personalities in America. In it, he asked for their aid to further his missionary work in Egypt, thinking that he would present Christ to the Copts, who, although they produce martyrs, are a dead Church, ignorant of Christ (in his opinion)! We need not defend our Church. For the Day of the Lord is at hand and many simple martyrs, shepherds, and pure theologians will be revealed as a heavenly bride, sitting at the right hand of the King of Kings!

The trials that have befallen the Church through the ages have contributed to revealing her living faith, her Orthodox teachings, and the work of the Holy Trinity within her. The Church did not deviate to pursue worldly glories or transient politics, but rather fixed her eyes on the second coming of the Lord on the clouds.

### **Stage 1: Catechism in The Apostolic Age.**

- a. The chief event of the first century was **St. Mark the Apostle’s** evangelism of Egypt, the land which the Lord Jesus Himself blessed when He took refuge from Herod (Matt. 2:13). St. Mark the Apostle ordained Annianus as bishop of Alexandria. The heart of the Church was preoccupied with **preaching** the gospel of salvation, and revealing God’s love to all humankind, and not solely to any particular group of people.

Christianity began in Egypt with a simple, yet very deep encounter.<sup>3</sup> **Annianus the cobbler** cried out, saying: “O the One God!” when he pierced his hand with an awl as he repaired St. Mark’s shoes. **St. Mark the Apostle** healed Annianus’ hand in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, he gave witness regarding the One God whom Annianus invoked, though he did not know Him. St. Mark spoke to him about the God who not only heals our bodies but our entire human nature through Jesus Christ, His incarnate Word. Annianus embraced Christianity, and was St. Mark ordained him as the first bishop of Alexandria.

There are two points, here, that I should like to highlight:

- i. St. Mark did not, at that time, attack Egyptian pagan worship, but on the contrary, he used Annianus’ words, “O the One God,” as the starting point for preaching the Gospel of Truth. His approach resembles that of St. Paul the

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<sup>3</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *God* (COERL, 1994).

Apostle in Athens, who said, “the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). And again, he said, “for in Him we live, and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring’” (Acts 17:28). The Alexandrian Fathers followed in the footsteps of St. Mark as they preached the unchanging Gospel of Truth to the Egyptians and to the bearers of Hellenic wisdom (the Greeks) in Alexandria. They spoke simply to the simple, and in philosophical language to the philosophers.

- ii. St. Mark healed Annianus’ wound in the name of the Lord Jesus and seized the opportunity as the starting point for his preaching of the gospel. Therefore, he did not reveal God merely as an idea which a person might believe, but as the Savior who heals all of humanity and saves it. This is the foundational principle of Alexandrian theology until this present day. It is a theology of salvation (soteriology): we do not know God through dry theoretical discussion, but through His saving works, whereby He grants us new knowledge, new life, and immortality.

Truly the seed St. Mark planted in our theological soil has produced fruits through the ages. One of those fruits is **the close relationship between theological understanding and practical salvation**. God bestows knowledge upon us, yet not in isolation from salvation. This is clearly manifest in the theology of **St. Clement of Alexandria** who presents Jesus Christ as the divine instructor (*Paedagogus*) and as a physician. He calls Him, “the all-sufficient Physician of humanity.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, for St. Clement, our knowledge of God is inseparable from our salvation, as he clearly writes: “It is the will of God that we should attain the knowledge of God, which is our pathway to immortality.”<sup>5</sup> Again he writes, “the Word of God became a man, so that you may learn from a man how man may become god.”<sup>6</sup> By this we understand why the incarnate Word of God did not speak to us in theological terms, nor lay out for us a formula of Trinitarian faith; but in simplicity, declared the Holy Trinity to us through His saving works.

- b. At this time, the philosophical School of Alexandria founded by Ptolemy was flourishing, along with the largest library in the East, as well as Jewish schools. It was thus necessary for a Christian School of Alexandria to be established. It was the opinion of St. Jerome that such a school was founded by St. Mark.<sup>7</sup> Many scholars consider it to be the first Christian school in the world.

<sup>4</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.2 (ANF 2:210).

<sup>5</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4:6 (ANF 2:413).

<sup>6</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 1 (ANF 2:174) amended.

<sup>7</sup> Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, *St Mark and the Coptic Church* (1968): pp. 25, 62; St. Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 36 (NPNF II/3:370).

**Stage 2: The flourishing of the School of Alexandria in the second century.**

The writings of **the Scholar Athenagoras, Saints Pantaenus and Clement, and the Scholar Origen** — the deans of the Catechetical School of Alexandria in the second century — reveal the curricula of the school at that time and its teaching, which included:

- a. **Concern with interpreting the Word of God.** Pantaenus wrote a commentary on the whole Bible, although only a few small quotations from it have come down to us.

Origen the scholar is considered prince of Biblical interpretation. He divides Biblical interpretation into three methods:

- i. *Allegorical or Symbolic interpretation:* He often exaggerated his usage of this method to the extent that he thought that every single word in the Bible has an allegorical meaning.
- ii. *Moral interpretation:* the Bible leads us to live in Christ Jesus.
- iii. *Literal or Historical interpretation.*

We will discuss these three methods of interpretation later and the dangers of overusing any one of them.

- b. **Athenagoras’ Plea for Christians:** where he mounts a defense against the accusations levelled against the Christians. In this defense he describes the loftiness of the Christian faith. He used his apologetic writings as **an opportunity to preach the faith to the Emperor** Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161–180 A. D.) and his co-emperor and son, Commodus.
- c. In his discourse regarding the *Resurrection of the Dead*, Athenagoras used philosophical proofs, since it was addressed to philosophers who rejected the resurrection of the body.
- d. The principal writings of **St. Clement of Alexandria** also indicate the School’s curriculum:
  - i. *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Heathen), where the Logos, the “Word of God,” calls humankind to be saved from the clutches of paganism, through faith. Here he highlights the person of Christ as Savior and Guide.
  - ii. *Paedagogus* (The Instructor or Tutor), where Christ urges believers to live a better life, He being the heavenly Guide **leading them to heavenly things.**
  - iii. *Stromata* (Miscellanies), which is incomplete, but in which he stresses that the Christian philosopher can find everything he needs in the Gospel. St. Clement of Alexandria is considered to be among the first to **link philosophy to faith.** In his view, if God provided the Law to the Jews to lead them to the

Savior, so He also provided whatever is true in philosophy to lead the Gentiles to the Savior.

In this way, the saint reveals to us the **Christian program of evangelism**. We ought not to attack others, but in love and wisdom, we should ask God to teach us how to present His Word, which is capable of satisfying souls and elevating them so that they may taste heaven.

### **Stage 3: The Alexandrian Fathers and the age of the ecumenical councils.**

Whoever studies the first Ecumenical Councils encounters the Alexandrians as Christian thinkers who are heroes of faith and leading thinkers on an ecumenical level. The School of Alexandria played an important role in supporting the leaders of the Church of Alexandria as well as those among the congregation who were passionate about the orthodoxy of the faith and about witnessing to the Gospel of Christ at every opportunity. The Church of Alexandria was not concerned with engaging in temporal politics. Alexandria lived within the Roman Empire, under the rule of Rome, and after that, under the rule of Byzantium, until the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. What supported them was their spiritual, pious, theological, and biblical focus. The School of Alexandria, with its strength of spirit, deep theological thought, and biblical studies, was the secret behind the strength of the Alexandrian Fathers.

The Alexandrian Fathers did not covet positions of power for personal benefit. Rather, it was the opening up of their hearts full of divine love and the depth of their studies that attracted many people to the School of Alexandria, and to the Egyptian deserts, where they learned their theology and were trained in the ascetic life under the guidance of the monks of Egypt. Since the dawn of Christianity, the Copts were known for their zeal for the orthodox faith, and they played a positive role in resolving many theological issues, both in the East and the West. They did not interfere in the problems of other Churches, nor did they intrude upon them; but with a spirit of love and unity, and through genuinely fraternal relations, they were invited to resolve such problems, or responded through the exchange of messages.<sup>8</sup>

When the emperors accepted the Christian faith and the waves of persecution calmed down, heretics found abundant opportunities to spread their dangerous thought; particularly Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Apollinaris, etc. It became necessary for the Alexandrian Fathers to play their positive role in the patient efforts to restore the heretics to the true faith; though, not at the expense of the Church's biblical faith. Therefore, the Alexandrian Church participated in the three ecumenical councils.

#### **a) The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.**

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<sup>8</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, 1993) ch. 2: p. 45.

Here, the four sees of Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria opposed the heresy of Arius, which denied the divinity of the Lord Christ. The council introduced the creed referred to by most scholars as the “Athanasian Creed,” referring to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic of Alexandria. Most recent modern catechisms highlight this creed and summarize it for the general public and for the new generations, as well as for the scholars.

“From a very early stage, the Church of Alexandria appreciated the value of the theological contributions of St. Athanasius to the definition and formulation of the content of the faith, and the preservation of the apostolic tradition received by the Church from the disciples of the Lord Himself; and, in fact, his ‘unconquerable and apostolic knowledge,’ as St. Cyril of Alexandria described him.<sup>9</sup> The high esteem of the twentieth Pope of Alexandria is evident from the fact that the Church describes him in her liturgical texts as ‘*the apostolic*’.”<sup>10</sup>

I have written elsewhere about Pope Athanasius and Arianism, and the testimony of Western scholars regarding him<sup>11</sup>.

#### **b) The Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 A. D.**

The second council focused on the heresy of Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who claimed that the Holy Spirit is created. The council also looked into the heresy of Apollinaris who, in defending the divinity of Christ, thought that the Word took flesh without a human soul. He thought that the human soul has a distinct human will, and thus Christ had two wills: the divine will and the human will, meaning that He was two persons. Pope Timothy of Alexandria, along with Nectarius, Patriarch of Constantinople; Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa took part in this council. The historian Sozomen mentioned that the number of bishops who participated was around 150 bishops, led by Timothy, the bishop of the See of Alexandria.<sup>12</sup>

#### **c) The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus<sup>13</sup>**

The third council was held in the year 431 A. D. under the leadership of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Two hundred bishops participated in it to try Nestorius, who employed the term *Christotokos* (mother or giver of birth to Christ) to the Virgin Mary, thus differentiating the human Jesus born from Mary from the Son of God who dwelt in him. He thought that there were two distinct persons in Christ: the son of Mary and the Son of God. These two

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<sup>9</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter I* (FOTC 76:15).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Maurice Faltas, *Ta'thir alqidis Athnasyos alrasuli fi alta'lim allaahutii lilkanisat alqibtia — alqidis bulos albushi, vol. 1 (The influence of St. Athanasius' on the Theological Teachings of the Coptic Church — St. Boulos Al-Boushi, vol. 1)* (Arabic, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, 1986): ch. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7:7–9 (NPNF II/2:380–382).

<sup>13</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, 1986): ch. 13.



persons were not united essentially or hypostatically, but merely morally or in character. Thus, Christ is not to be called God but “Theophorus” or “God-bearer,” just as we would call the saints because of the work of divine grace in them. As a result, Mary is not the mother of God, but the mother of the human Jesus in whom the divinity dwelt. Nestorius and his followers criticized the Magi for their worship of the Child Jesus and held that His divinity was parted from Him at the moment of crucifixion.

**What impact did the three Councils have on the Catechism of the Christian Sees or the Universal Church?**

All the apostolic Churches — whether Orthodox Chalcedonians, non-Chalcedonians or the Roman Catholic Church — consider these three ecumenical councils as being responsible for clarifying the faith, especially with regard to the Holy Trinity; and for the defense against many of the heresies that appeared in this period. Although there were some small disputes over the language of some expressions, these councils carried on their discussions in a spirit of love and holy zeal for the faith.

As for the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 A. D., some apostolic Churches hold that it did not introduce anything new, but only explained and clarified the first three ecumenical councils. Our unofficial and official dialogues with the apostolic Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church in the late twentieth century brought more openness. All of them came to realize that we are not Eutychians as they had thought; that is, we do not proclaim that His humanity was annihilated within His divinity.

Thus, we achieved positive results together with our Orthodox Chalcedonian brethren.

I recall, for example, that in the first official meeting between the two families, the Chalcedonians refused to call us “Orthodox,” insisting instead on referring to us as the “Ancient Eastern Churches.” After discussions filled with love, the following occurred:

**First:** After many years of dialogue with a Greek theologian, I asked him: “Do you remember the day when you refused to call us Orthodox?” He smiled and said: “We feel a sense of unity with you, perhaps even more than that which we feel among ourselves, between Orthodox Chalcedonians.”

**Second:** A well-known priest and dear friend took the initiative of supervising the doctoral thesis for some of Copts in England. He would answer every person who accused St. Dioscorus with heresy by saying: “I have the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon in the Greek language. They witness to the fact that this St. Dioscorus was not accused of heresy, but of insulting the Pope of Rome.”

**Third:** When the two Orthodox families opened up in the spirit of mutual love, whenever this father would walk by, some Chalcedonians would whisper to one another that the defender of the Coptic Church had come.

**Fourth:** I remember that in the spirit of love, after the convening of one of the sessions with the two families, a Greek Professor, Dr. Phidas, returned to his university in Greece and asked his Coptic students to stand. And he said before all the students, “I am proud of the Copts, and I rejoice that they study with us. They have a special place in my heart.”

In our recent conferences and gatherings we have lived and experienced a spirit of love and unity, whether in our practical work or our spiritual aspect.

#### **Stage 4: The Council of Chalcedon and Coptic catechism.**

In the second half of the twentieth century, God granted to many a passion for unity between the Churches, on the basis of sincere love and the orthodox teaching. A group of scholars from the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian parties undertook to study the proceedings of the sessions of the Council of Chalcedon. In our yearning for sincere love in Christ Jesus, while holding fast to the orthodoxy of our faith, we will not talk of the stance the Pope of Rome took against the Pope of Alexandria. The Popes of Alexandria played a leading role in the first three ecumenical councils and were well-respected by the emperors, while the Popes of Rome were content with only sending delegates and sometimes sending no one. Nonetheless, the See of Rome cherishes the first three ecumenical councils.

The dialogue between the Churches prompted me to present our theology by publishing relevant articles and books both in English and Arabic, including:

- a. *The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church*.<sup>14</sup>
- b. *Christology (The Nature of Christ)*.<sup>15</sup>
- c. I devoted a chapter to St. Dioscorus in the book *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology*.<sup>16</sup>

An Indian theologian<sup>17</sup> published his doctoral thesis in English in which he re-evaluates the Council of Chalcedon. It has also been translated into Arabic. He quotes excerpts from certain Orthodox Chalcedonian and Western scholars and churchmen who argue that certain expressions found in the Tome of Leo could be understood as leaning towards Nestorianism, if read in isolation.

I am not really concerned, here, with broadly defending the Coptic and Syrian Churches from the persecution they suffered in being placed under the authority of Melkite (i.e., appointed by the emperor) patriarchs, who were also given secular powers to persecute the

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<sup>14</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church* (Maryrose Halim, ed., undated).

<sup>15</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Christology According to the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches* (undated).

<sup>16</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology* (St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria, 1986): ch. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Fr. V. C. Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined* (British Orthodox Press, 2001).

faithful, leading to many being killed. Rather, it will suffice to present an extremely concise rectification of the accusations levelled against St. Dioscorus.<sup>18</sup>

**St. Dioscorus and Eutyches:** Eutyches was an archimandrite and the abbot of a monastery in Constantinople with about three hundred monks under his guidance. He was an old ascetic, gifted with eloquence of speech; but he was not a true theologian. He played a significant role in the split that occurred in the Church in the fifth century. Eutyches enjoyed great fame throughout the see of Constantinople: within monastic circles, the imperial court, and among the people. This was due to his intelligence, eloquence, his ascetic life, and his close relationship with the emperor, especially through his relative Chrysaphius, the chief minister.

**In reality, Eutyches represented neither Alexandrian theology nor Antiochian theology.** His extreme zeal against the Nestorianism that was rife in this region, and his defense of the Alexandrian formula led him to another heresy: he fell into the error of saying that there were two natures before the union; but only one nature after it, for **the divine nature absorbed the human nature, and the latter ceased to be.**

It is not difficult for any scholar to discover the character of Eutyches and his theology by simply reading his responses during his trials at the councils of Ephesus in 448 and 449 A. D. He was not by nature a theologian and he was largely ignorant of the system of Alexandrian theology. He would sometimes use orthodox expressions that contradict his main ideas. Perhaps this was because his theological understanding was shaky, or perhaps he **intended to deceive**, or perhaps he feared losing his fame, position, or priesthood.

**Eutyches' appeal to the emperor and bishops:** Leo, the bishop of Rome wrote to Eutyches, lauding his zeal in defending against Nestorian dualism. At the same time, he wrote to Flavian, urging him to be kind to Eutyches. But Leo later changed his mind, perhaps when he heard that the emperor had written to St. Dioscorus, the pope of Alexandria, inviting him to convene a council to discuss this matter. Leo, who had no real knowledge of the nature of the conflict between Alexandrian and Antiochian Christology, sent his tome (letter) to Constantinople on June 13, 449 A. D.; not to reconcile the parties, but to undermine the position of the Alexandrian theologians.

**The Second Council of Ephesus in 449 A. D.:** Emperor Theodosius II, who convened the council, appointed Dioscorus to preside over the council, and appointed Juvenal of Jerusalem and Thalassius of Caesarea in Cappadocia to co-preside with him.

St. Dioscorus did not say one word against Rome from the beginning of the council to its end. Leo, in his letters, refers to our pope as the “Egyptian Murderer” and the “Teacher of Satan’s Falsehoods” who always tries his best to spread blasphemy against his brethren. We

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<sup>18</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology* (St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria, 1986): ch. 14, pp. 115–146.

will see how Anatolius of Constantinople and others refused to call the Pope of Alexandria a heretic.

Some scholars have been in the habit of attributing violence to the Alexandrian fathers and theologians, even to Athanasius and Cyril.

**St. Dioscorus and the Council of Chalcedon:** although the Council of Chalcedon was thought to have been convened to try Eutyches, in the event, its attention turned to attacking Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria, rather than the old monk. Eutyches was not even present at the council, having been exiled to north Syria before the council met.

In fact, Dioscorus was condemned not because of any theological heresy, but due to political circumstances which dominated this council.

The Greek Professor Fr. Romanides says, **“Dioscorus was considered quite orthodox in his faith by such leading Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon as those represented by Anatolius of Constantinople.”**<sup>19</sup> Metropolitan Methodios of Aksum also says, **“Information, which we possess, does not depict Dioscorus as a heretic.** From available information it is obvious that he was a good man and even Bishop Leo himself tried to take him to his side ... Likewise Emperor Theodosius in a letter to Dioscorus calls him a man who radiates the Grace of God, a humble man and of orthodox faith.

“Several times in the course of the Council Patriarch Dioscorus declared his faith. He was not condemned because he was heretical but because he refused to communicate with Leo, the Archbishop, and because he refused to come to the Council although he was invited to do so three times.

“This evidence is sufficient for us to look for other reasons for Dioscorus’ condemnation. Rome was annoyed by the extraordinary vitality of the Church of Alexandria and its active Patriarch.”<sup>20</sup>

The emperor accepted the council’s decision and exiled Pope Dioscorus to the island of Gangra in Asia Minor. He remained in exile for five years, occupying his time in guiding the lost and healing the sick. He departed to the glorious realm in the year 457 A. D.

***What impact did the Council of Chalcedon have on the catechism of the Church?***

- a. The rise of strong theologians, such as Philoxenus of Mabbug, Pope Timothy, and the great teacher St. Severus of Antioch, who preserved the orthodoxy of the faith. Fr.

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<sup>19</sup> See “DISCUSSION: Concerning the paper of Professor Karmiris” in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 10 (1965): p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Methodios Fouyas, “Inter-Orthodox Theological Commission for Dialogue with the Non-Chalcedonian Churches” in *Theological and Historical Studies: A Collection of Minor Works*, ed. Methodios Fouyas (Athens, 1985): p. 15.

Meyendorff says of them that there was no theologian on the Chalcedonian side who could match them.

- b. Because of this council, Antioch was deprived of its patriarch St. Severus who fled and hid in Egypt for twenty years. Similarly, Pope Benjamin was forced to flee from Alexandria until the Arabs conquered Egypt, and they sent him a letter that assured him he was safe to return to his throne.
- c. The Church of Alexandria suffered bitter persecution at the hands of their fellow Christians, which forbade its congregation, servants, and churchmen to a great extent from carrying out their pastoral and teaching services, despite their best efforts to serve even as they fled the persecution of their brethren. The Melkites hunted down even the monks in their monasteries and the hermits, to employ all the tools of violence against them.

#### **Stage 5: From the seventh to the ninth centuries.**

Different Muslim governments employed different approaches. The more extreme used violence to expel Copts from government positions, confiscate the property of Copts, and force them to use the Arabic language, banning the use of any other language, whether spoken or written. They also carried out massacres against them as well as isolating them from the outside world, to the extent that the continued survival of the Copts until today was considered by Mrs. Butcher of Oxford University as one of the wonders of the world.

Such conditions impelled the Church to carefully preserve her doctrines, traditions, and rites from any deviations.

#### **Stage 6: From the tenth to the fifteenth centuries.**

It is in the tenth century A. D. that the first Coptic writings in the Arabic language emerge, authored by Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa, Bishop of Ashmunein. Some manuscripts attribute a book entitled, “The Precious Pearl in the Clarification of Religious Dogma,” to **Ibn al-Muqaffa**, while others attribute it to **the bishop Boulos Al-Boushy** (thirteenth century), whose writings were influenced by St. Athanasius. This book contains fifteen chapters on the doctrine of the Church. The author quotes the Holy Bible and excerpts from the Fathers to elucidate themes such as the Holy Trinity, the incarnation, and the Holy Spirit. In it, we find the name of Athanasius the Apostolic mentioned sixteen times with quotations from him. The theological importance of this valuable book is evident in the fact that it was copied several times in various languages, of which thirty-one manuscripts have survived and are preserved in the libraries of the world, both East and the West.

The thirteenth-century A. D. is considered the golden age of Arabic Coptic Christian literature. In this century, more authors emerged than any century before it, or the two centuries after it. This was due to the state of calmness, stability, and peace in which the Church lived at the end of the era of the Ayyubid dynasty (1171–1250), in which freedom of

speech was permitted and in which opportunities for dialogue increased, whether in the political or religious arenas.

Among the most important Coptic authors whose various works contributed to the formation and enrichment of the Arabic Christian heritage is the bishop, Boulos Al-Boushy. He was nominated for the patriarchal throne after the departure of Pope Youannis VI, the seventy-fourth patriarch (1189–1216). He authored many fine works on biblical commentary, doctrine, apologetics, and on ecclesiastical and pastoral matters.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps one of the most famous events of this period was the **Crusades** (between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries). Unfortunately, many Muslims assumed that the Copts supported the European Crusaders, since they bore the same sign of the cross; yet the Crusaders themselves treated the Copts as enemies because they were Egyptians.

### **Stage 7: From the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.**

Perhaps the most famous historical events of this period were:

- a. **The French campaign and British colonialism:** Despite the brevity of the French campaign (it lasted three years and eighteen days), it presented an offensive image of Christianity to both Muslims and Christians. Muslims did not trust Napoleon Bonaparte and felt that he deceived them by sending them a letter committing him to defend Islam. He also arrayed himself in Arabic clothes and his whole body trembled as he recited Islamic supplications. Also, Kléber renounced his Christian faith to marry a Muslim girl!

The prime goal of the campaign, as Bonaparte stated, was “to break the British hold over in the East.”

Some believe that this campaign helped develop modern Egypt. Napoleon Bonaparte created councils and agencies composed of the leading scientists, businessmen, and religious representatives to advise on public affairs. Also, Bonaparte was the first to introduce system of political representation in Egypt.

The French worked to improve Egypt’s capital. They built many wide well-designed roads in the city, planted trees by the sides of the roads, and required inhabitants to provide street illumination by night. They filled in Lake ‘Ezbekeya Lake and stopped any further burials in its cemetery, instead issuing an order that all burials must be at some distance from the city, for health reasons.

Napoleon came to Egypt with a group of scientists and thinkers to excavate its hidden monuments and study their unknown mysteries. This revived the interest of the

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Maurice Faltas, *Ta'thir alqidis Athnasyos alrasuli fi alta'lim allaahutii lilkanisat alqibtia — alqidis bulos albushi, vol. 1 (The influence of St. Athanasius' on the Theological Teachings of the Coptic Church — St. Boulos Al-Boushi, vol. 1) (Arabic, 2011).*

Egyptians themselves in this field. A violent upheaval occurred in the country which produced an independence movement whose features took form during the era of Mohammad Ali and came to maturity in the era of Ismael Pasha.

With regards to British colonization, there were many Coptic personalities who expended great efforts to express Coptic the patriotism of the Copts. **As for the impact of both campaigns on the Coptic Catechism:** Many French and British schools were founded; and as a result, many rich Coptic and Muslim families were able to speak French more proficiently than Arabic. In addition, government-run schools introduced the English language to the High school curriculum and many private companies started using English in addition to Arabic in their advertisements. The door was also opened for Catholic and Evangelical Protestant missionaries to enter Egypt. Some Coptic scholars rose to the challenge by writing expositions of Orthodox theology. In response to these attacks on the Church's doctrines and rites, an apologetic theology was born.

- b. **Habib Girgis** (1876–1951): A number of personalities, both lay and clergy, drove a powerful reform movement. Among these, Archdeacon Habib Girgis stands out most prominently.

Habib Girgis was a thinker, scholar, theologian, author, and pioneer in the field of religious education. Born in 'Ezbekeya, Cairo, he attended the Coptic school in Haret Elsakayeen. He was one of the first students to enroll at the Coptic Seminary in after it was reopened by Pope Cyril V in 1892 and he graduated in 1898. He was appointed as a lecturer in Theology there on May 8, 1899, at the young age of 23 years old; then Dean of the Seminary on September 14, 1918. He introduced evening classes at the seminary in 1945 to enable university graduates with work commitments to attend.

He was a renowned preacher, started the Sunday School movement and wrote its first curriculum, trained its teachers, and organized conferences for them. He was chosen to be the general secretary of the Sunday School Committee in 1927. He published *Al Karma (The Vine)*, a weekly magazine (1904–1930). He was very well respected and trusted by four patriarchs: Pope Cyril V (the 112<sup>th</sup> Patriarch); Pope Youannis XIX (the 113<sup>th</sup> Patriarch); Pope Macarius III (the 114<sup>th</sup> Patriarch); and Pope Yousab II (the 115<sup>th</sup> Patriarch). He acted as an adviser to the patriarchs, especially Pope Cyril V. He was nominated to become a bishop on three different occasions, and once, to become the pope.

He was a member of the Holy Synod due to his experience as an Archdeacon and his long service in the areas of education and religious instruction. He succeeded in introducing the teaching of Christian religion to Christians in government schools.

He published twenty-six books and many hymns. He also prepared books for children and prayers for different occasions. One of his books was: "Practical Reforms in the

Orthodox Church.” **Pope Cyril V** urged his metropolitans and bishops to select the priests they ordain for their dioceses from among the graduates of the seminary.

**Stage 8: From the revolution of July 23, 1952.**

God allowed for this period to be full of hardships that we may see God's work. These were among its events:

- a. At the beginning of Gamal Abd-El Nasser's reign as president, he persecuted the Christians. So, His Holiness Pope Cyril VI went to the presidential palace, but the president refused to meet him. But God intervened, and the two developed an amazing friendship. The president would publicly address him as “my father” with all love and humility until the day he died.
- b. Pope Cyril VI was by character simple, possessed of the spirit of worship and piety. The God of glory used him for the salvation of many, both inside and outside of Egypt. Fr. Daniel Fanous, the Dean of St Cyril’s Theological College in Sydney, Australia, wrote his PhD thesis on this saint and his theology, and it has been published as a book.<sup>22</sup>
- c. One month after Pope Shenouda III was placed under house arrest at a monastery, and the imprisonment of seven bishops, a *khouri episkopos*, twenty four priests, and just under one hundred laymen, a Muslim extremists assassinated President Anwar Sadat. Those imprisoned had charges laid against them in preparation for their trials. The congregation voiced their love for their Church and their esteem for those who had been imprisoned.
- d. During the last years of the reign of President Hosni Mubarak, there was not a week that went by without a terrorist attack on the Church. An agency that monitors the persecution of Christians all over the world ranked Egypt at the top of its list of countries that persecute Christians. However, the powerful hand of God was manifest as Mubarak’s throne was taken away from him.
- e. Morsi then came to power and imagined could destroy the Church; but he was ousted and imprisoned after only one year since becoming president.

The leaders of the Church were often accused of treason against their country simply because they participated in international Christian conferences.

In brief, the Church never enjoyed freedom to move; but God has always preserved her orthodox faith, that she might work with all her strength to witness to divine truth.

**Stage 9: The beginning of the immigration movement and spread of the Copts around the world since 1968.**

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<sup>22</sup> Fr. Daniel Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI, Life and Legacy* (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2019).



As a result of the suffering experienced by the Copts during the previous period, many were impelled to immigrate to America, Canada, Australia, and Europe. I must confess personally that my colleagues in the Church and I considered immigration to be a way of escaping from carrying the cross. However, Pope Cyril VI often stated that these families and immigrants were sent by God to the diaspora to spread the gospel of Christ. There are many needs for the Church to fulfill, which I have spoken about on more than one occasion, especially in especially in my book, “The Memoirs of a Priest in the Land of the Diaspora” in two volumes. **Now, after over half a century of the immigration movement, I feel the need to record “The Catechism of the Orthodox Church.”**



## 2

# The Basic Principles of Catechism

### 5. What are the basic principles of catechism in the Coptic Orthodox Church?

It is fitting for us as believers to benefit from the experience of our fathers through the stages of catechism over the centuries, that we may live with a spiritual, living, Biblical mindset in every aspect of our lives; whether in our study of the Holy Bible, our practice of the truly evangelical life, or in our daily conduct; even our eating and drinking, our worship in the spirit of truth, and our service for every person we meet, even if we do not know them personally, and in our conversations with believers and nonbelievers.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** describes the life of the Christian believer in his book *The Instructor (Paedagogus)*. He explains that our faith in Christ must be translated into action. We live in Christ Jesus when we walk alongside the elderly whose movement is slow and when we walk alongside the young who are quick in their movements; in our smile and our refraining from inappropriate laughter; in our observance of table manners as those in the conscious presence of God; in our sleep ...so the believer lives as an ambassador of Christ in all matters, whether they seem important or trivial. And he does all this without either the literalism that kills or tedious routine.<sup>23</sup>

In all of this, there are two important considerations: our hearts should be inflamed with love for the Lord Christ while we await His swift coming on the clouds to take us into His heavenly bridal chamber; and we should also be constantly occupied with the salvation of the whole world, even of those who have fallen into what we may deem serious crimes or impure sins!

### 6. What are the most important practical principles of catechism?

**First:** it is appropriate for us to present whatever we are able—together with our evangelist, **St. Mark the Apostle—of the Lord of Glory, who is the heavenly Physician;** Savior of souls; healer of the soul, intellect, emotions, senses, and every activity of the body.

I am reminded of someone who made every effort for a long time to attract a friend to the Gospel of Christ. The friend finally agreed to go to church to listen to a famous preacher. That evening, the church's priest called him to ask about the sermon he had attended. His response was: "I could barely tolerate listening to him for ten minutes and I left because I was internally resenting the world and its hardships. This preacher incessantly attacked me,

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<sup>23</sup> I hope, if God wills, to present the approach of St. Clement of Alexandria—one of the pillars of the School of Alexandria—in *The Life in Christ Jesus*.

and I could not bear to hear his voice any longer!” We should instead present our Christ to wounded souls in a way that allows them to be touched by His love.

**Second:** The Gospel should be manifested through our behavior, worship, and dialogue with others as an “exhilarating message of good news for the soul.” We present it in the manner of the School of Alexandria, through spiritual interpretation of the Holy Bible, as an invitation to encounter God, the One who fills the heart with joy; without setting aside the historical or moral interpretation of scripture; nor excessively employing this approach to scriptural interpretation.

I remember a man who worked with a British atheist for two weeks in Egypt. As the Briton prepared to return to his country, he said to the man, “this is the first time I have met a religious person who speaks to me with love and does not scorn me because I am an atheist. I felt comfortable with many of your words, even though I cannot not agree with everything you said. I have decided in my heart to reconsider my life and my principles. I will never forget your words.” Through this relationship, this British atheist tasted the gospel of Love in his heart.

This approach is also found in the words of St. Isaac the Syrian, who affirms that defending the truth without love transforms truth into violence and hatred. So also, if love does not yearn for everyone to walk in truth, it is rendered impotent.

**Third:** The Ecumenical Councils gave us practical pattern for dialogue, whether between believers, or with heretics. Two of the greatest leaders who conducted such dialogues were **SS. Athanasius the Apostolic and Cyril the Great**. St. Athanasius held that where there is unity of thought, we must not allow disagreements over terminology to divide us from each other. And St. Cyril, in defending the one nature of God the Logos incarnate, which Nestorius sought to divide, wrote to him affirming his love for him even though he could not accept his errors. Both saints strove with all their strength to **preserve the unity of the universal Church, in a spirit of sincere love and sound faith.**<sup>24</sup>

**Fourth: We preach the Gospel of Christ and not any particular culture.** When the Church preached the gospel in Ethiopia in the fourth century, it respected and preserved the local Ethiopian culture. Coptic writings were translated into Amharic. The Ethiopians had musical instruments, tunes, and icons that express the richness of their culture. They developed their own liturgies. Those who ministered to the Word in Ethiopia were committed to preserving Ethiopian culture. It was not the role of the Coptic Church to replace Ethiopian culture with Coptic culture. Rather, every believer ought to value the work of the Holy trinity and to express in his own culture.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> See the final chapter of Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Tradition and Orthodoxy* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1979).

**Fifth:** in order to effectively witness to his gospel, **the Christian needs to exhibit the value of the Gospel in his own daily life**, through divine grace. We may cite, for example, the words of the historian Yacoub Nakhla Rufayla: “among those who rose to fame from among the Copts during the Ayyubid dynasty were personalities possessed of education and learning (knowledge). They assumed high positions, earned titles of honor and distinction, and had their names recorded in both the Coptic and Muslim histories. [Here he lists the names of more than twenty personalities, together with their many talents, writings, and positions, whether in society or in the Church]. And there are many more such clergymen and laypeople whose names this limited space will not allow us to mention. All these various works, authored by the scholars and dignitaries of the Coptic community, those who lived before them and those who emerged after them; have survived in their own handwriting ...

“The Fatimid Caliphates and Ayyubid Kings deserve to be commended for granting the Copts the freedom to defend their religion. As a result, they produced a substantial and extensive literature in which they proved the correctness of their beliefs and religion with conclusive arguments.”

The historian concludes his exposition thus: “The Copts could have improved their situation further and progressed further in science and knowledge if their elders and scholars, (especially those living in the capital), were not preoccupied most of the time with internal rivalries and quarrels. They cared more for their personal ambitions than they did for the common good.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ya’qub Nakhla Rufayla, *Tarikh al-Umma al-Qibṭiyya (The History of the Coptic Nation)* (1898, Arabic). The original Arabic quote is taken from the second Arabic edition, 2000: pp. 183–189.



## 3

**Faith That Works Through Love<sup>27</sup>****7. What is faith?**

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). What we hope for, though it is not seen with the physical eye, is yet a present reality. Indeed, we do not touch it physically, but we experience it spiritually, and it generates peace, joy, and rejoicing in the soul. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Faith is an eye that enlightens every conscience, and imparts understanding; for the Prophet says, *And if you do not believe, you shall not understand* (Isa. 7:9 LXX).”<sup>28</sup> And **St. Augustine** says, “What is faith but to believe what you do not see?... The reward of faith is to see what you believe in. We can believe only when we want to. **Do not seek to understand that you may believe, but to believe that you may understand.**”<sup>29</sup>

**8. What is the importance of faith for unbelievers?**

St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, “Nor is it only among us, who bear the name of Christ, that the dignity of faith is great: but likewise all things that are accomplished in the world, even by those who are aliens from the Church,<sup>30</sup> are accomplished by faith.”<sup>31</sup>

By faith the laws of marriage yoke together those who have lived as strangers: and because of the faith in marriage contracts a stranger is made partner of a stranger’s person and possessions. By faith husbandry also is sustained, for he who believes not that he shall receive a harvest endures not the toils. By faith sea-faring men, trusting to the thinnest plank, exchange that most solid element, the land, for the restless motion of the waves, committing themselves to uncertain hopes, and carrying with them a faith more sure than any anchor. By faith therefore most of men’s affairs are held together: and not among us only has there been this belief, but also, as I have said, among those who are without. For if they receive not the

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *God* (COERL, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.4 (NPNF II/7:29–30), amended.

<sup>29</sup> Translator’s Note: see Augustine, Sermon 43.4, 7–9, in Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume II: Sermons 20–50*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1990): pp. 239–243.

<sup>30</sup> By “aliens from the Church” he means the those among the nations, the pagans or the heretics (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 14–15, ANF 3:676)

<sup>31</sup> One of the general objections the pagans raised against Christianity was that it is not founded upon logic and reason, but upon faith only. Here, St. Cyril points out the need for faith, even in the matters of daily life. This echoes the words of the Scholar Origen in *Against Celsus* 1.11 (ANF 4:400–401) and Arnobius in *Against the Heathen* 2.8 (ANF 6:436).

Scriptures, but bring forward certain doctrines of their own, even these they accept by faith.”<sup>32</sup>

### **9. Is it necessary to believe in the existence of God?**

The Bible says, “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). With His love, He wills to be very close to us, to make us one with Him, to dwell in our souls, and to give us the ability to share His glory, and not be preoccupied with philosophical arguments, but rather draw us to Himself, as a father attracts his children. In him we find the source of life, immortality, eternal pleasure, and glory. **St. Athanasius** wrote that “the contemplation of God, and the Word (*Logos*) which is from Him, suffice to nourish those who hear, and stand to them in place of all food. For the angels are not otherwise sustained than by beholding at all times the face of the Father, and of the Savior who is in heaven.”<sup>33</sup>

### **10. Do we challenge the devil by faith?**

When Adam and Eve deviated from faith and accepted the advice of the devil, the Garden of Eden turned for them into a place of terror, and the two were deprived of the sweetness of fellowship with God! By believing in the Crucified, the gates of Paradise are opened, that we might see heaven welcoming us and anticipating our eternal wedding day! The word of God bears witness to this, as the Apostle Paul says, “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Faith *stopped the mouths of lions*, as in Daniel’s case: for the Scripture says concerning him, that *Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God* (Dan. 6:23). Is there anything more fearful than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other shield than faith (1 Pet. 1:9), an impalpable shield against an unseen foe. For he sends forth various arrows, and *shoots down in the dark night* (Ps. 11:2) those that watch not; but, since the enemy is unseen, we have faith as our strong armour, according to the saying of the Apostle, *above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one* (Eph. 6:16). A fiery dart of desire of base indulgence is often shot forth from the devil: but faith, suggesting a picture of the judgment, cools down the mind, and quenches the dart.”<sup>34</sup>

### **11. How was Abraham, the father of the fathers, armed?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “though [Abraham] did many things well, yet he was never called the friend of God, except when he believed ... In like manner, therefore, as he was justified, you also shall be justified. In his body he was already dead in regard to offspring,

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<sup>32</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.3 (NPNF II/7:29).

<sup>33</sup> St. Athanasius, *Paschal Letters* 1.6 (NPNF II/4:508), amended.

<sup>34</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.4 (NPNF II/7:29–30), amended.



and Sarah his wife was now old, and there was no hope left of having children ... [Abraham] heeded not the weakness of his body, but the power of Him who promised, because *he counted Him faithful who had promised* (Heb. 11:11–12), and so beyond all expectation received the child from bodies that were, as it were, already dead. And when, after he had gained his son, he was commanded to offer him up, although he had heard the word, *in Isaac your seed shall be called* (Gen. 21:12; 22:2), he proceeded to offer up his son, his only son, to God, believing *that God is able to raise up even from the dead* (Heb. 11:19). And having bound his son, and laid him on the wood, he intended to offer him, but by the goodness of God in delivering to him a lamb instead of his child, he received his son alive.”<sup>35</sup>

## 12. How was Peter armed while on the water?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “For so great is the strength of faith, as even to buoy men up in walking on the sea. Peter was a man like ourselves, made up of flesh and blood, and living on the same food. But when Jesus said, *Come* (Matt. 14:29), he believed, and walked upon the waters, and found his faith safer upon the waters than any ground; and his heavy body was upheld by the buoyancy of his faith. But though he had safe footing over the water as long as he believed, yet when he doubted, at once he began to sink: for as his faith gradually relaxed, his body also was drawn down with it. And when He saw his distress, Jesus who remedies the distresses of our souls, said, *O you of little faith, why did you doubt?* (Matt. 14:31). And being nerved again by Him who grasped his right hand, he had no sooner recovered his faith, than, led by the hand of the Master, he resumed walking upon the waters.”<sup>36</sup>

## 13. Did God send the law to prepare us to believe in it?

When humans refused to listen to the voice of the natural that declares God as Creator and lover of mankind, **God provided the written law through Moses so that we might realize our need for faith in the Savior. He also sent his prophets to prepare the way for the Incarnate Word.** The incarnate Son of God came to manifest to us the divine mysteries. The Apostle Paul says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2).

## 14. Does faith abolish the gift of reason?

God created us to be rational beings, not irrational beasts. And He reveals His Self and His works to us, not to abolish our minds, but to exalt them, so that our human nature accepts

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<sup>35</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.5 (NPNF II/7:30), amended.

<sup>36</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.7 (NPNF II/7:30–31), amended.

Him and come to know His mysteries. God spoke to Moses “as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11), and He longs to enter into a dialogue with every believer.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** affirms that Christianity exalts the human mind and does not abolish it, but rather increases it in wisdom. He makes it clear that human knowledge is necessary to understand the Holy Scriptures, but not without God's help.<sup>37</sup> “... the soul is raised to God: trained in the true philosophy, it speeds to its kindred above, turning away from the lusts of the body, and besides these, from toil and fear.”<sup>38</sup> He says, “A noble hymn of God is an immortal man, established in righteousness, in whom the oracles of truth are engraved. For where but in a soul that is wise can you write truth?”<sup>39</sup>

## 15. What does faith ask of the Lord Christ?

Many ask for miracles from the Lord Christ. He came down to us so that we may know Him and ask Him to dwell in us. **Pope Cyril the Great** says, “This, however, we must carefully notice, that God does not excite an empty astonishment or vain wondering, but that such things are far from the divine Substance, which is free from pride and boasting, and altogether true, for the sole good and safety of mankind. And this I say, that no one may expect from sacred faith and the divine power useless changes, for instance, of the elements, or the removal of mountains and plants ... Let the thing be but useful for some real benefit, and the power will not be wanting.”<sup>40</sup>

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Receive Christ, receive sight, receive thy light, ‘In order that you may know well both God and man’ (*Iliad*, v. 128). ‘Sweet is the Word that gives us light, precious above gold and gems; it is to be desired above honey and the honeycomb’ (Ps. 19:10).”<sup>41</sup> He also says, “For each one by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent ... It remains that we understand, then, the Unknown, by divine grace, and by the word alone that proceeds from Him.”<sup>42</sup>

And **St. Augustine** says, “Christ dwells in you by faith. Where faith is present, Christ is present; where faith is awake, Christ is awake; where faith sleeps, Christ sleeps ... Arise and stir yourself. Say, *Lord, we are perishing!*”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.9 (ANF 2:309–310).

<sup>38</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.3 (ANF 2:410).

<sup>39</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 10 (ANF 2:201).

<sup>40</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 113.6: p. 537.

<sup>41</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:203).

<sup>42</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 5.12 (ANF 2:464).

<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume I*, trans. R.G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) Sermon 31.8: p. 252, amended.

## 16. What did Moses ask of God in his first meeting with Him when He called him to serve?

When God called Moses to be the first leader of God's people in the Old Testament, Moses asked of Him to know his name. God revealed His name to him as a representative of the people, and that name announced to him that his name is “Jehovah,” which means, “I AM.” What does the expression “I AM” mean? It means that He exists, working on behalf of his chosen people, unlike the Greek religions, which often looked to God’s existence as being far above the affairs of the world.

## 17. Why is God called Theos?

G. L. Prestige<sup>44</sup> says that some early Church Fathers, such as Clement and Dionysius of Alexandria, followed Herodotus<sup>45</sup> in linking *theos* meaning “god” and *thentes*, meaning “management.”

**St. Clement** says, “For God is called Θεός [*theos*], from θέσις ([*thesis*] placing), and order or arrangement.”<sup>46</sup> This is in contrast to Aristotle who said that God is the first mover, who moved the world and left it to natural laws. We believe that God is infinite love, the movement of His love emanating from within Him through the eternal relationship of the Holy Trinity. God’s love for His creation has revealed the world, and this love still operates, and continues even after the second coming of Christ.

The Alexandrian Fathers strongly affirm that God, who is incomprehensible, cares for the human being through his unique love, because the kingdom of his heavenly love is established in the depths of the human soul: “for indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The power of God is that love that is always in motion. **Pope Athanasius** says, “but God is self-existent, enclosing all things, and enclosed by none; within all things according to His own goodness and power, yet outside all things in His proper nature.”<sup>47</sup>

## 18. Why do some people reject faith?

In a meeting with a certain fellow, a leader of a group that denies the existence of God, he told me: “Many call us atheists. We believe in the extraordinary power of human thought. But we reject belief in God for the following reasons:

“a. We reject the existence of an invisible being that controls human life, demands what is not within our power, and threatens us with eternal punishments; this is what some religious people portray under the name of ‘God.’ There is no spirit of love apparent in their

<sup>44</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (SPCK, 1936).

<sup>45</sup> Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus* 2.52.

<sup>46</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.29 (ANF 2:341).

<sup>47</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Decretis or Defence of the Nicene Definition* 3.11 (NPNF II/4:157), amended.

portrayal. Some find belief in God offensive because of this disfigured image of the fatherhood of God; even for young children, where the family, the priest, or the servant present Him as an extremely strict judge, nit-picking for errors, and ignoring our weaknesses. On the other hand, the parent or the leader who conveys the spirit of love attracts souls to God, of whom it is said: ‘God is love.’

“b. We have no need for faith in things that cannot be seen or touched.

“c. With regard to the behavior of religious people, we refuse to associate with any particular group that includes people who belittle those who do not accept their faith, and who argue with them in a spirit of arrogance.”

I recall in 1971 in Los Angeles, a young woman walked into church around midnight together with a group of young people. I asked her about her relationship with God, and she said to me: “And who is God?” I answered her: “He is our Father and your Father.” She said: “What does it mean that He is our Father?” And when I suggested that it was like her own actual father, she replied that she did not know where either he or her mother lived; nor did she want to know where they lived. She had never tasted fatherhood or motherhood from her parents, nor marital love between her parents. So, she was incapable of tasting the love of God, and faith in Him no longer had any place in her heart.

I asked her about her life, and she answered frankly before all present that she lived with her boyfriend.

I asked her: “Are you thinking of marrying him?”

She replied: “I am enjoying a period of amusement, dancing, and drunkenness with him, but I will replace him with someone else after a few months.”

I asked her: “Are you happy?” She answered frankly, “It might appear that I live a life full of happiness. Some may count me the happiest person on the face of the earth. But the truth is that I am desperately miserable, because the life of entertainment in all its manifestations does not give me inner satisfaction, or peace, or security, or true joy.”

This is the harvest that some of us receive from our sons and daughters because the family does not convey the icon of heaven.

Here is the true story of a young man who lived in Alexandria in 1972: This young man was a senior high school student. He snatched up a bible and threw it on the ground, and said in front of all those present: “If there is God, then let Him stop me from trampling on this bible!” His fellow Christians took him to the Church of our Lady, the Virgin Mary in the suburb of Moharam Bek. He spat on her icon, and said to them, “If the Virgin Mary is present, let her wipe the spit from the icon.”

His fellow students asked me to visit him. So I did indeed go, together with servant who is a deacon. When the young man’s father opened the door and saw me, he exclaimed,

“Rescue me, or I will die because of my only son! Prove to him that God exists.” Quietly I asked him to calm down, and told him that I would talk to his son. The father asked that I conduct the discussion with his son in his presence and that of the boy’s mother. I took hold of the son’s hand, and said to the father, “Just let me sit with him.”

I took the boy into his room and said to him, “I heard about you from your colleagues. I have not come to argue with you, but to chat with you in the spirit of love, for the sake of your own inner peace.”

After we spoke about the words of **St. Augustine** — that behind every atheism there is lust — I said to him, “I know that in your depths you want to meet with God. But what is blocking you from Him is either that you want to marry an unbelieving girl, or that you suffer from lusts that you think you cannot escape, or in haughtiness, you desire to attain some particular kind of success that you feel to be unattainable.”

He answered me, “I do not suffer from any of these things. What impelled me to deny the existence of God is my parents. I am an only son, and my father and mother are suffocating me with their unwise love. They want to control me like a chess piece. I wanted to be a leader, with people gathered around me who think of me as a hero.”

I replied, “Why don’t you return to God? For He loves you and died for you.”

He asked, “Can God accept me after I trod on the Bible and spit on the icon of the Virgin Mary?”

I replied, “They look upon you as a child who acted in his anger. The Lord reaches out His hand, not to reproach you, but to kiss you.”

He asked again, “When can I confess?”

I answered him, “You have confessed, and your God rejoices at your return to Him!”

He asked, “When can I go back to church?”

I replied, “Even now, you are in the bosom of the Church, your mother.”

We left the room, and his elderly father asked me, “Can we start the discussion?”

The young man replied, “Please, Dad, leave me to work it out with our father.”

Another time, about five years ago, a young university graduate came to me and asked me if he could confess. He said, “I had come to a decision that I would declare my atheism to all my friends. But at the last moment I asked myself: I see my mother constantly rejoicing with Christ, so what should I do? My mother’s constant joy and her endless happiness restored me to the Lord Christ. I want to be with her in the great day of the Lord!”

### **19. How do we win those who reject the faith?**

A student at the Faculty of Pharmacy in the University of Alexandria was once invited to spend the summer vacation with another student of Pharmacy in Western Europe, as part of a student exchange program between the two countries, during the days of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. When the Egyptian student returned to Alexandria, she received a letter from her colleague who had hosted her. The European student thanked her for accepting the invitation and told her that this three-month summer period had been one of the most beautiful periods of her life. She apologized for ridiculing her faith in God, the Bible, and eternal life. She told her that she had the greatest affection for her, and that she would rebuke herself every night for mocking the girl's faith. But somehow, that never stopped her from mocking her anew every day for the whole three months.

In her letter, she confessed that in her, she saw a person who does not suffer from feelings of isolation, who loves everyone she meets in a spirit of humility and wondrous fellowship with the loving and almighty God. She asked if she could remain in touch with her so that she could enjoy what she enjoys.

A dear friend who works as an engineer surveying the sea floor once told me this story. On board the boat was an atheist British engineer, and the two became friends. After fifteen days, as the British engineer was departing for England he said to his friend, "I thank you for the opportunity to chat with you over these past two weeks. I have not come across a religious person who conversed with me so attentively and respectfully. I may disagree with you on some points, but I've decided that when I return home, I will reassess my life, and reconsider everything you said to me."

### **20. Is faith incompatible with intellectual understanding and scientific research?**

While **St. Basil** focuses on faith and its ability to sanctify the human mind and heart, he also accepts learning that is in harmony with faith. He criticizes believers who belittle scientific and philosophical studies, considering them to be full of deception.

He did not forget the benefits he derived from his own studies, even at the hands of non-believers, for they elevated his way of thinking and made him cleave more closely to the word of God. **St. Gregory the Theologian** praised St. Basil for this in a eulogy saying: "I think that every sensible person thinks that knowledge is the chief among those things that are good, and that are within the reach of our minds. I do not say that our learning alone is high and noble, because it cares little about appearing elegant in order that it might focus on beauty of thought, but also on that knowledge that is from the outside [outside the Church]; which is rejected by many Christians with little understanding, who consider it deceptive and a danger that separates us from God ... Therefore, **we ought to hold on to that which can help**

**us to contemplate what is true**, and avoid everything that leads to evil, sin, and destruction.”<sup>48</sup>

With such great appreciation of learning and philosophy, he affirms the need for discernment with the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we might not deviate from true knowledge, but enjoy the work of God. **St. Basil** says, “We should take great care not to succumb to being ignorant of learning, but to learn how to identify what is of great value in it ... we must beware that we do not become obsessed with it, and so forget the knowledge of God, immersed in vain research. We must use discernment in our education, methodically selecting out useful learning and avoiding everything that may be harmful.”<sup>49</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Faith is the gate of the mysteries. What the bodily eye is for the things of the senses, the same is faith in connection with the treasures hidden to the eyes of the mind. We possess two psychic eyes, as the Fathers say, just as we possess two bodily eyes. But both have not the same purpose as to sight. With one we see the hidden glory of God which is concealed in the things of nature, His power and His wisdom, and His eternal care for us which by His peculiar providence is directed unto us. With the same eye we also see the spiritual classes of our fellow-beings. With the other we see the glory of His holy nature.”<sup>50</sup>

## 21. What is the relationship between faith and scientific and spiritual knowledge?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Now neither is knowledge without faith, nor faith without knowledge ... And the Son is the true teacher respecting the Father; and that we may believe in the Son, we must know the Father, with whom also is the Son ... And the knowledge of the Son and Father, which is according to the gnostic rule—that which in reality is gnostic [one who truly knows God]—is the attainment and comprehension of the truth by the truth ... believed and known by a few.”<sup>51</sup>

He also says, “it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith. But to adopt what is well said, and not to adopt the reverse, is caused not simply by faith, but by faith combined with knowledge. But if ignorance is want of training and of instruction, then teaching produces knowledge of divine and human things.”<sup>52</sup>

And **St. Augustine** says, “Attend, dearly beloved, and see what wholesome advice the Apostle gives, who says, *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk in*

<sup>48</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 43.11 (NPNF II/7:398–99). Quoted in Elias Koyter Al-Mukhlessy, *St. Basil the Great* (Beirut: Publications of the Paulist Library in Beirut, 1989, Arabic): p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homily* 22.2 (PG 31:397). Quoted in Elias Koyter Al-Mukhlessy, *St. Basil the Great* (Beirut: Publications of the Paulist Library in Beirut, 1989, Arabic): p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923): p. 210.

<sup>51</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 5.1 (ANF 2:444).

<sup>52</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.6 (ANF 2:307).

*Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith; for with this simple and assured faith ought we abide steadfastly in Him, that He may Himself open to the faithful what is hidden in Him; for the same Apostle says, In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and He does not hide them to refuse them, but to stir up desire for those hidden things.*”<sup>53</sup>

## 22. Which is first: knowledge or belief?

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “What interpretation then are we to put upon the coal which touched the prophet’s lips, and cleansed him from all sin? Plainly it is the message of salvation, and the confession of faith in Christ, which anyone who receives it with his mouth is forthwith and altogether purified.”<sup>54</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “We say that, on the whole, in the case of sciences, faith precedes knowledge, but in our teaching, even if anyone says that knowledge begins before faith, we do not disagree — but, a knowledge commensurate with human comprehension.”<sup>55</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Those who believe now have the power to learn also. For thus says the prophet Isaiah: “if you do not believe this, neither will you understand it” (Isa. 7:9 LXX). That is why it was right for faith to first be rooted in them, and then after that comes an understanding of the matters of which they are ignorant.”

And **St. Augustine** says, “as understanding consists in sight, and is abiding, but faith feeds us as babes, upon milk, in the cradles of temporal things (for now we walk by faith, not by sight); as, moreover, unless we walk by faith, we shall not attain to sight, which does not pass away, but abides, our understanding being purified by holding to the truth”<sup>56</sup> “For faith ought to go before understanding, that understanding may be the reward of faith.”<sup>57</sup>

## 23. How do we pay our debts with faith?

**St. Basil the Great** says we should believe that repentance enables sinners to receive forgiveness, and yet **we hope to obtain forgiveness as a gift of faith** ... not as something God owes us. There is a difference between those who seek forgiveness as a gift, and those who ask for it as a right ... you must pay your previous debts before you ask for what you want. Come as an honest debtor who settles the debts he truly owes with faith before requesting a new loan. For he who borrows from God finds it easier to fulfill his debt than if

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<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume I*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) 1.5: p. 6, amended.

<sup>54</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 94: p. 437, amended.

<sup>55</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, Letter 235:11 to Amphilochius of Iconium (FOTC 28:161).

<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.12(17) (NPNF 1/2:540).

<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 89.1: p. 645.



he borrows from a person. Because a person requires money as repayment, which is not always affordable for the one in debt. But God asks you to repay your debt with the innermost feelings of your heart, which you can always afford ... prayer, fasting, and tears are the treasures of the faithful debtor, and they are more valuable than those who give money without faith.

And **St. Ambrose** says, “Ananias was poor, when after selling his land he brought the money to the apostles, and was not able with it to pay his debt, but involved himself the more (Acts 5:1–2). That widow was rich who cast her two small pieces into the treasury, of whom Christ said: ‘This poor widow has cast in more than they all (Luke 21:3).’ For God requires not money but faith. And I do not deny that sins may be diminished by liberal gifts to the poor, but only if faith commend what is spent. For what would the giving of one’s whole property benefit without charity? There are some who aim at the credit of generosity for pride alone, because they wish thereby to gain the good opinion of the multitude for leaving nothing to themselves; but whilst they are seeking rewards in this life, they are laying up none for the life to come, and having received their reward here they cannot hope for it there.”<sup>58</sup>

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Repentance, then, is an effect of faith. For unless a man believes that to which he was addicted to be sin, he will not abandon it; and if he does not believe punishment to be impending over the transgressor, and salvation to be the portion of him who lives according to the commandments, he will not reform.”<sup>59</sup>

#### 24. What do the Fathers say about the majesty of faith?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** compares the majesty of love to the majesty of faith, saying, “On the contrary, love has degrees, ascents, and peaks. Therefore, when the soul has made a little progress the love of God, she is able to ascend even higher ... So, let us work, O servant of God, to increase that which is capable of receiving growth, and let us keep the faith as it is, without further discourse. Love is like gold, and faith like a precious stone. One can add to one pound of gold thousands more pounds of gold, but to a precious stone, one cannot add an ounce or the shadow of an ounce. Here is the true image of Christ, whose history is above all discussion ... You (O Faith) are modest even when you are without a veil ... Your beauty is always on the right; in you, there is no left. Merchants desired you, for the sight of you is inexhaustible; for this reason they sold their possessions to buy you, and your richness has made them forget their own possessions. You speak to us even when you are silent, because the sight of you fills us with admiration.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 2.8(82–84) (NPNF II/10:355–356) amended

<sup>59</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.6 (ANF 2:353) amended.

<sup>60</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, Letter 16.12, 13, in J. P. P. Martin, *Lettres de Jacques de Saroug aux moines du Couvent de Mar Bassus, et à Paul d’Edesse, relevées et traduites*, (Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, vol. 30, 1876): pp. 252–253.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “And faith is a power of God, being the strength of the truth. For example, it is said, ‘if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move’ (Matt. 17:20). And again, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’ (Matt. 9:29). And one is cured, receiving healing by faith.”<sup>61</sup> “The reward of faith is great and endless. It is said that he who believes will be blessed with the richest blessings of God, for he will be filled with the gifts of the Spirit; not only enriching his mind, but also enabling him to overflow into the hearts of others, like the waters of a flooding river that overflow divine goodness upon his neighbor as well.”

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Understand from this, my beloved, that faith sets us also in Christ’s presence, and so brings us unto God, as for us to be even counted worthy of His words.”<sup>62</sup>

**St. Philoxenus** says, “Faith instills in a man divine power such that he believes that everything he wills, he can perform!”

**St. Aphrahat** says, “Let us draw near then, my beloved, to faith, since its powers are so many. For faith raised up to the heavens (Enoch), and conquered the Deluge. It caused the barren to bring forth. It delivered from the sword. It raised up from the pit. It enriched the poor. It released the captives. It delivered the persecuted. It brought down the fire. It divided the sea. It cleft the rock, and gave to the thirsty water to drink. It satisfied the hungry. It raised the dead, and brought them up from Sheol. It stilled the billows. It healed the sick. It conquered hosts. It overthrew walls. It stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the flame of fire. It humiliated the proud, and brought the humble to honour. All these mighty works were wrought by faith.”<sup>63</sup>

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “Steadfast faith is a strong tower; and for one who has faith Christ comes to be all.”<sup>64</sup>

And **St. Augustine** says, “Great is faith, but there is no profit from it if is devoid of love.” “Faith overflows with prayer, and overflowing prayer strengthens the faith.” “The goal of faith is that we believe, and the goal of love is that we work.” “Thus, we become able to touch Him who is seated in heaven with our faith, not with our hands.”

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<sup>61</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.11 (ANF 2:358), amended.

<sup>62</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 126: p. 585.

<sup>63</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations* 1.18 (NPNF II/13:351–352).

<sup>64</sup> St. Mark the Ascetic, “On the Spiritual Law: Two Hundred Texts,” 4, in Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer et al., (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) pp. 110–124: p. 110.

## 25. How is our faith strengthened?

For our sake, the Lord Christ put on our weakness that we might enjoy His strength. **The scholar Origen** says, “Faith in the crucified Christ grants us authority. And if we lack anything, the power of God supplies it to us through our faith.”<sup>65</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “But wonderful it is, that when Christ Crucified is preached, two hear, one despises, the other ascends. Let him that despises, impute it to himself; let not him that ascends, arrogate it to himself. For he has heard from the True Master; *no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father* (John 6:65). Let him rejoice, that it has been given; let him render thanks to Him Who gives with humble, not an arrogant heart; lest what he has attained through humility, he lose through pride ... For **unto Him Who is everywhere we come by love, not by sailing**. But even if in this kind of voyage, waves and tempests of diverse temptations abound; believe in the Crucified; that your faith may be able to climb upon the Wood. You shall not sink, but shall be borne upon the Wood. Thus, even thus, amid the waves of this world did he sail, who said, *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. 6:14) ... .”<sup>66</sup> “Our faith initially grows when we receive the preached word. After that, we are granted the presence of truth, as we are granted joyful contemplation and perfect peace. That is what will be granted to us in God’s eternal kingdom.”

## 26. What is the relationship of faith to virtues?

**St. Aphrahat** says, “So also let the man, who becomes a house, yes, a dwelling-place, for Christ, take heed to what is needed for the service of Christ, who lodges in him, and with what things he may please Him. For first he builds his building on the Stone, which is Christ. On Him, on the Stone, is faith based, and on faith is reared up all the structure. For the habitation of the house is required **pure fasting**, and it is made firm **by faith**. There is also needed for it **pure prayer**, and through faith is it accepted. Necessary for it too is **love**, and with faith is it compounded. Furthermore **alms** are needed, and through faith are they given. He demands also **humility**, and by faith is it adorned. He chooses too **virginity**, and by faith is it loved. He joins with himself **holiness**, and in faith is it planted. He cares also for **wisdom**, and through faith is it acquired. He desires also **hospitality**, and by faith does it abound. Requisite for Him also is **simplicity**, and with faith is it commingled. He demands **patience** also, and by faith is it perfected. He has respect also to **long-suffering**, and through faith is it acquired ... All these things does the faith demand that is based on the rock of the true Stone, that is Christ. These works are required for Christ the King, who dwells in men that are built up in these works.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 1.8.1–4.

<sup>66</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 81.3, 2: p. 587, amended.

<sup>67</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations* 1.4 (NPNF II/13:346) amended.

## 27. How do we proceed in true faith?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Learn to walk in the true faith, to rest in God, and do not seek earthly fulfillments and temporal blessings. Do not deviate towards a vain earthly faith that depends on requests for signs and wonders in order to be fully established.”<sup>68</sup>

And **St. Augustine** says, “For where are there those three, in order to build up which in the mind the whole apparatus of the divine Scriptures has been raised up, namely Faith, Hope, and Charity (1 Cor. 13:13), except in a mind believing what it does not yet see, and hoping and loving what it believes? Even He therefore who is not known, but yet is believed, can be loved.”<sup>69</sup>

## 28. How do we face all the worldly corruption?

**The Epistle to Diognetus** says, “He wants us to come to Him, to see Him as our only Father, the Guardian, Teacher, Counselor and Physician. He wants to fill and shape our every thought with His goodness, to change our way in this crooked dark world, so it becomes good. If you contemplate His righteousness, He truthfully fills you; He becomes your pride, glory, and strength. Righteousness becomes the life of your souls. Our faith then, is not based on human speculation, but on the righteousness of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the faith that you can attain, making you strong when facing all the world's mire. This faith is given to you for free, only if you want it and accept it.”

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Job says: ‘No one is free from stain, not even if his life last for one day’ (Job 14:4 LXX). And David laments and says: ‘I was conceived in iniquity and in sins did my mother conceive me.’ (Ps. 50:7 LXX) The Apostle also declares: ‘For all have sinned and do need the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation through faith in his blood’ (Rom. 3:23–25). Wherefore, the pardon of sins is also vouchsafed to them that believe, since the Lord Himself said: “This is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins (Matt. 26:28).”<sup>70</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “For what good work can be prior to faith, when the apostle says, ‘Whatsoever is not of faith is sin’ (Rom. 14:23)?”<sup>71</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “What human medicine could not cure, **patience and faith healed**. He (Job) sat on a dung heap, but in his soul he was wandering about in Paradise.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* in David Hazard, *You Give Me New Life: A 40-day Journey in the Company of the Early Disciples: Devotional Readings* (Bethany House, 1995): ch. 4.

<sup>69</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Holy Trinity* 8.4(6) (NPNF I/3:118).

<sup>70</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Concerning Baptism* 1.2 (FOTC 9:357–358).

<sup>71</sup> St. Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 86.2 (NPNF I/7:353).

<sup>72</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 2* (60–96) Homily 73 (FOTC 48:114).

## 29. What role do tribulations play in faith?

Tribulations impel us to cry out to God and ask for our faith to be strengthened, as **St. Ambrose** says, “Christian faith is like a mustard seed, that at first sight appears to be small, trivial, and weak; it does not clearly manifest its true strength. Yet when various tribulations begin to attack it, its activity and strength become apparent, and [the Christian then] breathes out his fiery faith in the Lord, stirring up a kind of divine passion that inflames not only himself, but also everything around him.”<sup>73</sup>

**Cyprian the Martyr** says, “Let not these things be offences to you, but battles: nor let them weaken nor break the Christian’s faith, **but rather show forth his strength in the struggle**, since all the injury inflicted by present troubles is to be despised in the assurance of future blessings. Unless the battle has preceded, there cannot be a victory: when there shall have been, in the onset of battle, the victory, then also the crown is given to the victors. For the helmsman is recognised in the tempest; in the warfare the soldier is proved. It is a wanton display when there is no danger. Struggle in adversity is the trial of the truth. The tree which is deeply founded in its root is not moved by the onset of winds ... Thus, moreover, the Apostle Paul, after shipwrecks, after scourgings, after many and grievous tortures of the flesh and body, says that he is not grieved, but benefited by his adversity, in order that while he is sorely afflicted he might more truly be proved.”<sup>74</sup> “There ought to abide with us, dearest brother, an immovable strength of faith; and against all the irruptions and onsets of the waves that roar against us, a steady and unshaken courage should plant itself as with the fortitude and mass of a resisting rock.”<sup>75</sup>

## 30. What is the role of faith in the virtues and acts of love?

**St. Augustine** says, “there are works which appear good, without faith in Christ; but they are not good, because they are not referred to that end in which works are good; ‘for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4). For that reason, He wills not to distinguish faith from work, but declared faith itself to be work. For it is that same faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6).”<sup>76</sup>

**Abba Evagrius** says, “Faith is the beginning of love; the end of love is knowledge of God.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Sermon 1*.

<sup>74</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 7: On the Mortality* 12–13 (ANF 5:472).

<sup>75</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian*, Epistle 54.2, To Cornelius, Concerning Fortunatus and Felicissimus, or Against the Heretics (ANF 5:339).

<sup>76</sup> St Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*, Tractate 25.12 (NPNF I/7:164) amended.

<sup>77</sup> Abba Evagrius, “Instructions to Cenobites and Others,” in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*, translated from the Russian text, “Dobrotolubiye,” by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981): pp. 115–116.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For faith and godliness are allied to each other, and sisters; and he who believes in Him is godly, and he also who is godly, believes the more. He therefore who is in a state of wickedness, undoubtedly also wanders from the faith; and he who falls from godliness, falls from the true faith ... And as when brother is helped by brother, they become as a wall to each other; so faith and godliness, being of like growth, hang together, and he who is practiced in the one, of necessity is strengthened by the other. Therefore, wishing the disciple to be exercised in godliness unto the end, and to contend for the faith, he counsels them, saying, ‘Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life’ (1 Tim. 6:12).”<sup>78</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “But it is not as I fear and hate a wild beast (since fear is twofold) that I fear the father, whom I fear and love at once. Again, fearing lest I be punished, I love myself in assuming fear. He who fears to offend his father, loves himself. **Blessed then is he who is found possessed of faith, being, as he is, composed of love and fear.** And faith is power in order to salvation, and strength to eternal life.”<sup>79</sup>

### 31. What is the role of faith in hope?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Hope, too, is based on faith ... And hope is the expectation of the possession of good. Necessarily, then, is expectation founded on faith.”<sup>80</sup>

### 32. How can we discern between the faith of demons and the faith of saints?

**St. Augustine** says, “You applaud yourself for your faith ... *you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble* (James 2:19). Shall they also see God? They shall see Him who are pure in heart [Matt. 5:8]. But who can say that unclean spirits are pure in heart? And yet they also believe and tremble. Our faith then must be different from the faith of devils. For our faith purifies the heart; but their faith makes them guilty. For they do wickedly, and therefore they say to the Lord, *What have we to do with You? ... We know*, they say, *Who You are: You are the Son of God* [Luke 4:34]. This Peter says, and is commended; the devil says it, and is condemned ... But by what, and what kind of faith, save that which the Apostle Paul defines when he says, Faith which works love (Gal. 5:6).”<sup>81</sup>

“So again when we hear, *He who believes and is baptized shall be saved* (Mark 16:16); we do not of course understand it of someone who believes in the same way that the devils

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<sup>78</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Festal Letters*, Letter XI—For 339, 9 (NPNF II/4:536).

<sup>79</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.12 (ANF 2:360).

<sup>80</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.6 (ANF 2:353).

<sup>81</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume I*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) Sermon 3.10–11: p. 55, amended.

believe and tremble; nor of those who receive baptism in the way of Simon Magus, who though he could be baptized, could not be saved (Acts 8:13).”<sup>82</sup>

### 33. Can a believer deviate and fall?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “A true gnostic [one who truly knows God ... chooses faith or rejects it, with his full freedom.”<sup>83</sup> And **St. Augustine** says, “Wretched, then, must be any people that is divorced from this God ... The City of God, however, has a peace of its own, namely, peace with God in this world by faith and in the world to come by vision.”<sup>84</sup>

### 34. How is faith established in our inner souls?

**St. Aphrahat** says, “Faith is compounded of many things, and by many kinds is it brought to perfection. For it is like a building that is built up of many pieces of workmanship and so its edifice rises to the top. And know, my beloved, that in the foundations of the building stones are laid, and so resting upon stones the whole edifice rises until it is perfected. **Thus also the true Stone, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all our faith.** And on Him, on [this] Stone faith is based. And resting on faith all the structure rises until it is completed ...

“And now hear concerning faith that is based upon the Stone, and concerning the structure that is reared up upon the Stone. For first a man believes, and when he believes, he loves. When he loves, he hopes. When he hopes, he is justified. When he is justified, he is perfected. When he is perfected, he is consummated ... then he becomes a house and a temple for a dwelling-place of Christ, as Jeremiah the Prophet said:—*The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are you, if you amend your ways and your works* (Jer. 7:4–5). And again He said through the Prophet:—*I will dwell in them and walk in them* (Lev. 26:12). And also the Blessed Apostle thus said:—*You are the temple of God and the spirit of Christ dwells in you* (1 Cor. 3:16 etc.). And also our Lord again thus said to His disciples:—*You are in Me and I am in you* (John 14:20) ...

“So also let the man, who becomes a house, yes, a dwelling-place, for Christ, take heed to what is needed for the service of Christ, who lodges in him, and with what things he may please Him. For first he builds his building on the Stone, which is Christ. On Him, on the Stone, is faith based, and on faith is reared up all the structure. For the habitation of the house is required **pure fasting**, and it is made firm **by faith**.

<sup>82</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume I*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) Sermon 21.16: p.177, amended.

<sup>83</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 3.9.

<sup>84</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 19:26, 27 (FOTC 24:245–246).

“There is also needed for it **pure prayer**, and through faith is it accepted. Necessary for it too is **love**, and with faith is it compounded. Furthermore **alms** are needed, and through faith are they given.

“He demands also **humility**, and by faith is it adorned.

“He chooses too **virginity**, and by faith is it loved.

“He joins with himself **holiness**, and in faith is it planted.

“He cares also for **wisdom**, and through faith is it acquired.

“He desires also **hospitality**, and by faith does it abound.

“Requisite for Him also is **simplicity**, and with faith is it commingled.

“He demands **patience** also, and by faith is it perfected. He has respect also to **long-suffering**, and through faith is it acquired.

“He loves **mourning** also, and through faith is it manifested.

“He seeks also for **purity**, and by faith is it preserved.

“All these things does the faith demand that is based on the rock of the true Stone, that is Christ. These works are required for Christ the King, who dwells in men that are built up in these works.”<sup>85</sup>

### **35. Can we find God’s heroes of faith throughout the ages?**

In astonishment, we stand before the heroes of faith and objectively behold God’s work across all ages:

- a. **From the time of Adam until Moses**, no one possessed even a single book of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, we find splendid examples of heroes of the faith who experienced it through handing it down from generation to generation (oral tradition) such as Abel and Seth; and Enoch who pleased the Lord so He took him to heaven. Also, Noah, Abraham the father of fathers and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Isaac and Rebekah, and Joseph, etc.; splendid examples of people most of whom lived in a pagan environment and yet never deviated from the faith.
- b. **In the age of the Mosaic Law**, some of the books of the Old Testament were given, but the people could not experience the grace of the New Testament, such as being divine adoption, the grace of the cross and the resurrection in Christ Jesus, etc. We find Deborah the judge, David the sweet psalmist of Israel, Hezekiah the king, and the great prophets of faith like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and people of God who were

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<sup>85</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations* 1:2–4 (NPNF II/13:345–346).



giants of faith during exile such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Queen Esther, and Judith. Though under the law, they were marked by a wonderful spirit of godliness.

- c. **In the covenant of grace**, we partook of grace upon grace (John 1:16) and we came into contact with characters from different backgrounds such as the disciples, the apostles, and so many early Church fathers, and holy women, up till this day.

People often wonder: will the state of those under the natural law resemble that of those under the Mosaic Law, and those under the covenant of grace? Paul the Apostle declared that those who do not have the law are a law to themselves (Rom. 2:14). At the same time we beheld the richness of God's love, His impartial love for all humanity.

### **36. Are the gifts of the people of faith the same for everyone?**

The Bible gives us examples of the work of faith in the lives of many, that we may realize that every person is offered that which satisfies his needs (Heb. 11). And as **St. Aphrahat** said: "For **Abel**, because of his faith his offering was accepted. And **Enoch**, because he was well-pleasing through his faith, was removed from death. **Noah**, because he believed, was preserved from the deluge. **Abraham**, through his faith, obtained blessing, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. **Isaac**, because he believed, was loved. **Jacob**, because of his faith, was preserved. **Joseph**, because of his faith, was tried in the waters of contention, and was delivered from his trial, and his Lord established a witness in him, as **David** said: — *Witness has he established in Joseph* (Ps. 81:6). **Moses** also by his faith performed many wonderful works of power. By his faith he destroyed the Egyptians with ten plagues. Again, by faith he divided the sea, and caused his people to cross over and sank the Egyptians in the midst of it. By faith he cast the wood into the bitter waters and they became sweet. By faith he brought down manna and satisfied his people. By faith he spread out his hands and conquered Amalek, as is written:— *His hands continued in faith till the setting of the sun* (Ex. 17:12, Syrian Peshitta translation). Also by faith he went up to Mount Sinai, when he twice fasted for the space of forty days. Again by faith he conquered Sihon and Og, the Kings of the Amorites."<sup>86</sup>

### **37. Does God have favorites among the believers?**

God reveals Himself, His secrets, and His plan to all who yearn and ask for that, *without any favoritism*.

**The young boy** Samuel, who gladly left his parents' house and lived in the temple with a zealous heart for the glory of God, was considered worthy — unlike Eli the priest — to hear God's voice and be entrusted with the secrets of God's plan for His people.

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<sup>86</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations* 1:14 (NPNF II/13:350).

**And Moses the prophet**, who “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:24–26) was considered worthy to witness the mystery of the incarnation in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2–4), where he was called to lead the people and receive the law, etc.

And since **Isaiah's** heart was full of zeal for the house of the Lord and His people, he was counted worthy to see the Lord God sitting with the train of His robe filling the temple. The Lord asked him who He should send to serve, and he answered, “Here am I! Send me.” (Isa. 6:8).

Paul the Apostle says of God — while in Athens among the philosophers — “He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27–28).

### **38. What are the signs of a living faith?**

- a. The feeling that my life is a pleasant journey in the company of my Savior, the Lord of glory, the crucified Jesus, even in the midst of tribulations.
- b. My church life should consolidate my personal relationship with the Holy Trinity, and my personal relationships should urge me towards a richer ecclesiastical life.
- c. Longing for the Lord’s second coming on the clouds.
- d. Continual spiritual progress so that one day, I may perhaps attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).
- e. Love for all humanity and prayer for the salvation of even those who resist the faith.
- f. Growth in knowledge through the Holy Bible and delight in the experience of the holy fathers.
- g. Prayer for the whole world and for future generations, even until the Lord’s second coming.
- h. Delight in the experience being united with the heavenlies.

## 4

# The Holy Bible

### 39. Why the Holy Bible?

At the beginning of creation, Adam and Eve were not in need of written words in the Garden of Eden before the fall, for they met the Lord face to face, and the grace of God was working in them. They were His friends. Naturally, they were always praising Him with joy and jubilation. They were like the heavenly creatures as they praised God and glorified Him. They were in a state of internal satiety, surveying nature in its beauty and aware of the praise that all creatures offer to God, each one in its own language with wonderful peace. But disobedience alienated them from the source of life and they came to be in a state of terror. The human fell into sin, his mind and conscience were darkened (Rom. 1:21), and he became incapable of restoring his relationship with his Creator to the way it was before the fall. It was not possible for God, the Lover of mankind, not to restore the state of the human that He had created in his image and likeness.

The nature which the Almighty created bears witness to His power and His boundless pastoral care. “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Ps. 104:24). Further, the Creator gave people a natural law in their hearts, “Their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves, their thoughts accusing or else excusing them, in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel” (Rom. 2:15–16).

Not only do nature and the natural law within man attest to the Creator; but God also announced His plan for salvation by offering the Messiah Himself as a sacrifice and atonement for the whole world:

**First:** Throughout history, God chose people who yearn for the salvation of humanity and declared to them, by the Spirit, prophecies that reveal the mystery of salvation: the incarnation of the Word; His dwelling among us; His offering of Himself as a sacrifice although He is the heavenly high priest; His suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, descent into Hades, and setting free of the believers who had fallen asleep; His ascension into Heaven; and His second coming, when heaven and earth will be dissolved and we will enjoy the Jerusalem above, our mother.

**Second:** These revelations came through visions, dreams, and conversations with God.

**Third:** God gave His people actual historical events that are symbols of the divine work of salvation. As the Lord Jesus Christ said: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

The human, who was disobedient and unbelieving toward his Creator, needed God to reveal to him His divine presence and His love for him. He needed to know God’s plan and power to reconcile his situation one way or another; whether by divine revelation by way of the creation that witnesses to this, or in a supernatural manner such as divine inspiration.

The human race needed divine revelation to reveal to them the way of their salvation. This is why **St. John Chrysostom** says, “that the grace of the Spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit. But, since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come, let us at any rate embrace the second best course ... Reflect then how great an evil it is for us, who ought to live so purely as not even to need written words, but to yield up our hearts, as books, to the Spirit; now that we have lost that honor, and are come to have need of these.”<sup>87</sup>

God was preparing humans to receive the Gospel as news that brings joy, regarding the coming of the Word of God incarnate and offered to them free salvation. This is what **St. John Chrysostom** describes to us, saying, “Yes, for it was removal of punishment, and remission of sins, and ‘righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,’ (1 Cor. 1:30) and adoption, and an inheritance of Heaven, and a relationship with the Son of God, which he came declaring unto all; to enemies, to the perverse, to them that were sitting in darkness. What then could ever be equal to these good tidings? God on earth, Man in Heaven; and all became mingled together, Angels joined the choirs of men, men had fellowship with the angels, and with the other powers above: and one might see the long war brought to an end, and reconciliation made between God and our nature, the devil brought to shame, demons in flight, death destroyed, Paradise opened, the curse blotted out, sin put out of the way, error driven off, truth returning, the word of godliness everywhere sown and flourishing in its growth, the polity of those above planted on the earth, those powers in secure intercourse with us, and on earth angels continually abiding, and hope abundant touching things to come.”<sup>88</sup>

#### **40. Why do we need to study the Scriptures deeply?**

Jesus Christ says, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). In other words, He is saying, “It is not enough to boast about possessing the books and reading them; you need to search them diligently in order to enjoy your salvation and eternal life, for they all revolve around My coming to you.” St. John Chrysostom considers this text to refer to those who seek precious stones deep in the ground, dig mines, and carefully search for the precious stone until they find them.

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<sup>87</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 1.1–2 (NPNF I/10:1).

<sup>88</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 1.4 (NPNF I/10:2), amended.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, even the lists of names included in Scripture have their profound value,<sup>89</sup> and he devoted two homilies to explain the greetings in chapter 16 of the epistle to the Romans to show that the treasures of wisdom lie hidden in every word uttered by the Spirit.<sup>90</sup> St. John Chrysostom says, “Christ sent the Scriptures to the Jews, not that they might read them casually, but that they might search them deeply and exhaustively; He did not say ‘read the Scriptures,’ but ‘**search the Scriptures.**’ Thus, He commands them to study them profoundly, for the words that have been said about Him need great attention if they are to reveal the benefits to be found in their depths.”

“For there is, there is an infirmity of hearing. For as a stomach which is infirm could not take in wholesome food (which it finds) hard of digestion, so a soul which is become puffy and heated, unstrung and relaxed, could not receive the word of the Spirit. Hear the disciples saying, ‘This is a hard saying: who can hear it’ (John 6:60)? But if the soul be strong and healthy, all is most easy, all is light: it becomes more lofty and buoyant: it is more able to soar and lift itself on high.”<sup>91</sup>

“Let us not therefore listen carelessly; since even they who roast the metallic earth, when they have thrown it into the furnace, not only take up the masses of gold, but also collect the small particles with the utmost care. Inasmuch, then, as we likewise have to roast the gold drawn from the Apostolic mines, not by casting it into the furnace, but by depositing it in the thoughts of your souls; not lighting an earthly flame, but kindling the fire of the Spirit, let us collect the little particles with diligence. For if the saying be brief, yet its virtue is great. For pearls too have their proper market, not owing to the size of the substance, but the beauty of their nature.”<sup>92</sup>

#### 41. Is the Holy Bible inscribed in the pure heart and preserved in it?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “It were indeed fitting for us not at all to require the aid of the written Word, but to exhibit a life so pure, that the grace of the Spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit.”<sup>93</sup> “The Scriptures were not given us for this only, that we might have them in books, but that we might engrave them on our hearts ... And this I say, not to prevent you from procuring Bibles, on the contrary, I exhort and earnestly pray that you do this, but I desire that from those books you convey the letters and sense into your understanding, that so it may be purified when it receives the meaning of the writing. For if the devil will not dare to approach a house where a Gospel is lying, much less will any evil spirit, or any sinful nature, ever touch or enter a soul which bears about with it such sentiments as it contains.

<sup>89</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Six Sermons on Isaiah* 6:1 (In illud, Vidi dom) 2.2 (PG 56:97–142).

<sup>90</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Two Sermons on Romans* 16:3 (In illud, Salutate) 1.1 (PG 51:187–208).

<sup>91</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 55 (NPNF I/11:327) amended.

<sup>92</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 1.3 (NPNF I/9:332) amended.

<sup>93</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 1.1 (NPNF I/10:1) amended.

Sanctify then your soul, sanctify your body, by having these ever in your heart, and on your tongue. For if foul speech defiles and invites devils, it is clear that spiritual reading sanctifies and draws down the grace of the Spirit. The Scriptures are divine charms, let us then apply to ourselves and to the passions of our souls the remedies to be derived from them.”<sup>94</sup>

#### **42. What is the believer’s view of the Holy Bible?**

The believer loves the Holy Bible, which is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit; being aware that it is the voice of his beloved God, which offers him divine truth and eternal life. Thus, he embarks upon a hidden and fulfilling dialogue with God, his heart never ceasing to commune with Him. This in no way contradicts our belief that the Lord who created the mind sanctifies the mind and exalts it. So, the believer experiences divine truth, exults in it, and contemplates it, for it is the word of life.

The Church therefore feels a responsibility to preserve what God has declared to those whom He chose to write, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, and it is not authorized to contradict it in any way. Nor does the Church or any of her members have the right to alter the texts of the Holy Bible. Any Church decree is legitimate if it is based on the Holy Bible.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “What is the mark of a Christian? Faith working through love [Gal. 5:6]. What is the mark of faith? **Unwavering of the truth of the God-breathed words**, unshaken by any [futile] reasoning introduced either by physical necessity or fraudulently in the form of piety. What is the mark of a believer? With such conviction, to be of the disposition that what is said [in the Holy Bible] is authoritative and to undertake not to disregard or add anything. For if ‘all that is not from faith is sin’ (Rom. 14:23), as the Apostle says, and ‘faith is from hearing, and hearing is through God’s word’ (Rom. 10:17), then everything outside the God-breathed Scripture [that is, everything that contradicts it], being not from faith, is sin.”<sup>95</sup>

And on the role of the Holy Bible in our lives, **St. Clement of Alexandria** speaks of it as a source of education and training in a person’s life, whether a pastor or a member of the congregation, saying, “For truly holy are those letters that sanctify and deify ... No one will be so impressed by the exhortations of any of the saints, as he is by the words of the Lord Himself, the lover of man. For this, and nothing but this, is His only work—the salvation of man. Therefore He Himself, urging them on to salvation, cries, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt. 4:17) ... Faith will lead you in; experience will teach you; Scripture will train you.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 32.3 (NPNF I/14:113), amended.

<sup>95</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics*, trans. Jacob N. van Sickle (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2014), 80:22: p. 323.

<sup>96</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 9 (ANF 2:196).

**St. Basil the Great** says, “The study of the inspired books is the chief way we know what is required of us. In them, we find instruction about behavior, as well as the life of blessed people recorded in writing, that we may inhale the images of their devout lives and be guided by their good deeds.”<sup>97</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “by means of small sentences, [the Bible] implants divine wisdom in all who give heed, and one sentence often times affords to those who receive it a sufficient source of provision for the whole journey of life.”<sup>98</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** speaks to us of the power of the word of God in the life of the faithful, saying:

“For this is the exhortation of the Scripture given, that the man of God may be rendered perfect by it; without this therefore he cannot be perfect. You have the Scriptures, he says, in place of me [i.e., the Apostle Paul]. If you would learn anything, you may learn it from them. And if he wrote thus to Timothy, who was filled with the Spirit, how much more to us!”<sup>99</sup>

“Thus He meant to set forth the most decisive sign of its greatness [of the gospel]. ‘Even so then shall it be with respect to the gospel too,’ He says. Yes, for His disciples were weakest of all, and least of all; but nevertheless, because of the great power that was in them, the gospel has been unfolded in every part of the world.”<sup>100</sup>

“Why then, tell me, was the greater part of the seed lost? Not through the sower, but through the ground that received it; that is, the soul that did not hearken.”<sup>101</sup>

“Yes, for a word from the divine Scriptures, made to sound in the ear, doth more than fire soften the hardened soul, and renders it fit for all good things.”<sup>102</sup>

“Knowledge of the Scriptures protects the mind, purifies the conscience, weakens dominant lusts, deepens virtue, makes one’s thinking sublime, prevents us from drowning in unexpected hardships, raises us up over the devil, moves the heavens, liberates the soul from the bonds of the body, and grants him wings to fly.”<sup>103</sup>

“Whether, he says, one be saved or be lost, the Gospel continues to have its proper virtue: and as the light, although it blinds the weak, is still light, though causing blindness; and as honey, though it be bitter to those who are diseased, is in its nature sweet; so also is the Gospel of sweet savor, even though some should be lost who believe it not.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Mike Aquilina, *The Way of the Fathers* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000): Article 31.

<sup>98</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 1.3 (NPNF I/9:332).

<sup>99</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy* 9 (NPNF I/13:510).

<sup>100</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 46.2 (NPNF I/10:282), amended.

<sup>101</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 44.4 (NPNF I/10:274), amended.

<sup>102</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 2.10 (NPNF I/10:13).

<sup>103</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Eleven Homilies that Have Not Hitherto Been Published etc.* 5.1 (PG 63:485).

<sup>104</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 5.2 (NPNF I/12:302) amended.

“So that should anyone be lost, the fault is from himself: for both ointment is said to suffocate swine, and light (as I before observed,) to blind the weak. And such is the nature of good things; they not only correct what is akin to them, but also destroy the opposite: and in this way is their power most displayed.”<sup>105</sup>

#### 43. What is the Church Fathers’ view of the Holy Bible?

- a. **The Holy Bible is a shining lamp: St. Cyril the Great** says, “The Word of God is the subject of our faith, and He is the Light. For the lamp is faith, for that was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 9:1).”<sup>106</sup> And the **scholar Origen** says, “The splendor of Christ’s arrival, therefore, illuminating the Law of Moses with the brightness of truth, has taken away that veil which had covered the letter and disclosed, for everyone who believes in him, all the good things which were concealed, buried within.”<sup>107</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “There is no impediment to attaining God's ordinances, except for the lack of a desire for them ... their light is clear and radiant.”

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Our Lord, Your word is all light to those who love it, by it, I am enlightened (Ps. 119:105), that I might speak of You to the world. Our Lord, you are a great day for those who walk in You; in Your light I move that I might walk without offenses. The world is dark, but You are luminous, O Son of God; in Your light, and with You, I walk to Your Father.”<sup>108</sup>

- b. **The Holy Bible is the paradise of the soul and its sweet food: St. John Chrysostom** says, “Yes, rather the reading of the divine Scriptures is not a meadow only, but a paradise; for the flowers here have not a mere fragrance only, but fruit too, capable of nourishing the soul.”<sup>109</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Now the open teaching of wisdom is like honey; like the honeycomb which is squeezed to exude the deeper mysteries, as if from cells of wax, by the mouth of the teacher, as if he were chewing it: but it is sweet to the mouth of the heart, not to the mouth of the flesh.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 5.3 (NPNF I/12:302).

<sup>106</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *In luc.* 11:33–36.

<sup>107</sup> *Origen: On First Principles, Volume 2*, trans. John Behr (Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.1.6: p. 477.

<sup>108</sup> *Memre 12 on the son who wasted his money* (See the text of Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony), *Memre 37 on the clever son*, printer of Egypt at Al-Fagallah, under the supervision of Joseph Bek Menkarios.

<sup>109</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 1.2 (NPNF I/9:331) amended.

<sup>110</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 119.103 (NPNF I/8:577) amended.



**St. Isaac the Bishop of Nineveh** says, “It will happen that the words become sweet in the mouth (Ps. 119:103) and that one word of prayer is repeated infinitely so that no feeling of satiety with it causes you to proceed and to pass ever to a second.”<sup>111</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “What honey is sweeter than to know the wisdom of God? Others, if they will, may possess riches, drink from a jeweled cup, shine in silks, and try in vain to exhaust their wealth in the most varied pleasures. Our riches are to meditate in the law of the Lord day and night, to knock at the closed door, to receive the ‘three loaves’ of the Trinity, and, when the Lord goes before us, to walk upon the water of the world.”<sup>112</sup>

- c. **The Holy Bible is the Groom's feast: St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “All the events of the world end in death. Come and hear from us a report from which life springs ... The bride of the Light has invited us today to feast with her; she has sacrificed the Bridegroom and distributes Him upon the (spiritual) altar.”
- d. **The Holy Bible is the harbor of life: the scholar Origen** says, “I do not presume or ask you to give me life according to my behavior (self-righteousness), but according to your judgments; in other words, to give me life in the way that You want me to live, for I too want to live.”

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The divine books are the harbors of life; arise, you who are discernible among the waves, and rest in the harbors ... here are the treasures stored in the divine volumes, and whoever wants, takes riches without limit.”<sup>113</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Reading the Holy Bible is very useful, it makes the soul wise, guides the spirit towards the heaven, directs the human towards thanksgiving, destroys the desire for earthly things, **and lets our minds constantly contemplate the other world.**”<sup>114</sup>

“For it is not possible that he who is continually under the influence of the words of God, can remain in this present low condition, but he needs must presently take wing, and fly away to the land which is above, and light on the infinite treasures of good things.”<sup>115</sup>

“Do you see, then, that I said not without cause that this Evangelist speaks to us from heaven? Only see from the very beginning whither he has drawn up the soul, having given it wings, and has carried up with him the mind of his hearers. For having set it

<sup>111</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. AJ Wensinck (Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, 1923), Discourse 22(164): pp. 111–112.

<sup>112</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 30 (NPNF II/6:45).

<sup>113</sup> *Memre 66 on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, alms and poverty* (see the text of Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).

<sup>114</sup> Dr. Adnan Tarabulsi: *Interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom*, (1996): p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 1:7 (NPNF I/14:4).

higher than all the things of sense, than earth, than sea, than heaven, he leads it by the hand above the very angels, above cherubim and seraphim, above thrones and principalities and powers; in a word, persuades it to journey beyond all created things.”<sup>116</sup>

- e. **The Holy Bible is the physician and remedy of the soul:** human beings in the world became not like those in a courthouse waiting for the sentence of eternal death, but in a hospital needing medicines and treatment; which are the books of the Holy Bible, administered by the divine Physician who cares for our salvation. Through the Holy Bible, we defy evil, corruption, and eternal death; and with the spirit of hope, we await the day of the coming of the Lord as our heavenly Bridegroom.

**St. Basil** says, “Indeed, many safeguards against the evil would you find in the divine Scripture, and many remedies which from destruction bring salvation: the mysteries of death and resurrection; the words of the terrible judgment and everlasting punishment; the doctrines of repentance and the forgiveness of sin [by the blood of Christ]; those innumerable examples of conversion [via medicines]; the drachma, the sheep, the son who spent his livelihood with harlots, was lost and found, was dead and alive again. Let us use these safeguards against evil [that they may be our witnesses]; through them, let us heal our soul.”<sup>117</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The divine Scriptures are the life of the soul, and he who lives by them—his life is higher than that of Nature ... The scriptures are cures for the sick soul, their words may be used like fine medicaments.”<sup>118</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish (2 Cor. 2:15). Whether, says he, one be saved or be lost, the Gospel continues to have its proper virtue: and as the light, although it blinds the weakly, is still light, though causing blindness... and as honey, though it be bitter to those who are diseased, is in its nature sweet; so also is the Gospel of sweet savor, even though some should be lost who believe it not. For not It, but their own perverseness, works the perdition... and the Savior is for the fall and rising again of many, but still He continues to be a Savior, though ten thousand fall... **and still it continues to be full of healing.**”<sup>119</sup>

- f. **The Holy Bible is the hidden pearl:** **St. Jerome** says, “Every word of scripture is a symbol all its own. These rustic words that men of every age ponder over are packed

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<sup>116</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 2:8 (NPNF I/14:7), amended.

<sup>117</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, Letter 46 (FOTC 13:125).

<sup>118</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, III. On Naboth the Jezreelite, I.13–14, 19–20, in *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Elijah: Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, trans. S. A. Kaufman (Gorgias Press, 2009): pp. 176, 178.

<sup>119</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 5.2 (NPNF I/12:301–302) amended.

full of mystical meaning. ‘But we carry this treasure in vessels of clay’ (2 Cor. 4:7); we have a divine treasury of meaning in the most ordinary words.”<sup>120</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The books (of the Holy Bible) are an ocean where you find the hidden pearl. The interpreter must immerse himself in its waters in order to extract it. The mind is immersed in the books, extracts the pearl, and shows it to the merchants.”

- g. **The Holy Bible is a guide to the human being: St. John Chrysostom** says, “Reading the Holy Bible is very useful, it makes the soul wise, guides the spirit towards heaven... **and lets our minds constantly contemplate the other world.**”<sup>121</sup>
- h. **Scripture uproots the tree of evil:** written divine words came as a cure for our human weakness. **Chrysostom** says, “Your doctrine is full of eyes of light from every side and purifies the way of the world of offenses.”<sup>122</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Hold the sword of the Spirit which is the word of life, and dash the enemy’s blows and cast them away from you. Surround yourself with the fiery spear of the cherubim. It is a vigilant guard, that is, the perfection of all the commandments.”<sup>123</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “You have heard the Apostolic voice, that trumpet from heaven [cf. Rev. 1:10], that spiritual lyre! For even as a trumpet sounding a fearful and warlike note, it both dismays the enemy, and arouses the dejected spirits on its own side, and filling them with great boldness, renders those who attend to it invincible against the devil! And again, as a lyre that gently soothes with soul-captivating melody, it puts to slumber the disquietudes of perverse thoughts.”<sup>124</sup>

- i. **Through the Holy Bible, the Spirit speaks in us: St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Your Spirit speaks in me through Your word, for I am incapable of speaking about You.”<sup>125</sup>

#### **44. How does the Holy Bible invite us, along with all nations, to extol and praise?**

The Holy Bible invites all nations to shout joyfully and praise (Ps. 47:1; 98:4), so that all the earth may be transformed into a heaven that rejoices in the Lord. This invitation is especially directed to the upright in heart (Ps. 32:11; 33:1), and addressed to every believer as a personal gift (Ps. 9:2). A believer feels that all is proceeding as it should, not when he enjoys good health or achieves success in some endeavor, but when he realizes that he has

<sup>120</sup> St. Jerome, Homily 20 on Ps. 90(91) (FOTC 48:160).

<sup>121</sup> Dr. Adnan Tarabulsi: *Interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew by St. John Chrysostom* (1996): p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Pastor Augustine of Paromeos, *St. Jacob of Sarug* (1988): p. 27.

<sup>123</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 66 on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, alms and poverty* (see the text of Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).

<sup>124</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 1.1 (NPNF I/9:331).

<sup>125</sup> Pastor Augustine of Paromeos: *St. Jacob of Sarug* (1988): p. 27.

acquired God, the source of satisfaction, wisdom, joy, and praise. Then his heart cries out every morning, “Let the peoples give thanks to You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Let the Gentiles be glad and greatly rejoice” (Ps. 67:3, 4 LXX).

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful” (Ps. 33:1). The voice of exultation is familiar in the Scripture, signifying a very bright and happy state of soul in those deserving of happiness. ‘Rejoice,’ therefore, ‘in the Lord, O you righteous,’ not when the interests of your home are flourishing, not when you are in good health of body, not when your fields are filled with all sorts of fruits, but, **when you have the Lord — such immeasurable Beauty, Goodness, Wisdom. Let the joy that is in Him suffice for you.** He who rejoices with joy and happiness in anything that is much desired, seems thus to rejoice in Him.”<sup>126</sup>

This is what the Psalmist meant, who sang before the coming of the Savior, “**Your salvation is among all nations**” (Ps. 67:2); and what filled the heart of Simeon the Elder with joy, when he took Him up in his arms and praised Him saying, “For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared **before the face of all peoples**” (Luke 2:30–31).

**St. Augustine** says, “Listen to the following phrase, how he does not speak of a part: ‘Let all the peoples praise You’ (Ps. 67:3). Walk along the way together with all nations; walk along the way with all peoples, O sons of peace, sons of the one Catholic Church. Walk along the way, looking forward, as you walk ... even those who fear thieves sing (on the way). How much better, that while you are safe, you sing in Christ! This path has no thieves; but if you stray from the path, then you shall fall into the hands of thieves.”<sup>127</sup>

**Patriarch Anthimus of Jerusalem** says, “David the Prophet calls upon all people to repent and to confess the beneficence of God. His saying, ‘**All the peoples**’ (Ps. 67:5), contains a prophecy that he would offer to God the sacrifice of praise and prayer everywhere, not only with the Jews and in Jerusalem.”<sup>128</sup>

It behooves us, the faithful, that our hearts rejoice always in the Lord. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.*” (Col. 3:16) ... Look at how St. Paul the Apostle is considerate to the feelings of others: seeing that reading is toilsome, and its irksomeness great, he led them not to histories, but to psalms, that you might at once delight your soul with singing, and gently entertain your friends. ‘Hymns,’ he says, ‘and spiritual songs.’ But now your children will utter songs and dances of Satan, like cooks, and caterers, and musicians; no one knows any

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<sup>126</sup> St Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 15.1 (FOTC 46:227), amended.

<sup>127</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Psalms* 67.6 (NPNF I/8:283), amended.

<sup>128</sup> See Anthimus of Jerusalem, *Tafsīr al-Zabūr al-Ilāhī al-sharīf (Commentary on the Divine, Honorable Psalms)* (Fiyānā, 1792).

psalm, but it seems a thing to be ashamed of even, a mockery, and a joke. There is the treasure house of all these evils ...

“Teach him [your son] to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom; as at once concerning chastity or rather, of not complying with the wicked, immediately with the very beginning of the book [of Psalms] ...

“When he has been instructed out of the Psalms, he will then know hymns also, as a more divine thing. For the Powers above chant hymns, not psalms. For ‘a hymn,’ says one, ‘is not comely in the mouth of a sinner’ (Sir. 15:9) ...

“What is the hymn of those above? The Faithful know. What do the cherubim above say? What say the Angels? ‘Glory to God in the highest!’ (Ps. 112:5) Therefore after the [Psalms] come the hymns, as a thing of more perfection ...

“And even if you are in the marketplace, you can collect yourself and sing unto God, no one hears you. For Moses also in this way, prayed, and was heard, for He said: ‘Why do you cry unto Me?’ (Ex. 14:15); although he said nothing, he cried in thought — wherefore also God alone heard him — with a contrite heart. For it is not forbidden one even when walking to pray in his heart, and to dwell [in thought] above.”<sup>129</sup>

#### 45. What is the purpose of the Holy Bible?

It calls us to heavenly life without coercive force! God sanctifies human freedom, revealing to us through the way of life and the way of death, the enjoyment of divine light or deviation into the darkness of Satan. He leaves room for perfect freedom to choose either of the two ways, while at the same time working within us to create a sanctified will, without compulsion on His part.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “The Christian ought to think thoughts befitting his heavenly calling and to live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ.”<sup>130</sup>

#### 46. How can we delight in the mysteries of the Holy Bible?

- a. **Read the Holy Bible with love: St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “He who loves learns much, for love opens the door to receiving the word.”<sup>131</sup>
- b. **Read the Holy Bible while asking for the grace of God:** “Grace is moved by the request of the one who asks; and the fountain of grace draws near and unites with the

<sup>129</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 9 (NPNF I/13:300–302) amended.

<sup>130</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 22, Concerning the Perfection of the Monastic Life* (FOTC 13:55).

<sup>131</sup> *Memre 6 on the star that appeared to the wise men and on killing the children* (see the text of Paul Bedjan and Dr. Fr. Behnam Sony).

mind of one who asks, despite his poverty and affliction, to give him what he asked of it.”

- c. **Put off the love of the world which blinds the soul from the perceiving the truth: St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Were it not that the love of the world blinds our souls, preventing them from seeing the riches of Christ’s care, the great treasures buried in the volumes of the holy books would be clearly visible to our souls . . . If the soul were unclothed in the purity of its nature, rather than clothed with strange love, it would be easy for it to look, see, search, find, comprehend, receive everything it asks, to do whatever it wants, and to speak to benefit others.”
- d. **Read the Holy Bible in humility: St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “If the soul is not submerged under the earth in humility, it can never see the beauty of the Bible, for its beauty is present only where humility is evident.”
- e. **Read the Holy Bible with the spirit of praise: St. John Chrysostom** says, “Teach [your son] to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom; as at once concerning chastity, or rather, before all, of not keeping company with the wicked, immediately with the very beginning of the book [of Psalms].”<sup>132</sup>

#### **47. How does the Holy Bible present the Lord to us as compassionate and just?**

The Bible depicts a God who is merciful and compassionate towards humanity; who, in His love and compassion, shows no partiality towards anyone. Yet He is also just, and in His justice, He opens the doors of His mercies to all without favoritism. Thus, for example, Ruth the gentile excelled over many of the people of God; and through repentance, the harlot enjoyed that which Simon the Pharisee did not.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Everywhere Scripture joins justice with the mercy of God, teaching us that neither the mercy of God is without judgement, nor His judgement without mercy. Even while He pities, He measures out His mercies judiciously to the worthy; and while judging, He brings forth the judgement having regard to our weakness, repaying us with kindness rather than with equal reciprocal measurement. ‘**And our God shows mercy,**’ mercy being an emotion experienced towards those who have been reduced beyond their desert . . .”<sup>133</sup>

#### **48. Why is it said that “The Word of God endures forever?”**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The word of life is timeless; it neither passes away nor dissolves, for it possess all times. The world withers like a flower under scorching heat of the midday sun, but the word of life is a pearl for those who hear it. O you who love the world,

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<sup>132</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 9 (NPNF I/13:301), amended.

<sup>133</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms*, Homily 22: On Psalm 114 (FOTC 46:355).

throw away the flower that does not endure, and come and adorn your ear with the priceless pearl.”<sup>134</sup>

#### 49. What is the subject of preaching?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Help me to become an active performer of Your word, that thereby I might make a good end to the course of my life. I will die and lay me down to sleep upon Your teaching; I will not depart from You, O Good Companion, even in death.”<sup>135</sup>

#### 50. How do heretics differ in their approach to the Holy Bible?

**First: they do not enter by the door:** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Observe the marks of a robber; first, that he does not enter openly; secondly, not according to the Scriptures, for this is the, ‘**not by the door**’ (John 10:1–6). Here also He refers to those who had been before, and to those who should be after Him, Antichrist and the false Christs, Judas and Theudas (Acts 5:36), and whatever others there have been of the same kind.”<sup>136</sup>

And regarding the saying of Christ that the thief “**enters not by the door**” (John 10:1), Chrysostom says, “And with good cause He calls the Scriptures ‘a door,’ for they bring us to God, and open to us the knowledge of God, they make the sheep, they guard them, and suffer not the wolves to come in after them. For Scripture, like some sure door, bars the passage against the heretics, placing us in a state of safety as to all that we desire, and not allowing us to wander; and if we undo it not, we shall not easily be conquered by our foes. By it we can know all, both those who are, and those who are not, shepherds. On which account also He said to the Jews, ‘Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ (John 5:39); and brought forward Moses, and called him and all the Prophets witnesses, for ‘all,’ says He, ‘who hear the Prophets shall come to Me;’ and, ‘Had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me’ ... Well did He say, ‘climbs up,’ not ‘enters in,’ since to climb is the act of a thief intending to overleap a wall, and who does all with danger.”<sup>137</sup>

**Second: they misuse the Holy Bible:** **St. Clement of Alexandria** spoke of the heretics’ misuse of the Bible, saying:

“And if those also who follow heresies venture to avail themselves of the prophetic Scriptures; in the first place they will not make use of all the Scriptures, and then they will not quote them entirely ... But, **selecting ambiguous expressions, they wrest them to their own opinions**, gathering a few expressions here and there; not looking to make sense, but making use of the mere words. For in almost all the quotations they make, you will find that

<sup>134</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 31* (see the text of Paul Bedjan and Dr. Fr. Behnam Sony).

<sup>135</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 154, IV on Sodom* (Genesis 19).

<sup>136</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John 59.2* (NPNF I/14:211) amended.

<sup>137</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John 59.2* (NPNF I/14:211) amended.

they attend to the names alone, while they alter the meanings ... not using the quotations they adduce, according to their true nature.”<sup>138</sup>

“Although they speak of one God and though they sing the praises of Christ, they speak without accuracy, not in accordance with truth; for **they discover another God, and receive Christ not as the prophecies deliver**. But their false dogmas, while they oppose the conduct that is according to the truth, are against us”.<sup>139</sup>

“Wherefore the Scriptures have conceived for gnostics [i.e., Christians with true knowledge]; but the heretics, not having learned them, dismissed them as not having conceived.”<sup>140</sup>

“And let him who has once received the Gospel, even in the very hour in which he has come to the knowledge of salvation, not turn back, like Lot's wife, as is said; and let him not go back either to his former life, which adheres to the things of sense, or to heresies.”<sup>141</sup>

**Third: They are preoccupied with foolish disputes** that waste time and miss the point: **St. John Chrysostom** says, “we should not be occupied with questions, since if we question, it is not faith; for faith sets reasoning at rest. But why then does Christ say, ‘Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you’ (Matt. 7:7)?; and, ‘Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life?’ (John 5:39). The seeking there is meant of prayer and vehement desire, and He bids ‘search the Scriptures,’ not to introduce the labors of questioning, but to end them, that we may ascertain and settle their true meaning, not that we may be ever questioning, but that we may have done with it.”<sup>142</sup>

## 51. Why are some people scandalized by the Old Testament?

The Church Fathers reveal several reasons why people are scandalized by the Old Testament. These include:

- a. **The need for the key of David:** St. Jerome perceived the need for the key of David to loose the seals of the Holy Bible and delight in its wonders. On this account the Psalmist asks God, saying, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.” (Ps. 119:8).

**St. Jerome** says, “In the apocalypse a book is shown sealed with seven seals (Rev. 5:1), which if you deliver to one that is learned saying, ‘Read this,’ he will answer you, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed’ (Isa. 29:11). How many are there today who fancy themselves learned, yet the scriptures are a sealed book to them, and **one which they**

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<sup>138</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.16 (ANF 2:551).

<sup>139</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.15 (ANF 2:508).

<sup>140</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.16 (ANF 2:551).

<sup>141</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.16 (ANF 2:550).

<sup>142</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy* 1 (NPNF I/13:410).



cannot open save through Him who has the key of David, ‘he that opens and no man shuts; and shuts and no man opens’ (Rev. 3:7). In the Acts of the Apostles the holy eunuch when reading Isaiah, he is asked by Philip ‘Do you understand what you read?’ He answers: ‘How can I unless someone guides me?’ (Acts 8:30–31) ... Then Philip came and showed him Jesus, who was concealed beneath the letter. Wondrous excellence of the teacher! In the same hour the eunuch believed and was baptized; he became one of the faithful and a saint. He was no longer a pupil but a master; and he found more in the church’s font there in the wilderness than he had ever done in the gilded temple ... It is idle to try to teach what you do not know ... it is worse still to be ignorant of your ignorance.”<sup>143</sup>

- b. **Suspicion: St. Basil the Great** says, “Never neglect reading, especially of the New Testament, because very frequently mischief comes of reading the Old; not because what is written is harmful, but **because the minds of the injured are weak**. All bread is nutritious, but it may be injurious to the sick. Just so all Scripture is God inspired and profitable, and there is nothing in it unclean: only to him who thinks it is unclean, to him it is unclean ... ‘All things are lawful but all things are not expedient’ (1 Cor. 6:12).”<sup>144</sup>
- c. **Reading without Love: St. Augustine** says, “The Bible enlightens the eyes of the soul, so read it, O wise one, and be filled with its love. God has placed the Holy Scriptures in the world as a lamp of light that illuminates its darkness. The one who loves himself shall be enlightened by reading, and follows it. **Approach the Bible with love, and contemplate its beauty**. You will not benefit without love, because love is the entrance to understanding. The book commands your love, if you do not love it, do not read it. It speaks to you, but if you are bored while reading it, you will be deprived of its gestures. You should love it, open it, read it and contemplate its beauty, otherwise, you shall not read it because if you do not love it, you will not benefit from it.”
- d. **Lack of repentance: St. Augustine** says, “If you sin, your adversary is God's word ... It's the adversary of your will until it can become the author of your salvation. Oh what a good adversary, what a useful adversary!”<sup>145</sup>
- e. **Conducting oneself in the Lord grants splendor to knowledge:** The father **Hesychius of Jerusalem** says, “When the earth is plowed, it produces flowers and fruit, but contemplating the Law produces virtues. This is the reason why the practice of the Law is required with zeal (Ps. 119:40, 47, 48); not by covering it in words, but

<sup>143</sup> St. Jerome, Letter 53.5, 7 To Paulinus (NPNF II/6:98, 99) amended.

<sup>144</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, Letter 42.3 To Chilo, his disciple (NPNF II/8:144–145).

<sup>145</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume IV: Sermons 94A-147A*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1992) Sermon 109.3: p. 133 (FC 94:149).

by doing it; not by discussing the language of the divine words in a useless way, but by confirming it by our conduct and approving it in our actions. Just as knowledge makes reading glorious, so doing grants knowledge splendor. What is the benefit of a vineyard without vines planted in it, nor pruned, nor being tended? Is not it vain for a knight to go out to a broad place when he has not yet trained his horses? ...

“In any case, Job did not behave like this, but from the beginning, he armed his soul with virtues, and trained it for battle through godliness. So long as he found himself in wealth and prosperity, he offered burnt offerings every day when he arose early (Job 1:5). Before the visible light (the sun) had dawned, he lit the invisible light. As he leapt out of his bed, he would run towards the One who grants sleep, with praise upon his lips (Ps. 127:2). He began the day’s activities by drawing near to the Creator of the day ... How many times did Job shut the mouth of Eliphaz who wanted to exhibit his eloquence! ... How many times did he negate the haughtiness of Bildad by weighing his words, this true soldier of righteousness! Notice that Zophar also proclaimed his own superiority at the beginning of his conversations! Let us scrutinize his words with awareness.”

## **52. What is meant by the veil that lies on the hearts of some?**

Paul the Apostle says, “unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart” (2 Cor. 3:13–16). The children of Israel were not capable of beholding the brilliance of Moses’ face, which was a temporary and passing glory. But God this to them, that they might seek that which is greater: the eternal glory that never passes away.

**St. Basil the Great** comments on these words of the Apostle Paul, saying, “Why does he say this? For he who dwells at the abstract literal meaning, and occupies himself by keeping the law, he shall be as if his heart has been covered with the acceptance of the Jewish letter as a veil lies on him. This happens to him because of his ignorance that the physical keeping of the law has been invalidated in the presence of Christ, that is for the symbols to become facts for the future ...

“He who has the power to look to the depths of the meaning of the Law, and then cross through the mystery of the letter as through a veil to reach inexpressible things shall be like Moses who takes away the veil when speaking with God; this takes back the letter to the spirit.

“[T]he obscurity of the teachings of the Law is analogous to the veil on the face of Moses, while spiritual vision, to the turning to the Lord. Therefore, he who strips off the letter in his reading of the Law turns to the Lord ... becomes similar to Moses whose face was glorified by God’s epiphany.

“For, as those things that are near brilliant colors are themselves colored because of the rays of light that flow around them, so he who clearly fixes his eyes on the Spirit is somehow transformed by the Spirit’s glory into something brighter as his heart is illuminated by the truth of the Spirit, as if by a light. And this is the transformation from the glory of the Spirit to his own glory; it does not happen in any insignificant or faint way, but in a manner that is suitable for one who is enlightened by the Spirit.”<sup>146</sup>

And **St. Augustine** says, “The truth is that the Old Testament of Mount Sinai, ‘bringing forth children unto bondage’ (Gal. 4:24), now serves no purpose but to bear witness to the New. Otherwise, the words of St Paul would not be true: ‘Yes, down to this very day when Moses is read, the veil covers their hearts’; but when any of them turn from the Old Testament to Christ, **‘the veil shall be taken away.’** What happens is that the deepest aspirations of those who make the change are shifted from the Old Testament to the New, whereupon they begin to look for spiritual — rather than earthly — happiness.”<sup>147</sup>

“Doubtless, there is a veil in the Old Testament, which will be removed as soon as one comes to Christ. At His Crucifixion, ‘the veil of the temple was rent,’ (Matt. 27:51) to signify what the Apostle said about the veil of the Old Testament, ‘Because in Christ it is made void’ (2 Cor. 3:14).”<sup>148</sup>

“For there is made void in Christ, not the Old Testament, but its veil: that so through Christ that may be understood, and, as it were, laid bare, which without Christ is obscure and covered. Forasmuch as the same Apostle straightway adds, ‘But when **you shall have passed over to Christ, the veil shall be taken away**’ (2 Cor. 3:16). For he does not say, the Law shall be taken away, or, the Old Testament. Not therefore through the Grace of the Lord, as though useless things were there hidden, have they been taken away; but rather **the covering whereby useful things were covered.** In this manner all they are dealt with, who earnestly and piously, not disorderly and shamelessly, seek the sense of those Scriptures, and they are carefully shown both the order of events, and the causes of deeds and words, and so great agreement of the Old Testament with the New, that not a jot is left that does not agree; and so great secrets of figures, that all the things that are drawn forth by interpretation force them to confess that they are wretched, who will to condemn these before they learn them.”<sup>149</sup>

Because they pored over the letter rather than the spirit and closed their eyes so as not to see the light of the Gospel presented to them, their hearts were hardened (Acts 14:2) and they were filled with foolishness. The veil that obscured the brightness of the face of Moses was still present. The veil of darkness and ignorance that prevents access to the glory of the gospel lay over their hearts, preventing it from shining upon them.

<sup>146</sup> St Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (SVS Press, 2011) 21(52): p. 90.

<sup>147</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 17.7 (FOTC 24:46).

<sup>148</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, Letter 140, To Honoratus 10 (FOTC 20:79).

<sup>149</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *On the Profit of Believing* 9 (NPNF I/3:351) amended.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For what happened then once in the case of Moses, the same happens continually in the case of the Law. What is said, therefore, is no accusation of the Law, nor of Moses that he then veiled himself, but only of the senseless Jews. For the law has its proper glory, but they were unable to see it. ‘Why therefore are you troubled,’ he says, ‘that the Jews do not believe Christ, seeing at least that they do not even believe the Law?’”<sup>150</sup>

He also says, “The veil lies upon their heart ... because of the grossness and carnal mind of the Jews ... Do you see that not over the face of Moses was there that veil, but over the eyesight of the Jews? For it was done, not that the glory of Moses might be hidden, but that the Jews might not see. For they were not capable. So that in them was the deficiency, for it caused not him to be ignorant of anything.”<sup>151</sup>

**The scholar Origen** says, “Turning the pages of the prophets one by one ... [the Bride, i.e., the Church] finds Christ springing forth from them and, now that the veil that covered them before is taken away, she perceives Him breaking out and emerging from individual passages in her reading, and bursting out of them in a manifestation that is now quite plain.”<sup>152</sup>

“[S]o long as someone has not turned to a spiritual understanding, ‘a veil lies over his heart’, by which veil, that is, a duller understanding, Scripture itself is said or thought to be veiled; and this is what is meant by the veil placed over the countenance of Moses when he spoke to the people, that is, when the Law was publicly read aloud. But if we ‘turn to the Lord’, where also is the Word of God, and where the Holy Spirit reveals spiritual knowledge, then ‘the veil is removed’, and thus with an ‘unveiled face we shall behold the glory of the Lord’ in the holy Scriptures.”<sup>153</sup>

“The brightness of the coming of Christ through the light of the Law of Moses by the honor of truth takes away the veil that covers the letter of the Law and shuts it up, for whoever believes in it and hides within it these good things.”<sup>154</sup>

“Thus the Lord Himself, the Holy Spirit Himself must be entreated by us to remove every cloud and all darkness which obscures the vision of our hearts hardened with the stains of sins so that we may be able to the spiritual and wonderful knowledge of His Law.”<sup>155</sup>

“Let us beware, therefore, lest not only ‘**when the Moses is read,**’ but also when Paul is read ‘a veil’ be ‘placed over’ our ‘heart.’ And clearly, if we hear negligently, if we bring no zeal to learning and understanding, not only are the Scriptures of the Law and prophets but also of the apostles and Gospels covered for us with a great veil. I fear, however, lest by too much negligence and dullness of heart the divine scriptures are not only veiled to us but also

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<sup>150</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 7.2 (NPNF I/12:311).

<sup>151</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 7.3, 4 (PG 61:484; NPNF I/12:312) amended.

<sup>152</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3:11 (ACW 26:214).

<sup>153</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, vol. 1, trans. J. Behr (Oxford University Press, 2017) 1.1.2: p. 27.

<sup>154</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4.1.6 from the Latin (ANF 4:354)

<sup>155</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.4 (FOTC 83:30).

sealed, so that if a book should be put into the hands of a man who cannot read to be read, he would say, 'I cannot read'; if it should be put into the hands of a man who can read, he would say, 'It is sealed' (Isa. 29:12, 11). Whence it is shown that we must not only employ zeal to learn the sacred literature, but we must also pray to the Lord and entreat 'day and night' that the lamb of 'of the tribe of Judah' may come and himself taking 'the sealed book' may deign to open it. For it is He who 'opening the Scriptures' kindles the hearts of the disciples so that they say, 'Was not our heart burning within us when He opened to us the Scriptures?' (Luke 24:32). May He, therefore, even now, see fit to open to us what it is which He inspired His Apostle to say, 'But the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor. 3:17)."<sup>156</sup>

**St Gregory of Nyssa** says, "And the removal of the veil, so that the eye, freed of what obscures it, gazes without interference on the Beauty it desires, is a good thing, as none can doubt who pays attention to the apostle. He attributes the removal of the veil to the power of the Spirit when he says: 'But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed; and the Lord is the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:16–17)."<sup>157</sup>

"Such a boon as this, however, is not within any man's reach to lay hold of, but the Divine intention lies hid under the body of the Scripture, as it were under a veil, some legislative enactment or some historical narrative being cast over the truths that are contemplated by the mind. For this reason, then, the Apostle tells us that those who look upon the body of the Scripture have 'a veil upon their heart' (2 Cor. 3:15), and are not able to look upon the glory of the spiritual law, being hindered by the veil that has been cast over the face of the law-giver. Wherefore he says, 'The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.'"<sup>158</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, "Thus the holy one is bidden by the Lord to cross over to the stream, for he who has drunk of the New Testament not only is a river, but from his belly will flow rivers of living water, rivers of understanding, rivers of meditation, spiritual rivers."<sup>159</sup>

"Rightly, then, does Paul say, '**The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life**' (2 Cor. 3:6). The letter circumcised a small part of the body, the understanding spirit keeps the circumcision of the entire soul and body, so that chastity might be preserved, frugality loved, with the unnecessary parts cut off (for nothing is so unnecessary as the vices of greed, the sins of lust, which do not belong to nature but which sin has caused). Bodily circumcision is the symbol, but the reality is the spiritual circumcision; the one cuts off a member, the other sin."<sup>160</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 12.4 (FOTC 71:371–372) amended.

<sup>157</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on The Song of Songs*, trans. Richard A Norris Jr., eds. Brian E. Daley SJ and John T Fitzgerald (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 12: p. 381.

<sup>158</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 7.1 (NPNF II/5:192).

<sup>159</sup> St. Ambrose, Letter 59, *To the Church at Vercelli* (Letter 63 in PL 16; FOTC 26:350).

<sup>160</sup> St. Ambrose, Letter 68, *To Clementianus* (Letter 75 in PL 16; FOTC 26:407).

**St. Augustine** says, “Therefore, you who fear the Lord, praise Him, and that you may worship Him, not as slaves but as free men, learn to love Him whom you fear, and you will be able to praise what you love. **The men of the Old Testament, fearing God, because of the letter which terrifies and kills, and not yet possessing ‘the spirit which quickens,’ (2 Cor. 3:6)** ran to the Temple with sacrifices and offered up bloody victims, ignorant of what was foreshadowed by them, although they were a figure of the Blood to come, by which we have been redeemed.”<sup>161</sup>

“God commands chastity and He gives chastity; He commands by the Law, He gives by His grace; He commands by the letter, He gives by the spirit; for the Law without grace makes sin abound (Rom. 5:20), and the letter without the spirit kills (2 Cor. 3:6). He commands so as to make us learn how to ask the help of grace when we try to obey His commandments, and in our weakness fall wearied under the Law, and also to make us grateful to Him who helps us if we have been able to perform any good work.”<sup>162</sup>

“For, if you take away the Spirit, how does the Law avail? It makes a prevaricator. On that account the Scripture says: ‘The letter kills’ (2 Cor. 3:6). The Law orders, and you do not obey ... Something is commanded, and you do not do it; something is forbidden, and you do it. Behold, ‘the letter kills.’”<sup>163</sup>

“Let the Spirit be joined to the Law, because, if have received the Law, and if you lack the help of the Spirit, you do not fulfill what is of the Law, you do not carry out what is commanded you ... Let the Spirit be added, let Him help, [and] that which is commanded is accomplished. If the Spirit is absent, the letter kills you ... You cannot excuse yourself on the plea of ignorance since you have received the Law. Now, because you have learned what you should do, ignorance does not excuse you ... But why does the Apostle say, ‘**The letter kills but the spirit gives life**’ (2 Cor. 3:6)? How does the Spirit give life? Because He causes the letter to be fulfilled so that it may not kill. The sanctified are those who fulfill the Law of God according to the gift of God. The Law can command; it cannot help. The Spirit is added as a helper, and the commandment of God is fulfilled with joy and delight. Certainly many observe the Law from fear, but those who keep the Law from fear of punishment would prefer that what they fear did not exist. On the contrary, those who observe the Law through love of justice rejoice even in that respect because they do not consider it hostile to them.”<sup>164</sup>

### **53. How shall the veil be lifted from us?**

The veil is lifted from our hearts and minds when we turn to the Lord with sincere prayer. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For [the veil was placed], not that the glory of Moses might be hidden, but that the Jews might not see. For they were not capable ... For ‘when you shall

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<sup>161</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, Letter 140.18, To Honoratus (FOTC 20:96) amended.

<sup>162</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, Letter 157, To Hilarius (FOTC 20:324–325) amended.

<sup>163</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 250.3 (FOTC 38:314).

<sup>164</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 251.7 (FOTC 38:322–323).

turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away' ... For when Moses talked with the Jews he kept his face covered, but when he turned to God it was uncovered. Now, this was a type of that which was to come to pass, that when we have turned to the Lord, then we shall see the glory of the Law, and the face of the Lawgiver bare; yes rather, not this alone, but we shall then be even in the same rank with Moses."<sup>165</sup>

#### 54. What is the interpretive approach of the School of Alexandria?<sup>166</sup>

Dom. D. Rees says, "The most renowned intellectual institution in the early Christian world was undoubtedly the Catechetical School (*Didascaleion*) of Alexandria, and its primary concern was the study of the Bible, giving its name to an influential tradition of scriptural interpretation ... The preoccupation of this school of exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture."<sup>167</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** used this kind of exegesis, but it was his student, Origen, who systematized it, established its guiding principles and made it popular in both the East and West, so much so that it was attributed to him. Origen elevated the School of Alexandria to the pinnacle of this approach, and it was influenced by his initiatives and ideas, **although it was later freed from his excesses in allegorical interpretation**. This approach was significant in that it allowed Christian theology to build a bridge between philosophy and revelation, and provided solutions to many problems in the interpretation of the Old Testament. At the same time, however, we cannot ignore the damage done by its excessive use. Accordingly, this approach met with opposition, and the later fathers of the School called for moderation in its use.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** is considered one of the earliest Christian theologians (writers) to use allegorical exegesis, justifying its use practically. In his view, the Bible contains hidden meanings in order to inspire us to search and discover the words of salvation which are hidden from the eyes of those who would spurn them. His student **Origen** adds some further justifications for the use of allegorical exegesis.

#### 55. What is the difference between Allegory and Typology?

The Bible uses at least three types of allegory:

- a. Figurative allegory.
- b. Narrative allegory.

<sup>165</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 7:4 (NPNF I/12: 312–313) amended.

<sup>166</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria Before Origen*, (Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995; Arabic edition, 1980).

<sup>167</sup> In *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, eds. R. C. Fuller, L. Johnston, and C. Kearns (Nelson, 1969): p. 15.

c. Typological allegory.

The Apostle Paul’s hymn on love in 1 Corinthians 13, and the depiction of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 are two examples of **figurative allegory**.

In some parables, such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–35) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), the kind of allegory used is **narrative allegory**.

But the dominant mode in the gospel is **typological allegory**, which is “a New Testament exegetic method which treats events and figures of the Old Testament as combining historical reality with prophetic meaning in terms of the Gospels and the Christian dispensation.”<sup>168</sup>

As Joseph Trigg explains: “Some scholars distinguish ‘allegory’ defined as a method in which earthly realities are interpreted symbolically to refer to heavenly realities, from ‘typology,’ in which one historical reality is interpreted as foreshadowing another, especially the person and work of Christ.”<sup>169</sup>

J. N. D. Kelly also presents a basis for distinguishing between allegory and typology: “In **allegorical exegesis** the sacred text is treated as a mere symbol, or allegory, of spiritual truths. The literal, historical sense, if it is regarded at all, plays a relatively minor role, and the aim of the exegete is to elicit the moral, theological or mystical meaning which each passage, indeed each verse and even each word, is presumed to contain ...

“**Typological exegesis** worked along very different lines. Essentially it was a technique for bringing out the correspondence between the two Testaments, and took as its guiding principle the idea that the events and personages of the Old were ‘types’ of, i.e., prefigured and anticipated, the events and personages of the New. The typologist took history seriously; it was the scene of the progressive unfolding of God’s consistent redemptive purpose.”<sup>170</sup>

Jean Daniélou also says, “the typology of the Fathers was based on the continuity which exists between the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>171</sup>

## 56. What is the Fathers’ stance on Allegory and Typology, after Origen?

The theologians of Alexandria after Origen, from **St. Didymus the Blind** to **St. Cyril the Great**, were influenced to varying degrees by the allegorical method of interpretation, and the same can be said of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Fathers of Palestine (with the exception of Epiphanius).

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<sup>168</sup> J. MacQueen, *Allegory* (Methuen & Co, 1970): p. 18.

<sup>169</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, “Allegory” in Everett Ferguson (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1997): pp. 34–35.

<sup>170</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): pp. 70–71.

<sup>171</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. W. Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960): p. 69.



The **School of Antioch** later came to oppose the tradition of allegorical exegesis, and although it did not completely reject allegorical interpretations, it rarely resorted to them, instead preferring the historical method of interpretation.

The allegorical tradition moved to the West through the influence of the Alexandrian theologians, as is clearly evident in the exegetical writings of fathers like St. Hilary and St. Ambrose.

Even though the great Latin commentator **St. Jerome** grew skeptical of allegorical interpretation in his latter years, he nonetheless accepted the three levels of biblical interpretation established by Origen, and affirmed the importance of resorting to the spiritual meaning because of the extensive use of *anthropomorphism*<sup>172</sup> to describe God in the Bible.

**St. Augustine** applied allegory very freely, particularly with regard to the hidden significance of names and numbers.<sup>173</sup>

**St. John Cassian**,<sup>174</sup> following **St. Clement of Alexandria**, developed a scheme that divided the kinds of interpretation into the following four categories:

- a. Literal interpretation.
- b. Allegorical interpretation (applying the texts to Christ and the striving Church).
- c. Tropological or moral interpretation (relating to the soul and its virtues).
- d. Anagogical interpretation (applying the texts to heavenly realities).<sup>175</sup>

## 57. What is St. Clement's justification for the use of allegorical interpretation?

In **St. Clement's** view, allegory drives believers to discover hidden meanings in the Holy Bible. According to some scholars, the authors of the books of the Holy Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit to use symbols in order to conceal the most sublime doctrines from simple readers whose intellect was not equipped to grasp them, while at the same time inspiring the curiosity in the souls of the more spiritually and intellectually mature. Discovering the deeper hidden meanings in Scripture is a gradual process whereby God guides the souls to whom He has chosen to reveal Himself, conveying them from the sensible realm to the spiritual realm. In this way, by contemplating the most obscure texts of Scripture, the true Gnostic (one who possesses knowledge) is transported from the present world to connect to the other world.

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<sup>172</sup> Anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to God

<sup>173</sup> Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): pp. 74–75.

<sup>174</sup> St John Cassian, *Conferences* 14.8 (NPNF II/11:437–438).

<sup>175</sup> F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford University Press, 1990): p. 37.

## 58. What is Origen’s justification for using allegorical interpretation?

**Origen** discussed two problems concerning the Old Testament that confronted the early Church:

- a. **The Jews expected Jesus to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament in a literal manner**; for instance, that He would be their king who rules over all the world.<sup>176</sup> **Origen** says, “Both Jews and Christians agree that the books (of Scripture) were written by the Spirit of God, but we do *not* agree about the meaning of their contents; for we do not regulate our lives like the Jews, because we are of opinion that the literal acceptance of the laws is not that which conveys the meaning of the legislation.”<sup>177</sup> Origen also says, “If therefore both the Lord and God are ‘Spirit,’ we ought to hear spiritually those things which the Spirit says.”<sup>178</sup>
- b. The **Gnostic sects** rejected the Old Testament because they were scandalized by certain passages which refer to God as becoming angry, changing his mind, or feeling regret. They were scandalized because they interpreted these descriptions literally rather than spiritually.

**Origen** contends that the attribution of human characteristics to God (*anthropomorphism*), like God’s wrath, cannot be understood literally. He says, “If you hear of the *anger* of God and his *wrath*, do not suppose that *anger* and *wrath* are passions of God. The purposes of using this way of speaking are for converting and bettering the infant [i.e. the human race], since we also use a fearful expression with children, not from an actual state of mind but because of a purpose to cause fear. If we maintain what is kindly for the soul in our expression toward a baby, and we show the affection which we have for it, since we have not altered ourselves nor changed for the conversion of that one, we lose him and make him worse. So then it states that God is also said to be angry and wrathful in order that you can convert and become better. And he is truly neither angry nor wrathful, but you experience the effects of anger and wrath when you are in unbearable pains because of evil, whenever he disciplines by what is called the *anger* of God.”<sup>179</sup>

In addition to countering the Jews and Gnostic sects, Origen appeals to a third reason for the use of allegory, namely, that the spiritual interpretation is justified by the fact that the Old Testament presents to us the person of Christ in advance. Origen says, “**most of the things recorded in the law refer typically and enigmatically to the Christ.**”<sup>180</sup> Therefore, it is

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<sup>176</sup> N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): pp. 82–83.

<sup>177</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.60 (ANF 4:569) amended.

<sup>178</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 4.1 (FOTC 83:70).

<sup>179</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6 (FOTC 97:200–201); Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990): p. 114.

<sup>180</sup> Origen, *Homilies on John* 13:161 (FOTC 89:102).

the spiritual meaning which links the Old Testament to the New and reveals the relationship between them.

### 59. How does Origen explain allegorical interpretation?

- a. **Origen** contemplates on the priest who skins the burnt offering (Lev. 6:1), saying that he “is the one who removes the veil of the letter (2 Cor. 3.14) from the word of God and uncovers its interior parts which are members of spiritual understanding.”<sup>181</sup>
- b. **Origen** does not find the spiritual meaning to be difficult: “The spiritual interpretation, however, is not so difficult and hard to come by. For the Bride of the Word, the soul who abides in His royal house—that is, in the Church—is taught by the Word of God, who is her Bridegroom, whatever things are stored and hidden within the royal court and in the King’s chamber.”<sup>182</sup>
- c. **Origen** understands the human being to be made up of body, soul, and spirit; and likewise, understands the Holy Bible to be of the same structure for the salvation of the human being: that is; the literal meaning, the moral meaning, and the spiritual meaning.
- d. **Origen** finds in Noah’s ark an example that confirms his theory, since it consists of three decks (Gen. 6:15–16). “And thus by ascending through the individual levels of the dwellings, one arrives at Noah himself, whose name means rest or righteous, who is Christ Jesus.”<sup>183</sup>
  - i. The lower deck refers to the base — that is, the literal or historical interpretation of the Holy Bible.
  - ii. The upper deck is the spiritual or mystical meaning. In his commentary on Genesis, he says, “These, indeed, who live by rational knowledge and are capable not only of ruling themselves but also of teaching others, since very few are found, represent the few who are saved with Noah himself and are united with him in the closest relationship, just as also our Lord, the true Noah, Christ Jesus, has few intimates, few sons and relatives, who are participants in his word and capable of his wisdom.”<sup>184</sup>
  - iii. The middle deck represents the moral interpretation.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.4.2 (FOTC 83:35).

<sup>182</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Songs of Songs* 3.13 (ACW 26:231).

<sup>183</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.3 (FOTC 71:79).

<sup>184</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.3 (FOTC 71:78).

<sup>185</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.6 (FOTC 71:85–88).

## 60. What are St. Cyril of Alexandria’s views regarding the interpretation of the Holy Bible?

We conclude our discussion on typology and allegory in the School of Alexandria with excerpts from Alexander Kerrigan’s study on **St. Cyril of Alexandria’s** methods of Biblical interpretation.

Regarding St. Cyril’s methods, Kerrigan writes, “Our author rounds off his conclusions in three propositions, which, though formulated negatively, are quite positive in their contents: 1) it is a mistake to hold that the law has been abolished to the extent that none of its prescriptions have any force; 2) it is likewise a mistake to think that it is altogether useless; τὰ ἀναγκαῖα [necessary things], if they are explained, are still useful; 3) finally, it is erroneous to claim that the law cannot be used a proof of the truth.”<sup>186</sup>

St. Cyril of Alexandria says, “Great spiritual wealth ... was pounded into the Mosaic oracles.”<sup>187</sup>

Naturally, if we wish to avoid burying this richness, we ought to stop using the literal interpretation. It is clear that St. Cyril does not wish to speak much about this topic: “the Law is at once both perfect and imperfect: perfect if understood spiritually, speaking to us about the mystery of Christ, and in turn imperfect if the mind of those under guidance proceeds only to the letter, the concreteness of the factual meaning being, as it were, only half of knowledge.”<sup>188</sup> St. Cyril reiterates these thoughts again and again.<sup>189</sup> Throughout his writings, he frequently repeats the saying of St. Paul the Apostle, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6). This verse became a universal slogan of that time. He again says:

“‘The letter of the Law kills,’ remember, according to Paul in his wisdom, and in itself it is a useless shadow, but it has become for us who understand it most beneficial for an understanding of Christ and has emerged as a kind of spiritual shower irrigating in some fashion the earth under heaven. It is true that the Law, which formerly was harsh and unbearable for the ancients, has become for us a guide to the mystery of Christ so that even through it we may succeed in bearing fruit by reducing the density of the shadow to the reality.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Interpreter of the Old Testament*, (Pontificio Istituto Biblico Roma, 1952): p. 136. See also St. Cyril of Alexandria, *The Worship in Spirit and Truth* (PG 68:140A).

<sup>187</sup> Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Interpreter of the Old Testament*, (Pontificio Istituto Biblico Roma, 1952): p. 138. See St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, Pusey II:385 4f.

<sup>188</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Hosea 3* (FOTC 115:97).

<sup>189</sup> See Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Interpreter of the Old Testament*, (Pontificio Istituto Biblico Roma, 1952): p.139, footnote 5 for a list of quotation references.

<sup>190</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Amos 9* (FOTC 116:124).

## 5

# Holy Tradition

Some Christians view “tradition” as blind obedience to the past, a passive clinging to an unchanging deposit (of faith). In their view, tradition resembles a precious catalog of a collection of ancient traditions, canons, and rites; or a museum in which ancient relics are gathered. As a result, they see the traditional Church as static and backward-looking, holding onto what is old simply because it is old. In this simple work, I would like to explain our understanding of “tradition” through the Holy Bible, the mind of the Fathers, and our practical church life.

### 61. What does the word “tradition” mean?

In Greek, the word “tradition” — as found in the New Testament — is “*paradosis*,” and it does not mean “imitation.” Its cognate verb is “*paradidomi*,” which can be translated as “to commit something to another person” or “handing something over.” A closely associated verb is “*paralambano*,” which means “to accept something” or “to receive.” In Hebrew, these two terms correspond to “*nasar*” (“to hand over” or “to deliver”) and “*qibbel*” (“to accept something” or “to receive”).<sup>191</sup> Thus, the word tradition does not mean simply “mimicking the past.” Biblically, it means to hand over something precious. One generation delivers the faith, and another receives it.

### 62. What is the material of tradition?

What is the material of Christian tradition? Or, what is the deposit that the Church received and preserved throughout the generations? In fact, Christ did not give His disciples and apostles a written document. Instead, He prepared them to follow Him and to accept Him dwelling within their hearts. They heard Him teach and followed Him everywhere. They saw Him pray, comfort people, treat sinners kindly, heal the sick and give life to the dead. They saw Him celebrate the Last Supper and grant them peace after His resurrection. Finally, He sent them His Holy Spirit, not only to remind them of His own words and to help them follow His example, but also that they may have unity with Him and that they may partake in His divine life. This is the essence of our tradition: “*unity with the Lord Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.*” For God the Father gave up His own Son for us, and the Son also gave Himself up for us (see John 3:16, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 5:2).

This is the Tradition, “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), or the “Gospel” written in our lives and engraved in our hearts. It is a continuous, living gift,

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<sup>191</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): pp. 20, 21.

received by the apostles who delivered it to their disciples by the Holy Spirit who bears witness to Christ within the life of the Church and unites her with the Savior.

In other words, this act of transmission or delivery did not occur only through the apostles' writings, but also through the Holy Spirit who guided their feelings, attitudes, worship, behavior, and preaching. He granted them a new life that is "the life in Christ," in the life of the Church throughout the generations as He continues to live and work in the Church yesterday, today, and tomorrow; inspiring her life and filling it with a continuity of life, faith, and love, and not a static imitation of the past.<sup>192</sup> Thus, tradition is the living stream of the one life of the Church, which carries the past in all its aspects as a living present and extends the present towards the future without deviation. This is the essence of "tradition." When we study tradition, we must focus on its contents which include:

- a. The message of faith in the Holy Trinity and God's saving works, and the teaching of it.
- b. The acts and words of the Lord Christ.
- c. The books of the Old and New Testaments and the experience of the Church Fathers and their understanding of the word of God, etc.
- d. The spiritual and behavioral program in Christ Jesus.
- e. The pattern of worship: its concepts and order.
- f. The canons of the Church and the order of worship, such as prayers, fasting, prostrations (metanoias), feasts, etc., which are practiced in a spiritual manner for the edification of the Church and the growth of every believer's spiritual life and personal relationship with the Holy Trinity.

### **63. What was the role of tradition in the apostolic age?**

The books of the New Testament appeared gradually through the apostolic age, but they were not yet canonized by the Church. At this time, tradition was the only source of Christian faith, teaching, and worship. We can summarize the role played by tradition during that period in the life of the Church in the following points:

- a. When the Church first began, she used the books of the Old Testament. Based on the teachings of Christ and His apostles, the early Christians accepted these books from the Jews and considered them the wisdom of God, inspired and authoritative. The early Church viewed herself as the heir of the ancient Jewish tradition, and hence inherited these holy books. It is worth noting that the early Church read these holy books with an enlightened eye and distinctly Christian mind. She received the

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<sup>192</sup> See, E. O'Brien (ed.), *The Convergence of Traditions: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant* (Herder & Herder, 1967): p. 22.

prophecies in these books and applied to them a certain kind of interpretation,<sup>193</sup> which the Jews did not yet know. This type of interpretation was received by the Church from the apostles and we are certain that Christ was the one who established it.

- b. Even though the books of the New Testament were not canonized by the Church until the mid-second century, the fathers viewed these books as the inspired word of God and quoted them in their writings.
- c. Through tradition, the Church Fathers recognized the unity of holy scripture — the unity of the Old and New Testaments — being the word of God, even before the Church’s official canonization of the New Testament.
- d. The apostles indicated that one of the sources of the authority of their apostleship is the tradition that they received through their discipleship to Jesus Christ. They preached as eyewitnesses to the events of Christ’s life and His saving deeds. St. John states, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). In his gospel, he also says, “He who saw it has borne witness — his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth — that you also may believe” (John 19:35). St. Luke also pointed out that accounts of the events of Christ’s life “were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2).

When the eleven apostles wished to appoint someone in place of Judas, they were determined to choose only one “of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us — one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). Therefore, the apostolic tradition began with the eyewitnesses of the Lord’s life, but that alone was not sufficient to permanently maintain it. The Holy Spirit, who guides the life of the Church reveals the truth and unites her with God in Christ Jesus, established this tradition and provided the basis for its continual survival throughout the generations as the Apostle Luke says, “We are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:32).

St. Paul the apostle, who was interested in establishing “the tradition of Christ” for the Church, was not an eyewitness to these events, but he received a special commission to the apostleship. By the Holy Spirit, he received the tradition of the Church as though it were given to him from God directly. He asserts, “Paul, an apostle — not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father ...” (Gal. 1:1). He also says, “I received (*paralambano*) from the Lord (*apo tou Kyriou*)

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<sup>193</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): p. 32.

what I also delivered (*paradidomi*) to you“ (I Cor. 11:23). Notice that the use of the preposition *apo* in the phrase “from the Lord” indicates the delivery of information through one or more intermediaries, and the genitive *para* in the word “received” (*paralambano*) confirms such mediation.<sup>194</sup>

- e. The tradition which the apostles received from Christ and granted to the Church is in its essence “our new life in Christ by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, the apostolic tradition was never something static, as it bears within itself the continuity of Pentecost in the Church as a whole and in every living member. The Christian community as a whole practices this new life through the Holy Spirit and every individual member of the Church also accepts a personal relationship with God in the Spirit without isolation from the Universal Church.

From this point of view, we also view our tradition as a spiritual gift, in its very essence. It is not just offered from one person to another but has an effect on the life of the one who offers it as well as that of the one who receives it. “I long to see you,” wrote St. Paul to the Romans, “that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Rom. 1:11–12). St. Augustine also says, “For you I am a bishop, with you, I am a Christian.”<sup>195</sup> As a bishop, he felt deeply that he was appointed by God to preserve the Christian tradition for his people. At the same time, he lived this tradition with them as a Christian, being a member of their community.

- f. The apostles subjected themselves to some Jewish traditions of worship that were consistent with their faith after baptizing them. We will talk further about this point later.
- g. Through tradition, the Church stressed the importance of loyalty to bishops, as she regarded the bishop, as the successor of the apostles, as being appointed to be responsible for preserving the orthodoxy of the faith.

In brief, we can say that the Church in the apostolic age accepted a living tradition by which she accepted the Old Testament, understood its prophecies, discovered its types and symbols, and became acquainted with its unity with apostolic testimony. By this tradition, the Church also accepted the eyewitness accounts of the apostles, declared the authority of their successors in preserving the Christian faith, and lived the true worship of God.

#### **64. How is apostolic tradition connected to the Gospel?**

Our faith in the Messiah, the Savior, is at the core of our Holy Tradition. More than once, St. Paul the apostle told his congregation that he has delivered to them the tradition of the

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<sup>194</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): p. 33.

<sup>195</sup> J. P. Mackey, *Tradition and Change in the Church* (M. H. Gill & Son, 1968): p. 20.



“gospel of salvation,” the “word of hearing” or the “God’s salvific work,” which he had received from the Church. He says, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received and wherein you stand ... For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1–4). “When you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively works also in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). Truly, the apostles received this gospel of the Church, not written on paper but through word of mouth, that they may deliver it to the Church by oral tradition, as well as written.

On this note, Cyril Richardson says, “Hence Christian preaching was founded on the Old Testament and on the living tradition of Jesus, passed from mouth to mouth. This feeling for personal witness was very strong in the Early Church. Papias, for instance, records his disdain for books and his preference for ‘the living and abiding voice’.”<sup>196</sup>

Many Western scholars are coming to appreciate this truth: oral tradition does not stand side by side with the written works as separate and distinct things; rather, they are one thing. What the Bible declares, the Church has received by oral tradition.

F. F. Bruce, the professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester notes: “Whereas western Christians tend to set ‘scripture’ and ‘tradition’ over against each other, as though tradition were exclusively oral and not written, there is no reason why tradition should not take written form. If it is apostolic tradition, in due course it takes written form and becomes apostolic scripture. Whether Paul’s teaching was given orally or in writing, it equally carried apostolic authority; hence he can encourage the Thessalonian Christians to ‘stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter’ (2 Thess. 2:15).”<sup>197</sup>

In *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* we find, “The term (*tradition*), however, came to be used in a good sense of the apostolic teaching handed down in the Church either by the oral word or by letter.”<sup>198</sup>

J. N. D. Kelly says, “by tradition the fathers usually mean doctrine which the Lord or His apostles committed to the Church, irrespective of whether it was handed down orally or in documents ... The ancient meaning of the term is well illustrated by Athanasius’ reference<sup>199</sup> to ‘the actual original tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church, which the Lord bestowed, the apostles proclaimed and the fathers safeguarded.’”<sup>200</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (Touchstone, 1995): p. 21.

<sup>197</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): p. 37.

<sup>198</sup> Henry Gehman, *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976): p. 957.

<sup>199</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (Epworth Press, 1951), 1.28: pp. 133–136.

<sup>200</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): pp. 30, 31.

Indeed, the Church received the “word of God” before it was written on paper. She enjoyed its good news and understood the deepest meaning of the word of God by the Holy Spirit through oral tradition, received not only by words but also as a way of life. She received this life more than twenty years before the New Testament began to be written. And when the evangelists and apostles did write the New Testament by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church accepted it, venerated it, and understood it as the very life she had already been living. Thus, the Gospel is not a stranger to tradition, but its first component, for they both declare the “One Truth” and explain the nature of the Church.

Perhaps one may ask whether oral tradition was annulled by the appearance of the books of the New Testament. We point to the apostles themselves who, in their letters to the early Christian communities, often reminded the believers of oral tradition from which they may gain an understanding of Christian truth. “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full” (2 John 12). “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face” (3 John 13–14). “And the rest I will set in order when I come” (1 Cor. 11:34). “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5).

In many situations, the apostle Paul commands his disciples to preserve the tradition, deliver it to others, and keep the traditions they were taught — whether by word of mouth or by his epistles — and to withdraw themselves “from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). He also warns us to beware of every tradition of men which is inconsistent with the faith, “according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Moreover, in the early Church, converts to Christianity accepted the faith in many countries that had no versions of the Bible in their own languages and thus had no access to the truth except through oral tradition.<sup>201</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** in the second century is the first to discuss the matter of tradition. He poses these questions: suppose we had no holy scripture, what would have happened? To whom should we turn? “Should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> P. E. Hallett, *A Catholic Dictionary*. 15th ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951): p. 782.

<sup>202</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.4.1 (ANF 1:417); J. F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen 1920): pp. 55–56.

## 65. How has the Holy Bible been preserved till today?

The Holy Bible is the book of the Church, which we receive through the tradition of the Church. By tradition, our sacred books were canonized, confirming that they were divinely inspired. **Origen** the scholar says, “in all these questions we approve of nothing but what the Church approves of, namely only four canonical Gospels.”<sup>203</sup> **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says “Learn also diligently, and from the Church, what are the books of the Old Testament, and what those of the New.”<sup>204</sup> So also **St. Augustine**: “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.”<sup>205</sup> **St. Basil the Great** says, “For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in its very vitals.”<sup>206</sup>

It is important to note that while Church tradition testifies to the Holy Bible, and the Holy Bible is itself a part of the Church’s tradition, none of this diminishes the unique value of the Bible. Tradition defends the Bible’s nature as the word of God, the eternal divine revelation, which addresses not only the present age but also the ages to come.

Although tradition testifies to the Holy Bible, it cannot be its judge. On the contrary, a tradition is only accepted if it is founded on the Bible; it cannot be accepted if it disagrees with the Holy Bible.<sup>207</sup>

Moreover, the Holy Bible is for every believer, that he may experience it and personally taste its beauty, appreciating its value and inspiration. However, no one can by himself determine the divine inspiration of the Holy Bible and the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Bible — only the Holy Spirit who lives in the Church can do that. It is not through any individual effort of a human deciding alone, but through adherence to the judgment of the Church.<sup>208</sup>

Finally, the close relationship between the Holy Bible and the tradition of the Church in no way extinguishes one’s personal feelings towards the Holy Bible. On the contrary, the tradition of the Church reinforces the personal approach, and requires of us that we live the Bible in no way isolated from the Church.

<sup>203</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 1.2 (FOTC 94:6).

<sup>204</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.33 (NPNF II/7:26).

<sup>205</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus, Called Fundamental* 6 (NPNF I/4:131).

<sup>206</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (NPNF II/8:41).

<sup>207</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Elizabeth S. Cram, ed. Donald A. Lowrie (New York: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1935): p. 21.

<sup>208</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Elizabeth S. Cram, ed. Donald A. Lowrie (New York: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1935): p. 21.

## 66. How were the words and acts of Christ preserved?

By tradition, we received the Holy Gospels which contain some, but not all, of the acts and words of Christ, as St. John concludes in his gospel, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

The disciples and apostles heard many sayings which they treasured and lived; but they did not record them all in the gospels. For example, consider some of the things that Paul the Apostle wrote: “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10). The apostle Paul received these commandments and sayings of the Lord from the disciples and apostles who heard the Lord firsthand, lived them by the Spirit, and preached them to others.

Concerning the **acts of Christ**, the apostle Paul also says, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord (*Kyrios*) Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread” (1 Cor. 11:23). The apostle Paul did not witness this event firsthand on the night of His suffering, but as Oscar Cullmann<sup>209</sup> explains, the word “*Kyrios*” here refers to the “**oral tradition**” concerning the Lord Jesus. Of course, the apostle did receive many visions and revelations firsthand; but this particular act he received from the Lord through the Church. What is wonderful is that the earliest liturgies — such as that found in the Apostolic Tradition of **St. Hippolytus** — contain the apostle Paul’s expressions in the signings, in the Institution Narrative. Perhaps this is because the Apostolic Tradition of **Hippolytus** reflects a general tradition in the Church on which both the apostle Paul and all the apostolic liturgies relied.

## 67. What does Papias say about tradition?

After the departure of the apostles and the disciples who were eyewitnesses to the saving events of Christ’s life, Church Fathers like **Papias, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria** were interested in preserving the oral tradition — the “tradition of the fathers, the elders (presbyters)” — which they held to date back to the apostolic era.

We know about **Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis** in Phrygia, from the writings of **Irenaeus** and **Eusebius**. Irenaeus’ testimony of him is considered more important than that of Eusebius since Irenaeus belongs to the same group of witnesses as Papias, although he came a little bit later.<sup>210</sup> **St. Irenaeus** wrote that Papias had heard St. John firsthand, was a

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<sup>209</sup> Oscar Cullmann, “‘Kyrios’ As Designation for the Oral Tradition Concerning Jesus (Paradosis and Kyrios),” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 3 no. 2 (1950): p. 180.

<sup>210</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity. A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 1 (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964): p. 46.

companion of St. Polycarp, and compiled five books.<sup>211</sup> Irenaeus praised his works highly and regarded Papias as having a direct lineage to the apostolic era.<sup>212</sup> His works survived until the fourteenth century (if not later), but unfortunately not a single manuscript of his survives today.<sup>213</sup> Eusebius preserved for us a preface to Papias' work entitled, "The Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord."<sup>214</sup> In this preface, Papias (before the mid-2nd century) collected the memoirs of those still alive who had personally known the apostles. He says, "I shall not hesitate to set down for you together with my interpretations all that I have ever learned well from the presbyters and recall well, being confident of their truth ... if ever anyone came who had carefully followed the presbyters, I inquired as to the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or what Peter said, or what Philip or what Thomas or James or what John or Matthew or any other of the disciples of the Lord ... For I did not suppose that information from books helped me so much as that from a living and abiding voice."<sup>215</sup>

### **68. What does St. Irenaeus say about tradition?**

In the second half of the second century, **St. Irenaeus** highlighted the importance of oral tradition. This is evident from the sayings he used to remind his friend Florinus of their earlier days with **St. Polycarp in Smyrna**.<sup>216</sup> He says, "I recall the events of that time better than what has happened recently (for what we learn as children grows with the soul and becomes one with it), so that I can tell even the place where the blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings and comings, and manner of his life, and the appearance of his body, and the discourses which he gave to the multitude, and how he reported his living with John and with the rest of the Apostles who had seen the Lord, and how he remembered their words, and what the things were which he heard from them about the Lord, and about His miracles and about His teaching, how Polycarp received them [*paralambano*] from eyewitnesses of 'the word of life,' (1 John 1:1) and proclaimed them all in harmony with the Scriptures. These things even then I listened to through the mercy of God that was granted me, making notes of them not on paper but in my heart; and ever by the grace of God I ruminate on them."<sup>217</sup>

### **69. How did tradition confront Gnosticism and the heresies of the second century?**

In the second century, the Gnostics misinterpreted the Holy Bible to serve their own needs by quoting some Bible verses out of context and apart from the tradition of the Church. Moreover, they claimed that they had received secret traditions from the apostles<sup>218</sup> and that

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<sup>211</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.33.4 (ANF 1:563).

<sup>212</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity. A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, vol. 1* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964): p. 46.

<sup>213</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): p. 108.

<sup>214</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4 (FOTC 19:203–206; PG 20:297; ANF 1:151–155).

<sup>215</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39 (FOTC 19:203).

<sup>216</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): p. 111.

<sup>217</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.4–7 (FOTC 19:329).

<sup>218</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.3.1 (ANF 1:415).

they themselves knew better than either bishops or even the apostles.<sup>219</sup> The early Church Fathers confronted the Gnostics and refuted their beliefs. Among these fathers was **St. Irenaeus**, who was called the “Father of Church Tradition.” We can summarize his view of “tradition” in the following points:

**First:** The tradition that has come down to us from the apostles was preserved and passed down to us without interruption through the succession of presbyters in the Church (the Greek-origin word *presbyter* means the priesthood, and here refers to bishops).<sup>220</sup>

- a. Tradition is preserved in the Church by the Holy Spirit who renews the Church’s youth.<sup>221</sup>
- b. The apostolic tradition is not a matter for secrecy; it can be known by all who desire to accept the truth. It is proclaimed in every Church throughout the whole world.<sup>222</sup>

**Second:** The heretics misinterpreted the Holy Bible by relying on passages they lifted from the Bible and rearranged to suit their own thought,<sup>223</sup> thus disregarding the underlying unity of the Scripture. They used biblical texts, but they did not read them within the Church or according to the tradition of the apostles. The true understanding of the Bible is found in the Church, where the holy tradition and the apostolic teaching are preserved. “For the Church has been planted as a garden (*paradisus*) in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, ‘You may freely eat from every tree of the garden,’ (Gen. 2:16) that is, eat from every Scripture of the Lord; but you shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord. For these men do profess that they have themselves the knowledge of good and evil; and they set their own impious minds above the God who made them.”<sup>224</sup>

**Third:** “the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it ... For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions<sup>225</sup> of the world.”<sup>226</sup>

**Fourth:** “all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour. For

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<sup>219</sup> G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics: Six Studies in Dogmatic Faith* (London: SPCK, 1948), 16.

<sup>220</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.2.2, 3.3.1, 3.4.1 (ANF 1:415, 417).

<sup>221</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

<sup>222</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.3.1 (ANF 1:415).

<sup>223</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 1.8.1 (ANF 1:326).

<sup>224</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.20.2 (ANF 1:548), amended.

<sup>225</sup> Probably referring to the Churches in Palestine.

<sup>226</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 1.10.2 (ANF 1:331).

where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth.”<sup>227</sup>

## 70. What does the scholar Tertullian say about tradition?

The scholar Tertullian’s view of tradition does not diverge from that of **St. Irenaeus** in any essential points. We can summarize his view in the following points:

- a. **The scholar Tertullian** insists that there is no secret tradition. He says, “it is inconceivable that the apostles were either ignorant of the whole scope of the message which they had to declare, or failed to make known to all men the entire rule of faith.”<sup>228</sup>
- b. The scholar Tertullian considered the surest test of the authenticity of the doctrine to be the fact that the churches had been founded by the apostles and were continuously linked with them.<sup>229</sup> In this, he agrees with St. Irenaeus. For example, the scholar Tertullian says, “We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different from theirs. This is our witness of truth.”<sup>230</sup> He also says, “[the] authority of churches ... lends support to the tradition of the apostles; because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on.”<sup>231</sup>
- c. The scholar Tertullian asserts that the oral tradition or the “Rule of Faith” (*Regula Fidei*) is the key to true interpretations of the Holy Bible. The heretics were able to make Scripture say whatever they liked because they disregarded the Rule of Faith.<sup>232</sup>
- d. The scholar Tertullian describes a tradition of practical worship that has been the custom of the Church for many generations. He says, “And how long shall we draw the saw to and fro through this line, when we have an ancient practice, which by anticipation has made for us the state, i.e., of the question? If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it. For how can anything come into use, if it has not first been-handed down?”<sup>233</sup>

<sup>227</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458). See also 1.10.2; 3.2, 2.3, 3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.4.1, 2; 3.5.1; J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1975): pp. 115–117.

<sup>228</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 27 (ANF 3:256), amended. See also 22 (ANF 3:253).

<sup>229</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): p. 40.

<sup>230</sup> Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics* 21 (ANF 3:252).

<sup>231</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5 (ANF 3:351).

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics* 9 (ANF 3:247–248); *On the Resurrection* 21 (ANF 3:560); and *Against Praxeas* 26 (ANF 3:622).

<sup>233</sup> This and the remaining quotes under this section are from Tertullian, *De Corona* (The Chaplet) 3, 4 (ANF 3:94–95), amended.

He continues: “Even in pleading tradition, written authority, you say, must be demanded. Let us inquire, therefore, whether tradition, unless it be written, should not be admitted. Certainly we shall say that it ought not be admitted, if no cases of other practices which, without any written instrument, we maintain on the ground of tradition alone.”

He then gives some examples: “To deal with this matter briefly, I shall begin with baptism. When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the priest, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel [see Matt. 28:19]. Then when we are taken up (as new-born children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week.” This was the tradition that was observed in former times.

He continues, “We take also, in our congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the priests, we celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord commanded to be eaten at mealtimes.

“As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honours.

“We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord’s Day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Pentecost.

“We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground.

“At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign (i.e., of the cross).

“If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition, and custom, and faith, you will either yourself perceive, or learn from someone who has ...

“These instances, therefore, make it sufficiently plain that you can vindicate the keeping of even unwritten tradition established by custom; the proper witness for tradition as demonstrated by long continued observance.”

## **71. What does St. Clement of Alexandria say about tradition?**

**Eusebius** comments, “In the [*Stromateis*] he refers to himself as having been next in succession to the Apostles ... he acknowledges that he was forced by his companions to hand down to posterity in writing traditions which he happened to have heard from the elders



[presbyters]of old.”<sup>234</sup> According to St. Clement, the true gnostic (*his ideal Christian*), “having grown old in the Scriptures, and maintaining apostolic and ecclesiastic orthodoxy in doctrines, lives most correctly in accordance with the Gospel, and discovers the proofs, for which he may have made search (sent forth as he is by the Lord), from the law and the prophets. For the life of the Gnostic, in my view, is nothing but deeds and words corresponding to the tradition of the Lord.”<sup>235</sup> He further says that he who spurns the tradition of the Church deprives himself of being a man of God,<sup>236</sup> and that gnosis (*knowledge*) is found by few (*of us*) being handed down from the apostles, through their successors, passed on to us unwritten (*agraphōs*).<sup>237</sup>

## 72. What does Origen say about tradition?

Tradition, or “the Canon of Faith,” is for **Origen** the currently prevailing body of beliefs accepted by Christians. **The scholar Origen** states that “one must guard the ecclesiastical preaching, handed down from the apostles through the order of succession and remaining in the churches to the present.”<sup>238</sup> And in his commentary on the Holy Bible, he refers to tradition and to the writings of the elders or priests (presbyters), by which he means the Fathers of the Church.

For example, concerning the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), he writes, “One of the elders wanted to interpret the parable as follows: the man who was going down [to Jericho] is Adam. Jerusalem is Paradise, and Jericho is the world. The robbers are hostile powers ... and the Samaritan is Christ.”<sup>239</sup> Jean Daniélou points out that this same interpretation had indeed appeared in **Irenaeus**<sup>240</sup> but since it is doubtful that **Origen** would call **Irenaeus** “one of the elders,” the common source of both passages must be a shared tradition.<sup>241</sup> **Origen** believes that true understanding of the Holy Bible is found only in the Church. He says, “The true disciple of Jesus is he who enters the house, that is to say, the Church. He enters by thinking as the Church does, and living as she does; this is how he understands the Word. The key of the Scriptures must be received from the tradition of the Church, as from the Lord Himself.”<sup>242</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.13.8, 9 (FOTC 29:25–26).

<sup>235</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.16 (ANF 2:554).

<sup>236</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.16 (ANF 2:551).

<sup>237</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.7.61 (ANF 2:494).

<sup>238</sup> Origen, *On First Principles, Volume I*, trans. John Behr (Oxford University Press, 2017), Praef. 2: p. 13.

<sup>239</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 34.3 (FOTC 94:138).

<sup>240</sup> J. Daniélou, “Le Bon Samaritan” in *Mel Robert* (Paris: Tournai, 1957): pp. 457–465.

<sup>241</sup> J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964): p. 49.

<sup>242</sup> Yves Congar, *Tradition and the Life of the Church* (London: Burns and Oats, 1964): p. 83.

### 73. What does St. Cyprian say about tradition?

**St. Cyprian** insists that outside the Church there is no salvation, either for heretics or for schismatics: “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.”<sup>243</sup> Therefore, the true interpretation of Scripture and orthodox doctrines are found only within the true Church. The tradition of the true Church is the guardian of the Christian faith.

### 74. What does St. Gregory the bishop of Nyssa say about tradition?

In the writings of **St. Gregory of Nyssa**, we find: “it is enough for proof of our statement, that the tradition has come down to us from our fathers, handed on, like some inheritance, by succession from the apostles and the saints who came after them.”<sup>244</sup>

### 75. What does St. Basil the Great say about tradition?

- a. This saint refers to many quotations from the writings of the Fathers as witnesses of the orthodox faith.
- b. He also speaks of oral tradition as safeguarding the sound interpretation of the Holy Bible, which the heretics try to destroy. He says, “in truth, it is the faith that is the object of their war, and their intention, shared by all who oppose and hate sound teaching (1 Tim. 1:10) is to throw down the foundation of faith in Christ by dashing apostolic tradition to the ground and to obliterate it. On account of this, like true debtors they cry out for proofs from the Scriptures and dismiss the non-scriptural witness of the fathers as worthless.”<sup>245</sup>
- c. **St. Basil** refers to tradition as our guide in sacraments and rites, saying: “Of the dogmas and proclamations that are guarded in the Church, we hold some from the teaching of the Scriptures, and others we have received in mystery [1 Cor. 2:7] as the teachings of the tradition of the apostles. Both hold the same power with respect to true religion.

“No one would deny these points, at least no one who has even a little experience of ecclesiastical institutions. For if we attempt to reject non-scriptural customs as insignificant, we would, unaware, lose the very vital parts of the Gospel, and even more, we would establish the proclamation merely in name.

“For instance — I will take the first and most common — who has learned through the Scriptures that those who hope in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ are marked

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<sup>243</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church* 6 (ANF 5:423); Letter 73.7 (ANF 5:388).

<sup>244</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 4.6 (NPNF II/5:163; PG 45:653).

<sup>245</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 10.25: p. 56.

with the sign of the cross? What sort of scriptural text teaches us to turn to the East for prayer?

“Which saint has left us a scriptural account of the words of the epiclesis at the manifestation of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing? We are not satisfied with the [Eucharistic] words that the Apostle or the Gospel mentions, but we add other words before and after theirs, since we have received non-scriptural teaching that these words have great power in regard to the mystery.

“We bless the water of baptism and the oil of chrism in addition to the very one who is to be baptized. By what Scriptures? Is it not by the secret and mystical tradition? But why? What scriptural authority teaches the anointing itself of oil?<sup>246</sup> Where does a man being immersed three times come from?<sup>247</sup> How much of the baptismal ritual is for the renunciation of Satan and his angels, and what scriptural text does it come from? Does it not come from this secret and unspoken teaching, which our fathers guarded with a simple and unprying silence, since they were well taught that the solemnity of the mysteries is preserved by silence? ...

“Because of this we all look to the East for prayers, but few of us know that our ancient fatherland [Heb. 11:14], the paradise that God planted in Eden, was in the East [Gen. 3:8]. We say our prayers standing on the first day of the week, but not all know the reason why. By standing for prayer we remind ourselves of the grace given to us on the day of the resurrection, as if we are rising to stand with Christ and being bound to seek what is above (see Col. 3:1). Not only this, it also seems somehow to be an image of the age to come.”<sup>248</sup>

## 76. What does St. John Chrysostom say about tradition?

After saying that the apostles did not hand down everything in epistles, but also handed down many matters without writing them down, **St. John Chrysostom** adds, “both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther.”<sup>249</sup>

<sup>246</sup> For the unction of the catechumens — cf. *The Apostolic Constitutions* 7.22 (ANF 7:469); of the baptized — Tertullian, *On Baptism* 7 (ANF 3:672); of Confirmation or the oil of Chrism — Tertullian *On Baptism*, 8 (ANF 3:672–673); and of the sick — James 5:14.

<sup>247</sup> For triple immersion, an early authority is Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 26 (ANF 3:623); also St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ* (NPNF II/5:516).

<sup>248</sup> St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 27.66: pp. 104–106.

<sup>249</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Thessalonians* 4.4 (PG 62:488; NPNF I/13:390).

### **77. What does St. Epiphanius the bishop of Salamis say about tradition?**

This saint teaches that it is the Church alone and not the heretics that has received the tradition, preserved it, and handed it down. He also states, “But tradition must be used too, for not everything is available from the sacred scripture. Thus the holy apostles handed some things down in scriptures but some in traditions.”<sup>250</sup>

### **78. What does St. Augustine say about tradition?**

In his treatment of the dispute over the validity of the baptism of the heretical Donatists, St. Augustine writes, “And this custom [i.e., the invalidity of their baptism], coming, I suppose, from apostolical tradition (like many other things which are held to have been handed down under their actual sanction, because they are preserved throughout the whole Church, though they are not found either in their letters, or in the Councils of their successors).”<sup>251</sup>

### **79. What is the relationship between Christian tradition and Jewish tradition?**

Early Jewish tradition arose naturally before any written law or written history. It was the only source for Jewish faith. After receiving the written law, tradition explained it and complemented it.<sup>252</sup> Tradition became the practical interpreter of the written law, growing over the centuries as rules and statutes were applied to the changing conditions of life in succeeding generations. We give here two examples of the interaction between the written law and tradition:

- a. According to the fourth commandment, “you shall do no work” on the Sabbath day (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). But what is the precise meaning of the word, “work”? Which activities count as work and which do not? In an agricultural community, the answer was relatively easy. “Work” consists of those activities that make up the daily routine of labor.<sup>253</sup> Thus, it is plain that even in the seasons of plowing and harvesting, they must rest (Ex. 34:21). Nevertheless, in the time of Nehemiah, the Levites worked on the Sabbath day, for they guarded the gates (Neh. 13:19).
- b. In the book of Exodus we read “Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Ex. 16:29). If this regulation were strictly observed, it would have prevented any movement outside of one’s home on the Sabbath. However, “his place” was

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<sup>250</sup> St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books 2 & 3. De Fide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Frank Williams (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 61.6.5: p. 121 (PG 41:1048); *Ancoratus* 63.7 (FOTC 128:149).

<sup>251</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 2.12 (NPNF I/4:430; PL 43:133).

<sup>252</sup> P. E. Hallett, *A Catholic Dictionary*, 15th ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951): p. 781.

<sup>253</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): p. 22.

interpreted to include any point within two thousand cubits from one's home, and this distance came to be known as "a Sabbath day's journey."<sup>254</sup>

## 80. What are the important schools of Jewish tradition?

Jewish tradition reflects the attitude of many Jewish leaders, who preserve the law to the letter, but show little interest in its spirit. In the time of Jesus Christ, there were two schools of oral tradition. One was headed by *Rabban* Gamaliel the Elder, a disciple of the founder of the school, Hillel the Elder, and his successor as its head. It was in this school that Saul of Tarsus was educated, and he may have even been Gamaliel's successor had he not converted to Christianity. The other school was headed by Shammai, which diverged quite sharply in some points of interpretation and application of the law. Despite their differences, they shared much common ground with Gamaliel's school. Both accepted the principle of tradition as a means of adapting the requirements of the ancient law to changing circumstances, contrary to the Sadducees who insisted on adherence to the strict letter of the written law.<sup>255</sup>

## 81. What are the important books or works of Jewish tradition?

Before discussing Jesus' point of view of the Jewish tradition, I would like to give you a brief account of the important works of the Jewish tradition, even those works that were compiled after the time of Christ.

**The Talmud:** The Aramaic word *Talmud* means "teaching."<sup>256</sup> It may refer to the *Gemara* — a particular subset of the collection of traditions — but is used more generally to designate the entire collection. The Talmud is divided into two parts: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*.

**The Mishnah:** The word *Mishnah* means "repetition" or "second law." The *Mishnah* is a collection of Jewish legal traditions transmitted orally until they were compiled by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi the prince sometime around 200 A. D. It contains the opinions of rabbis or teachers (*Tannaim*). It is divided into six sections (singular, *seder*; plural, *sedarim*):

- a. Seeds (*Zeraim*), eleven tractates treating mostly agricultural tithes and offerings.
- b. Festivals (*Moed*), twelve tractates on the Sabbath, Passover, etc.
- c. Women (*Nashim*), seven tractates relating to marriage laws.
- d. Damages (*Nezikin*), ten tractates on civil and criminal law.

<sup>254</sup> Mishnah, *Erubin* 4:3 etc. The fixing of a limit of two thousand cubits was based on an extension of the principle of Num. 35:5.

<sup>255</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.16 (F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): Ch. 1).

<sup>256</sup> John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: G. Chapman, 1965): p. 948.

- e. Holy Things (*Kodashim*), eleven tractates mostly on animal sacrifices.
- f. Purities (*Tohorot*), twelve tractates treating all aspects of ritual impurity,<sup>257</sup> how to avoid it, and how to overcome it.

**The Gemara:** The word *Gemara* means “completion.” It is a commentary on the *Mishnah* and contains the opinions of the interpreters (*Amoraim*). There are two main forms of *Gemaras* or *Talmuds*: The Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud — compiled around the fourth century; and the Babylonian Talmud compiled around the fifth or sixth century. They are similar in method and construction, but they are by no means identical in content.<sup>258</sup> The latter is the more authoritative in Jewish circles.

In addition to the *Talmud*, Jewish tradition includes the *Tosefta* and the *Midrash*:

**The Tosefta:** The word *Tosefta* means “addition” or “supplement.” It is a collection of teachers’ opinions (*Tannaim*) not found in the *Mishnah*. Its teachings are called *Baraita*.

**The Midrash:** This name is derived from the Hebrew verb *darash* or *daras*, which means “investigate” or “search out,” i.e., to reveal a thought not apparent on the surface. The word occurs in the Old Testament (2 Chron. 13:22, 24:27) to designate the source used by the Chronicler. The book of Sirach (51:23) speaks of the “Bet-Midrash” (the house of Midrash) which must designate a school where the sacred texts were studied.

In rabbinical literature, *Midrash* means the study of the text of sacred scripture in general. More specifically, it refers to the homiletic interpretation and explanation of the text. Midrash refers to an approach that closely ties interpretations to their corresponding sacred texts. This differs from the *Mishnah*, in which interpretations are repeated in isolation from the sacred text. It is worth noting that the *Midrash* is more concerned with edifying lessons and its goal is always practical application to the present time.

There are **two distinct types of Midrash**: the *Halakha* and *Aggadah*.

- a. **Halakha or Halaka:** a Hebrew word that means “behavior,” “way,” “practice,” “rule,” etc. It denotes a way of interpreting the law in order to derive from it principles of conduct. It arose from the pious wish to make the law apply to even the most trivial and unexpected situations in daily life. First it was handed down orally; then later, compiled and written down.
- b. **Aggadah:** a Hebrew word that means “narrative” or “story.” It denotes the interpretation of the foundational texts of the five books of Moses somewhat

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<sup>257</sup> F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1990): p. 1338.

<sup>258</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972): Ch. 1; J. P. Mackey, *Tradition and Change in the Church* (M. H. Gill & Son, 1968): pp. 2f.

expansively in order to derive edifying lessons. It consists of parables, legends, narratives, folklore, “folk morality,” and other subjects.

## 82. What is our Lord Jesus’ attitude towards Jewish tradition?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17), did not belittle the value of Jewish tradition. When He asked, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your traditions?” (Matt. 15:3; Mark 7:13; Col. 2:8), He was not rejecting tradition itself, but rather rejecting their approach to tradition. He rejected those traditions that stood in opposition to the word of God, and their literal attitudes towards the application of the law or the tradition. He gave them an example of a tradition that contradicts the word of God, whereby a man might avoid the duty of caring for his parents financially by offering that money to the Temple instead as *qorban* (offering).<sup>259</sup>

In another example, we find that our Lord Jesus does not forbid His disciples when, walking in the fields on the sabbath, they plucked some heads of grain and extracted the grains from them with their hands. The Pharisees accused the disciples of violating the law, since “gathering the grain and pressing it” are two of the thirty-nine categories of work identified by the Mishnah as work prohibited on the sabbath.<sup>260</sup>

## 83. What is the Christian Church’s attitude towards Jewish tradition?

From the Apostolic age, the Christian Church did not neglect the living traditions of the Jews. She refused those traditions that opposed the word of God, and accepted the rest after giving them a Christian flavor, that they might serve the new faith. Here are some examples of the influence of these traditions on early Christianity:

- a. In his epistle, St. Jude quotes from ancient tradition the dispute between the Archangel Michael and the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 9), a prophecy of Enoch (Jude 14, 15), and the names of “Jannes and Jambres” (2 Tim. 3:8), who opposed Moses. The Book of Revelation mentions the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel that they might eat food sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:14–15) which was also sourced from an ancient tradition.
- b. The early Fathers were influenced by Jewish tradition. **St. Justin** was in contact with the Jew Trypho and Origen consulted rabbis and borrowed some interpretations from them. Syrian literature in particular absorbed Jewish *Aggadah*, notably Eusebius of Emesa and St. Ephrem.

<sup>259</sup> Mishnah, *Sabbath* 7.1f.

<sup>260</sup> For more details, see Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist*, 2nd ed. (Sporting, Alexandria: St George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1973): pp. 188–191.

- c. We borrowed many liturgical texts that are in harmony with our faith from the Jewish tradition.<sup>261</sup>
- d. The *Didache* (“The Lord’s Teaching to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles”) bears a Jewish character (a treatise on the two ways).

#### **84. Has the life of the Church taken anything from holy tradition?**

We saw above that the tradition of the Church is the continuous stream of life in Christ Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit. This life encompasses the Church’s spiritual and ethical programs, as well as her order of worship. As such, **tradition represents the “oneness” of life in the Church**, one interconnected life that cannot be divided into separated components such as faith, spiritual teaching, and worship.

#### **85. Has ethical teaching taken anything from holy tradition?**

The apostle Paul delivered to us a tradition that contains a spiritual and ethical program. He says, “As therefore you have received (*paralambano*) Christ Jesus the Lord, **so walk in Him**, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught”(Col. 2:6–7). “Just as you received from us how **you ought to walk** and to please God” (1 Thess. 4:1). “But we command you ... that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do” (Phil. 4:9).

In the Christian tradition, faith is inseparable from spiritual and ethical life. As an archetype of the Church, St. Mary “kept the word of God” (Luke 2:19) in her heart and performed it in her life. When, in the second century, the pagan Autolyucus asked **Theophilus of Antioch**, “Show me your God,” Theophilus wisely replied, “show me your inner man and I will show you my God.”<sup>262</sup> In other words, show me the soundness of the inner man of your heart, then you will be able to see God and I will show Him to you. Thus, he tied faith to daily life.

#### **86. Has Church worship taken anything from holy tradition?**

What was said about the ethical program applies also to the Church’s order of worship. Without doubt, we receive our “Church life in Jesus Christ” not only through Christian doctrines, teaching, the Holy Bible, and the ethical program, but also through tradition: the Church’s liturgies, rites, canons, and all that concerns worship. We have received a true life of worship in an apostolic and patristic spirit, which upholds our true faith.

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<sup>261</sup> Dom Guéranger, *Examen des Institutions Liturgiques* (Librairie Liturgique et Catholique de L. Lesort, 1846); Yves Congar, *Tradition and the Life of the Church* (London: Burns and Oats, 1964): p. 125.

<sup>262</sup> St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolyucus* 1.2 (ANF 2:89).



**87. Have the liturgies taken anything from holy tradition?**

Tradition is the source of our Church liturgies of Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, etc. At the same time, these liturgies are themselves tradition at its highest degree of power and sanctity.<sup>263</sup> For in their entirety, they sanctify the mystery of Christianity in its perfection. They do not teach us the mystery, but bring us into real relationship with it.

**88 Have the rites taken anything from holy tradition?**

Rites are an essential element of liturgical, family, and personal practice, for they represent the communion of the body with the spirit in worshipping God. The rites we received by tradition are not accidental in the life of the Church. In their symbolic meaning, they are more than an expression that brings the senses and the mind to the realities of the faith. They actually bring us right into the mystery of worship; they are a declaration of the living Truth, which abides in the Church.

For instance, in the hymns (or praises) of the Church we participate in the new heavenly song in Christ Jesus. Through these hymns we not only taste musical art, but also experience heavenly life.

In the Church building and all its contents, we encounter more than mere art or architecture or precious antiquities — we drink in a living tradition. The building is a living icon of the heavenly Church, which accurately expresses the Church's faith.

Thus, in every kind of Christian art, we meet with the spirit of tradition. For instance, iconography offers us the life of the Church through the Holy Spirit and explains the life of faith in the Orthodox teaching. For we neither see icons as visible entities that help us in worship nor as religious decorations for the temple, but we taste in them our living faith in heavenly things and our love and unity with the saints in Christ Jesus.

**89. What is the responsibility of the clergy and the laity in preserving holy tradition and its continuity?**

**First: Tradition and Councils.** In the first century, the apostles assembled together in Jerusalem (Acts 15) to examine the problem of how to accept the Gentiles into the new faith and to come to an ecclesial decision in keeping with the mind of Christ. So, it is the responsibility of the fathers of the Church to assemble in local or ecumenical councils to study the needs of the present Church and to preserve its traditional life in new circumstances. In doing so, they do not give individual opinions, but collective opinions. They assemble under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in one mind to fulfil the needs of their flock. For example, they must study how to present the teaching of the Church and its dogmas to the

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<sup>263</sup> J. N .D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): pp. 48–49.

modern person and how to strengthen their people against every heresy or materialistic philosophy. They also discuss pastoral needs, evangelistic activity, and the Church's ecumenical role. In other words, it is the fathers' responsibility to preserve the Church's life of tradition as an active life producing spiritual effects.

**Second: Tradition and the Writings of the Fathers.** Next to the Church councils, the writings of the Church Fathers are one of the essential sources that preserve the Church's tradition. J. N. D. Kelly gives many examples of "the appeal to the Fathers" in the early Church to affirm traditional beliefs and doctrines:<sup>264</sup>

- a. Writing to the Egyptian monks in defense of the blessed Virgin's claim to be called "Mother of God," St. Cyril of Alexandria counseled<sup>265</sup> them to follow in the steps of the holy Fathers, since it was they who had preserved the faith handed down from the apostles and taught Christians to believe aright. Again, he was prepared to affirm<sup>266</sup> that the correct doctrine of the Holy Trinity had been expounded by "the wisdom of the holy Fathers." As against Nestorius, he appealed<sup>267</sup> to "the holy catholic Church and the venerable Fathers themselves," claiming that the Holy Spirit spoke in them. For the more formal justification of his Christological position, he prepared elaborate arguments from patristic quotations, inserting them in his controversial writings<sup>268</sup> and producing them at the council of Ephesus.<sup>269</sup> St. Cyril states, "I am a lover of sound doctrines, treading in the religious footsteps of the Fathers."<sup>270</sup>
- b. **Theodoret**, the Antiochene Father, speaks<sup>271</sup> of the orthodox faith as having been transmitted to us, not only by the apostles and prophets, but also by those who interpreted their teachings. These include **Ignatius, Eustathius, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, John Chrysostom**, and other luminaries of the world as well as the holy Fathers who assembled before them at Nicaea. He added that any who deviated from their collective teaching must be labeled as an enemy of the truth. Elsewhere,<sup>272</sup> he explained that the Holy Spirit inspired the Fathers to make clear the more difficult passages of the Scriptures.

It is worth noting that according to our Orthodox Church no single Father can alone comprehend the Truth in its fullness — only the Church as a whole can do this.

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<sup>264</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968): pp. 48, 49.

<sup>265</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters* 1.4–9 Cyril to Monks in Egypt (FOTC 76:15–16; PG 77:12, 13).

<sup>266</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 2*, trans. Thomas Randell (Library of the Fathers, 48, 1885), 9.1: p. 265 (PG 74:216).

<sup>267</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Five Tomes Against Nestorius* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1881), 4.2: p. 131.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. *De Recta Fide etc.* ed. P. E. Pusey, (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1877), (PG 76:1212f, 316 f).

<sup>269</sup> E. Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I.I: 7: pp. 89ff.

<sup>270</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume III* (Christian Classics, 1983): p. 136.

<sup>271</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, Epistle 89 To Florentius the Patrician (NPNF II/3:283).

<sup>272</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, Epistle 151 To the Monks etc. (NPNF II/3:325ff; PG 83:1440).

**90. What is the role of the laity in preserving the traditional life of the Church?**

The laity play a role in preserving tradition by practicing it in their daily lives and in their worship. Church life cannot be preserved only by canons or through books, but through practice and life.

Every true believer represents a living stone in the spiritual temple of God, laid upon other living stones that came before him. That is, he receives the traditional life of the Church from past generations. And at the same time, he bears other living stones. That is, he transmits this life to future generations. Thus, he becomes a living member of the Church of Christ, transmitting her life by practicing it daily. We can therefore identify “traditional believers” not as those who carefully study Church canons, are well acquainted with the details of the rites, or just recite the church hymns; but rather as those who discover their unity with God in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit through preserving and practicing the canons, rites, hymns, etc., of the Church.

**91. How can we hold fast to the tradition of the Church in contemporary life?**

Some assume that “tradition” means “conservation” or “solidification,” as if it prevents any progress in the life of the Church. From our Orthodox point of view, tradition is the life of the Church throughout history, which is guided and renewed by the Holy Spirit. The Church will never be satisfied until the perfection of all mankind. Sergius Bulgakov declares, “Tradition is not a book which records a certain moment in the development of the Church and stops itself, but a book always being written by the Church’s life. Tradition continues *always* and now not less than formerly; we live in tradition and create it. And nevertheless the sacred tradition of the past exists for us as present; it lives in our own life and consciousness ... Ecclesiastical tradition does not put the voice of the past *in the place of* the voice of the present; in it the past does not kill the present, but gives it full force.”<sup>273</sup>

Tradition must be *creative* and at the same time *conservative*. There is no contradiction between these two elements, but they are essential and are indispensable to each other. Tradition cannot be conserved unless it is continually developing, and it cannot develop unless it stands on the shoulders of the past.<sup>274</sup> *Conservation* and *development* are two facets of the same process, which we call *tradition*.

**92. What does tradition mean in the ecumenical movement of the Church?<sup>275</sup>**

As theologians today explore the ecumenical movement that strives to attain the global unity of the Church, they face this question: **What is the true tradition received by the**

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<sup>273</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans., Elizabeth S. Cram; ed., Donald A. Lowrie (New York: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1935): pp. 38, 36.

<sup>274</sup> Cf., J. P. Mackey, *Tradition and Change in the Church* (M. H. Gill & Son, 1968): p. 24.

<sup>275</sup> John Meyendorff, *Orthodoxy and Catholicity* (United States: Sheed & Ward, 1966).

**Church, whose principles can guide her life everywhere in the whole world?** If we return to the apostolic age, we find “many local church traditions” reflecting a variety of cultures. However, all these traditions are bound together by one mind, the mind of Christ; one spirit, the Spirit of the Lord; and one aim, our salvation.

For this reason, the bishops of Alexandria did not hesitate to participate with the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Jerusalem, in one service and on one altar, even if they differ in the details of their rites and traditions. For all of them received a single form of worship, in one spirit and **one Tradition**.

So did all the apostles live in one open spirit of preaching. “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor. 9:19). When St. Mark preached in Egypt, he spoke about the One Christ. The Egyptians worshiped through their culture but in true apostolic spirit, and with the same spirit of worship as other bishoprics. For instance, the **Coptic hymns** differ from the Syrian and Latin ones ... but all have the quiet and meek spirit, the spirit of the new heavenly hymn, reflecting the deepest true dogmatic and spiritual concepts and teachings.

The **Lights in the House of the Lord** are another example. All the apostolic Churches in the world use lights during worship by day and by night, especially during the reading of the Gospel. This is the spirit of tradition, which declares that “Christ is the Light of the world.” However, Egyptian art emerged in the crafting of their oil lamps —*kanadeel*— peculiar to the Coptic Church, while the Syrians, Latins, Greeks, etc., embody their own artistic traditions in the particular styles of their own lamps.

Thus, while all who are called Christians across the world share a unity of faith and preserve the true, living tradition, every local church expresses this one faith through her own language, her liturgical rites, hymns, sacred clerical vestments, etc., without losing the unity of faith. The local character of Churches does not obscure the character of the Universal Church. In other words, the differences between traditions, in detail and not in essence, do not stop the realization of the unity of the Universal Church, as long as those traditions have all been established upon the unity of faith and life.

Finally, we conclude this section with the following observations:

- a. The Orthodox Church, especially the Church of Alexandria, has more than others, preserved the holy tradition, both in its details and in its spirit. Perhaps this is because our Church has neither worldly authority nor does it interfere in politics. She lives in her spirituality far from the spirit of the world. The emergence of the monastic movement in Egypt has preserved the reverent, biblical, and ascetic spirit of the tradition of the Church.
- b. The unity that exists between the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches in our time provides a very practical case study for theologians interested in the ecumenical movement of how the concept of unity can be implemented. While these Churches

differ in some details in their local traditions, they are blessed in sharing a single Faith and a single Tradition. More than once in recent years, the whole world has witnessed the cooperation of the patriarchs, bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laymen from these Churches in one service, partaking in one offering for all.

It behooves these Churches to play an active role with their sisters, the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches, so that together, the Orthodox Church can devote all her power to evangelism across the whole world.

- c. As an Orthodox Church, we need to think seriously about what we can offer to the world through our evangelism. When a French man, for instance, accepts the Orthodox faith, it is the heart of our mission that we should offer him the opportunity for genuinely Orthodox, patristic, divine worship with one spirit, yet through the culture he finds familiar. In a speech to Orthodox Church leaders in Melbourne in June 1977, H.E. Metropolitan Gregorius, of New Delhi, India said that we must sow the seeds of Orthodoxy in Australian soil, so that an Australian Orthodox tree may grow and flourish.
- d. As the Church of Alexandria has opened up to the outside world, and millions of her faithful have emigrated to the diaspora, the Mother Church needs to re-examine her mission. She must guide and help them to present Orthodox thought to others without deviating from the spirit of tradition or rites. She must never enclose herself within an ethnic community nor make a particular language compulsory; she must bear a worldwide responsibility. This is a very delicate mission, to offer this living tradition to the world with an open heart, while at the same time avoiding deviation or negligence! This is the most important work of theologians today.



## Conclusion

The Church and Tradition are but two aspects of the life of Faith. They cannot be separated from each other, neither can we know one without the other. Through tradition, the Church comes into being, is acquainted with her Bridegroom, practices His saving work, and receives His divine mysteries. Through tradition, we come to know the *Gospel of the Church*, and we embrace it, preserve it, live by its rules, and preach it. Through tradition, we understand the sacramental life of the Church, with its liturgies, hymns, and rites. Through tradition, we meet the saints and fathers of the Church, learn of their lives in Christ Jesus and their writings, take the blessings of their prayers, and enjoy our fellowship with them in Christ Jesus. Through tradition we understand the canons of the Church and relate to its holy Councils and their works.

In brief, tradition is the nervous system of the Church, and her life. Without it, she could not exist, nor practice the apostolic life, nor her continual renewal, nor her unity, nor live her authentic character.





## Book 2

# Christian *Dogma*

1. Christian Dogma
2. (a) The Creed of Faith and the Origin of the Canons of the Church
2. (b) Regarding the Coptic Orthodox Creed
2. (c) Exposition of the Creed
3. Faith in God and Our Knowledge of Him
4. The Holy Trinity
5. The Wondrous Creator, the Guardian of the World
6. The Exalted Nature of the Human Creation
7. Divine Providence
8. Divine Grace
9. The Fall of Humanity
10. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World
11. Titles and Names of the Savior that Witness to the Works of His Love
12. The Holy Spirit and Divine Salvation



# 1

## Christian Dogma

### 93. What does the word “dogma” mean? And what is its purpose?

In the New Testament we find the Greek word “dogma” (δογμα) used to refer to the apostles’ decree, produced in the apostles’ council, guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:4). Such dogmas were intended to help the faithful walk in the ways of salvation that the Church maintains throughout history without deviation. In the Orthodox Church, dogma is founded on the Holy Bible and the holy apostolic tradition. Its cornerstone is Christ, who united the Jews (Old Testament) with the gentiles. And it reveals the work of the Holy Trinity for the salvation of humanity; how to walk in the Lord and grow in sacred knowledge, awaiting the coming of the Lord on the last day.

### 94. What are the main characteristics of Christian dogma?

**First:** Christian dogmas are not just ideas to discuss drily and argue over. Dogma provides a way of life, of walking in Christ Jesus, enjoying a taste of eternity while still being on earth. This Christian faith is experienced by the Church through practice, and interpreted by her holy councils, both local and ecumenical. Indeed, there are schools of theological thought that offer various interpretations of Christian dogma. But these must never contradict or ignore the Holy Bible or holy tradition. These interpretations or explanations are called “pious opinions” or *theologoumena*.

**Second:** Every true Christian dogma touches the depths of the soul, heart, and mind, while not neglecting the role of the body and external behavior. In this way the believer encounters divine truth since humans are composed of soul and body.

**Third:** The Church is the interpreter of divine truth and its guardian; eager for her the salvation of her children, urging them to be witnesses to the Gospel of Christ, and to present the Holy Trinity, the lover of humanity, to all people. Saint Peter says, “knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20–21).

**Fourth:** These Church dogmas are preserved by the one holy universal (catholic) and apostolic Church. The word “universal” or “catholic” means more than a mere gathering of churches from different locations—it is the Church that includes all the faithful from Adam to the second coming of our Lord. She never prefers anyone over another, as the apostle Paul says, “and [you] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:10–11).

**Fifth:** Many have sincerely desired to discover divine truth. The Lord showed them the path through a variety of revelations. For example, God sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, to guide him and preach the Gospel to him (Acts 8:35). Cornelius was a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household ... and prayed to God always” (Acts 8:2). God sent him an angel who asked him to “Now send men to Joppa and send for Simon whose surname is Peter ... He will tell you what you must do” (Acts 10:5–6).

### **95. Is believing in divine dogmas incompatible with growing in knowledge?**

The apostle Paul invites us to grow in both faith and knowledge. Living faith grows alongside knowledge and true knowledge grows alongside faith. Through faith, the believer comprehends divine revelation. The apostle Paul says, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the **faith and of the knowledge** of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12–13).

Through faith, the true believer attains knowledge of this faith, using his intellectual capabilities, which are sanctified in the Lord. He becomes acquainted with the faith, experiences it, accepts it, grows in it, and comes to know divine truth through his personal practical experiences with the Holy Trinity in the holy Church of God. Therefore, faith does not contradict one’s intellectual capabilities, even in matters whose real nature the mind cannot comprehend. The Holy Spirit who guides the Church illuminates the believer, reminding him of the Lord’s words: “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). So, we should not marvel at Saint Peter’s saying, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). When we come to know the correct dogmas of faith, understand them, and live them in our lives and worship, we close the door on heretics who wish to devour the flock.

## 2

### (a) The Creed of Faith and the Origin of the Canons of the Church

#### 96. How did the canons of the Church originate?

The eternal Word of God descended to us in the flesh that He might build us into a Church united with Him, in which He lives, and that bears His image. Thus, by making us members of His Holy Body — that is, the Church that is one with Him — we enter into His life, practice His heavenly behavior, and discover His kingdom within us. He tinged His Church with the colors of heaven and brought it into “supernatural life” through its union with Him; not as a fictional life like those found in books or preached by some of the servants of God, but as “a real experience in Christ” who came to us in our earthly reality.

For the Christian life is a life that resembles heaven, yet it is lived upon the earth. God does not invite us to live this life while He remains far from us in heaven; rather, the divine Word descended and was united with our humanity, lived on earth, was subject to its laws, and practiced the rituals of worship, while He is the eternal One who is worshiped! He has given us an earnest of eternity within the reality of time; and so we abide in the heavenly places whilst still on earth.

Thus did the Church live in the era of the Apostles, as also in the era of the early Fathers, abiding in a real heavenly spirit, bearing the imprints of the eschaton (the end times) and the present reality at the same time. She declared without ceasing her fervent longing for the eternal meeting with the Lord face to face in paradise, yet never neglected to live the holy life daily in Christ Jesus.

All of this was reflected in the life of the Church; in her worship, preaching, and behavior, for she wishes to bring the whole world into “eternity.” She liberates every soul from the bounds of time and opens every eye to behold the kingdom of God which no language can express, no laws can define, and no human system can regulate. But at the same time, she does not neglect our reality as embodied human beings who walk upon on the face of the earth. The Church delivers her faith to us through words and laws that invite us into that which is beyond words and laws.

For this reason, we ought to examine together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the laws of the apostles as recorded by the early Church. How did they begin? How did they evolve? What is their purpose?

## 97. What is the Apostles' Creed (*Symbolum Apostolicum*)?

**St. Hilary** says, “We are compelled to attempt what is unattainable, to climb where we cannot reach, to speak what we cannot utter. Instead of the bare adoration of faith, we are compelled to trust the deep things of religion to the perils of human expression.”<sup>276</sup>

The Lord Christ questioned his disciples about their faith in him, so Peter confessed that “**He is the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (Matt. 16:16). Perhaps this declaration of faith provided the main idea for the creation of a creed of faith for the Church that declares “the truth of the Lord Christ, the Savior.” Another time, the Lord gathered his disciples and gave them authority to preach, teach, and baptize, saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” (Matt. 28:19), thus providing them with a formula for a trinitarian creed related to baptism. Thus, the New Testament records for us a formula of faith in Christ and a formula of faith in the Trinity. These two formulas are the essence of the faith of the Church.

F. L. Cross says of the **Apostles' Creed**, “Though it is much later than the Apostolic age, it can so far claim to be Apostolic that **its articles one and all express the faith of apostolic times.**”<sup>277</sup>

Patrology<sup>278</sup> offers us many texts of creeds found in the writings of both Eastern and Western Fathers. Among these are creeds found in the writings of: Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, 180 A.D.; Tertullian of Carthage, 200 A.D.; Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, 250 A.D.; Novatian of Rome, 250 A.D.; Origen of Alexandria, 250 A.D.; Gregory, bishop of Neocaesarea, 270 A.D.; Lucian of Antioch, 300 A.D.; Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, 325 A.D.; Marcellus of Ancyra, 340 A.D.; Cyril of Jerusalem, 350 A.D.; Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, 374 A.D.; Rufinus of Aquileia, 390 A.D.; and the creed found in the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles.

The Eastern texts differ from those of the West in that they are generally longer and more diverse. They have a metaphysical dimension (what lies beyond physical nature) and include a number of educational expressions in response to heresies that were widespread in the East.

## 98. How did the Creed of the Church evolve?<sup>279</sup>

In the apostolic era, as the Church set out to evangelize and preach salvation to the world, it was required of the catechumens to publicly confess their faith using a brief formula before being received as members of the body of Christ; that is, immediately before their baptism.

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<sup>276</sup> Anne Fremantle (ed.), *A Treasury of Early Christianity* (Viking Press, 1953): p. 325.

<sup>277</sup> F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: G. Duckworth, 1960): p. 89. The Apostles' Creed is a different text to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed used by the Coptic Orthodox Church.

<sup>278</sup> *Patrology* — the study of the Church Fathers' lives and writings. Also known as *patristics*.

<sup>279</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): pp. 485–488; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, Ch. 12; W. K. Lowther Clarke and Charles Harris, *Liturgy and Worship* (London: SPCK, 1932).

This is what the Ethiopian eunuch did (Acts 8:37) when he declared his wish to be baptized, confessing, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” The creed of the Church thus arose as a **formula for the purpose of baptism**, confessed by those seeking baptism, declaring their acceptance of the truth, and their entry into “the life in Christ Jesus.”

**With the emergence of non-orthodox Gnosticisms that espoused dualism**, despising physical matter and distorting the reality of the divine incarnation, the creed in its primitive form was no longer sufficient. It became necessary to include confessions of the conception of the Lord Christ by the Holy Spirit, His birth from the Virgin Mary, His suffering during the reign of Pontius Pilate, His death, burial, and ascension (not — as the Gnostics held — that He was snatched up to heaven from the cross or before His crucifixion), and that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Church. This development appears clearly in the baptismal **Creed of St. Hippolytus**, in which the seeker of baptism is asked three questions and answers them:<sup>280</sup> (The seeker of baptism) descends into the water, and the baptizer puts his hand on his head, saying, “Do you believe in God, the Pantocrator?”<sup>281</sup> The one who is baptized says, “I believe.” Then he baptizes him (dipping him) once while his hand is on his head. Then he says to him, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, was crucified in the reign of Pontius Pilate, died, arose from the dead on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and sat at the right hand of the Father, who is coming again to judge the living and the dead?” And when he says, “I believe,” he baptizes him once again. Again, he says to him, “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, and the resurrection of the body?” The baptized says, “I believe,” and is then baptized the third time.

**As heresies began to spread**, the creed came to be no longer used just for those seeking baptism, but a necessary part of both liturgical and personal worship. The Ecumenical Councils began to develop the creed for defensive and educational purposes. Thus, at the Council of Nicaea, a Creed was laid down to fight Arianism.

This Creed resembles the older baptismal creed of Jerusalem, but it adds the following formula to the second section which speaks about the Lord Christ: “Light out of light, true God out of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father.” This formula was unacceptable to the Arians, and thus differentiated them from the faithful. Thus, the Council of Nicaea gave the Church a simplified theological formula that declares the faith of the Church; which Christians confess, sing, and pray; and not just a formula for those seeking Baptism.

The Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, in 381 A.D., was convened to address the beliefs of Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, but not of the Lord Christ. This Council added the following formula

<sup>280</sup> E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003): p. 5.

<sup>281</sup> I.e., the Almighty, the Ruler of All.

referring to the Holy Spirit to the Creed of Nicaea: “The Lord, the life giver, who proceeds from the Father, who, with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets ...” Thus, the Creed came to be a summary of the Orthodox faith rather than a confession repeated by those seeking baptism.



## 2

**(b) Regarding the Coptic Orthodox Creed****99. What does the Church mean by “the Creed”?**

Every institution in the world — whether educational, social, industrial, or commercial — is required to formulate its foundational charter, setting out its purpose, organization, capabilities, and its mission and intended impact upon society. The Church of God is the Body of Christ, whose founder is God Himself, who is “not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33). From the believers, He fashions the Body for Christ, as the apostle says, “You are the body of Christ and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27). The purpose of the Church is for God to work within her, and by her, to fulfil His will, for “He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). The capability of the Church is the divine grace which works in those faithful who labor with holy zeal, as the apostle Paul says, “I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

**100. What is the purpose of the Creed?**

In the liturgy the whole congregation, together with the clergy, pray the Creed aloud. This is one way the Creed helps us to fulfil the following purposes in us:

- a. Affirmation that God is One, as opposed to polytheistic paganism.
- b. Faith in the Holy Trinity, which works to build up the Kingdom of God within every sincere person who yearns to find eternity and become one with the divine.
- c. Awareness of God’s love for us, and of the possibilities that He provides for us to work for His kingdom.
- d. Sanctification of the human mind together with all its faculties, gifts, abilities, and powers; and its elevation to cooperate with the incomparable grace of God.
- e. Protection of our faith from deviations and heresies.
- f. Dissemination of the spirit of hope to us and to those who work with us, and to those around us.
- g. Revelation of the purpose of our life on earth, as we journey towards eternal life.
- h. Awareness of God’s plan for our life and for all humanity.

### 101. What did our Fathers of the Middle Ages transmit to us?

The libraries of Europe overflow with medieval manuscripts from Egypt, in both the Coptic and Arabic languages, that reveal the theological richness of the Coptic Church of the Middle Ages. This motivates me to present a sample of their writings about the Creed.

**Abu Al-Majd ibn Yu'annis**, a priest from Manyat Bani Khusib (now called Minya), who died in 1357 A.D., has an exposition of the Creed in about fifty large manuscript pages attributed to him. He wrote this at the request of Anba Gabriel, the bishop of Qus, in reply to a Jewish person who criticized the Creed saying, “Where did you get this text? And why have you inscribed it among the books of the church?” Thus, the book contains a collection of texts from the Old Testament to substantiate each of the Creed’s clauses.

This work differs in its aims from other medieval Coptic expositions of the Creed: those of **Severus ibn al-Muqaffa** (around 940 A.D.); and a commentary at the beginning of the second chapter of **Abu al-Barakat ibn Kabar’s** work titled *Miṣbâḥ al-zulma wa-îḏâḥ al-khidma* (*The Lamp in the Shadows and the Illumination of Service*, about 1310 A.D.). Abu al-Barakat quotes mostly from the New Testament. The Rev. Dr. Samir Khalil says that “the three Coptic commentaries complement each other in a felicitous manner.”<sup>282</sup>

A summary of the text of **Abu Al-Majd ibn Yu'annis’** exposition:<sup>283</sup>

1. **We believe in one God:** he cites the Torah (2 quotations), Isaiah (2 quotations), Jeremiah, and the Gospel (2 quotations; these are the only quotations from the New Testament).
2. **The Father almighty, [Pantocrator] of all things visible and invisible:** quotations from Zechariah (2), Nahum, and the books of Kings.
3. **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten, born of the Father before all ages:** quotations from Isaiah (2), David, Solomon (2), and Micah.
4. **Light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made:** quotations from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and David.
5. **For us, he came down from heaven:** quotations from David, Isaiah (3), Esdras (Ezra), Jeremiah, David (2), an unnamed prophet, and Isaiah.
6. **He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary:** quotations from Isaiah (2), Ezekiel (2), Nahum, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Daniel, and Isaiah (2).

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<sup>282</sup> Samir Khalil, “Abu Al-Majd Ibn Yu’Annīs” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, Atiya, Aziz Suryal, ed. (Macmillan, 1991), 21–23: p. 21.

<sup>283</sup> See Samir Khalil, “Abu Al-Majd Ibn Yu’Annīs” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, Atiya, Aziz Suryal, ed. (Macmillan, 1991), 21–23: pp. 21–22.

7. **He suffered, was crucified, and was placed in the tomb:** quotations from Isaiah (4), Amos, Jonah, Zechariah (4), Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Job, Esdras (Ezra) the priest, and David (3).
8. **He rose from the dead on the third day:** quotations from David (3), Isaiah (4), and Esdras (Ezra) the priest.
9. **He ascended into heaven and sits at the right of the Father in the heights:** quotations from David (3), Zechariah, and Daniel.
10. **He will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead:** quotations from Isaiah (4), Solomon, David (2), Malachi, and Jeremiah.
11. **We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who spoke in the Prophets:** quotations from Isaiah (2), Joel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
12. **And the confession of one baptism for the forgiveness of sins:** quotations from Isaiah and Ezekiel.
13. **We hope (look) for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come:** quotations from Isaiah (2), Ezekiel (very long), and Malachi.

## 102. What is the connection between the Creed and the Lord's Prayer?

We can see a common denominator in the worship of the Coptic Church: the recital of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed in all our liturgies, including those of baptism, eucharist, engagement, matrimony, and funeral prayers, as well in private prayers, such as the Canonical Hours (Agpeya). So what is the connection between them?

In all our communal and private prayers, we are concerned with preparing ourselves for the second coming of our Lord Christ and accompanying Him to heaven, being His joyous bride united with her heavenly Groom. Through the Lord's Prayer, we lift our hearts to the heavenly Father in the spirit of joy through that prayer which the Groom Himself taught us, the only-begotten Son incarnate; for it is truly where the joy of the Holy Trinity abides, when offered from the heart with a heavenly mind and unfeigned, undeviating faith. This is also the role of the Creed when we recite it in a spirit of prayer. The aim of both the Lord's Prayer and the Creed is to help us become **the bride whose heart is always lifted up in prayer, holding fast to her unfeigned, undeviating faith.** This mindset which never leaves us — whether at church or at home or even at work or among friends — can be attained by the child, the youth ... and all the way into old age. As the apostle says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

### **103. What does the Creed contribute to our interior richness?**

In the early Church, Jews and Gentiles who wished to join the Church were required to attend a course of study designed to prepare them for baptism. These courses were not purely about imparting information; they delved into the meaning of faith, the Lord's Prayer, walking in Christ Jesus, etc., to bring them to appreciate the richness they would enjoy through baptism and communion with the Holy Trinity.

All the people of the household would be baptized together, as in the case of the jail guard of Philippi (Acts 16:31–34). Why was it that the whole household was baptized together with the one who first believed? As guardian of his children, it is the believer's role to lead them, as a father, to the richness they received through baptism as children. His main task is to explain practically the words of the Lord Christ to His disciples: "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Sadly, some believers focus on raising their children by judging their wrong actions, rather than revealing the love of the Holy Trinity to them and His work within them.

I recall during my service in Los Angeles, a lady who was in financial difficulty visited me early one morning and she was exceedingly joyful. When I inquired about the reason for her joy, her reply was that her young son had come to her earlier that morning, woke her, and said to her, "I am the richest person in the world." She was very surprised and thought that he must have had a dream in which he became very rich. She asked him, "Why do you say that?" He answered, "I am the richest person because you are my mother!" She could hardly believe it. She rejoiced and came to share her son's words with me.

I felt that what this child said ought to be the feeling of every believer; to feel like the richest person on the face of the earth, because he became the child of God, and His holy temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in him (1 Cor. 3:16). I do not mean, here, that we should not counsel our children about their errors, but that we should begin to deal with our children from their infancy by training their eyes to see the richness they have in their inner depths.

I consider it fitting that our study of the Creed should focus on the richness that we enjoy deep within ourselves, through the work of the Holy Trinity. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, "For all things are yours ... And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21, 23). So, we here on earth delight in the earnest of our eternal inheritance. It is the secret of our richness and happiness.

**St. Cyril the Great** says, "Those who out of ignorance have belittled possession of the true faith, and then exalt their way of life with virtuousness, somehow are like to men who have goodly features of face but the glance of their eyes is irregular and distorted. Proper to them is the saying of God through the voice of Jeremiah to the mother of the Jews, I mean Jerusalem, 'Behold, your eyes are not true and your heart is not fair' (Jer. 22:17). Accordingly it is necessary that, before other things, you have a sound mind within yourselves and that you be mindful of Holy Scripture addressing you and saying, 'Let your eyes look straight

ahead' (Prov. 4:25 LXX) ... for to slip away from the rightness of holy doctrines would be nothing else except to sleep in death."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter 55.3* (FOTC 77:16).



## 2

**(c) Exposition of the Creed****104. What is the extent of the connection between the Creed, preparation for baptism, and preservation of the Orthodox faith?**

Many of the Fathers of the Church concerned themselves with explaining the Creed or parts thereof, especially those who were responsible for preparing people for baptism, but also those who responded to various heresies, such as **St. Cyril the Great**, **St. Cyril the Bishop of Jerusalem**, and **St. Augustine**.

According to the **Constitutions (Laws) of the Holy Apostles**, “Let him, therefore, who is to be taught the truth in regard to piety be instructed before his baptism in the knowledge of the unbegotten God, in the understanding of His only begotten Son, in the assured acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit. Let him learn the order of the several parts of the creation, the series of providence, the different dispensations of Your laws. Let him be instructed why the world was made, and why man was appointed to be a citizen therein; let him also know his own nature, of what sort it is; let him be taught how God punished the wicked ... and did glorify the saints in every generation—I mean Seth, and Enos, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham and his posterity, and Melchizedek [etc.] ... let him instruct him in the doctrines concerning our Lord’s incarnation, and in those concerning His passion, and resurrection from the dead, and ascension ... let him learn what concerns the renunciation of the devil, and the joining himself with Christ.”<sup>285</sup>

The importance of the Church’s responsibility to transmit the Creed is evident in that bishops undertook to deliver this teaching themselves, personally. Thus, Bishop Ambrose wrote to his sister Marcellina: “The day after, which was Sunday, after the lessons and the sermon, when the Catechumens were dismissed, I was teaching the creed to certain candidates in the baptistry of the basilica.”<sup>286</sup>

Similarly, **Augustine the bishop** begins his homily on “The Creed” saying, “Receive my sons, the rule of faith which is called the Creed. When you have received it, write it on your hearts; recite it daily to yourselves. Before you go to sleep, before you go forth, fortify yourselves with your Creed. No one writes the Creed so that it can be read; let your memory be your codex that you may be able to review it if it should happen that forgetfulness effaces what diligence has given you.”<sup>287</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “But in learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to you by the Church, and which has been built up

<sup>285</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7.3.39–40 (ANF 7:475–476), amended.

<sup>286</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letter* 20.4 (NPNF II/10:423).

<sup>287</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Creed* 1.1 (FOTC 27:289).

strongly out of all the Scriptures ... not writing it out on paper, but engraving it by the memory upon your heart ... I wish you also to keep this as a provision through the whole course of your life.”<sup>288</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “Our custom is, for the space of forty days, to deliver public lectures to those who are to be baptized.”<sup>289</sup>

To confess the faith is to enter into a divine pact or to seal a covenant with God, recorded in the book of heaven. Theodore of Mopsuestia says, “They confess and they renounce – the two in one, without doubting – [making] a renunciation of the Evil One, and a confession of the heart in the name of the Divinity. By the hand of the priesthood they make a covenant with the Divinity, that they will not again return to Satan by their doings. They give to the priest a promise by the words of their minds; and he brings in, reads [it] before the good pleasure of God. The chart which is the door of the royal house he holds in his hands; and from the palace he has [received] authority to inscribe [the names of] men.”<sup>290</sup> He also says, “By confessing the faith, you attach your soul to God through the Bishop and establish a covenant, pledging to persist in loving the Divine nature.”<sup>291</sup>

## 105. What are the articles of the present Creed?

We can divide the Creed into fourteen articles:

In truth, we believe in **One God**,

**God the Father**, the Pantocrator, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in **One Lord, Jesus Christ**, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten not created; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made.

Who for us men and our salvation, **came down from heaven, was incarnate** of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary,

And became man. And He **was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate**,

**Suffered and was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead** according to the Scriptures.

**Ascended into the heavens**; He sits at the right hand of His Father,

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<sup>288</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.12 (NPNF II/7:32), amended.

<sup>289</sup> St. Jerome, *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem* 13 (NPNF II/6:431).

<sup>290</sup> E. C. Whitaker and Johnson, M. E. *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003): p. 48.

<sup>291</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 13.1.



And **He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead**, whose kingdom shall have no end.

Yes, **we believe in the Holy Spirit**, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

**And in one holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic Church.**

**We confess one baptism, for the remission of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,**

**And the life of the age to come.**

**Amen.**

### **The First Article: “In truth, we believe in One God.”**

#### **106. Why do we begin the Creed by saying, “we believe”?**

- a. We need to be aware that when we recite the Creed, **faith is more than just abstract feelings; it is to enjoy knowledge in our practical life**. A believer ought not to be content with merely human knowledge, unaware of the role of divine grace in sanctifying the mind and working in the life of the faithful, that he might experience that which is above all human thought. Thus, he experiences the life of the exultant and wise Church.
- b. By saying “**we believe**” in the plural, whether during the liturgy or in one’s private chamber, the believer should be aware that **the Creed is not an invention of the person who is praying**, but represents his acceptance of the faith of the Church. The secret of growing in faith lies in his being a living member of the universal Church of God.
- c. We say, “we believe” rather than “**we know**,” for faith precedes knowledge. Faith necessarily touches our lives, whereas theoretical or abstract knowledge is limited to matters that do not touch our lives. Faith imbues our lives with meaning, happiness, patience, and perseverance; while at the same time, it reveals our commitment and our practical interaction with the One in whom we have faith. We believe in God not just through theoretical philosophical discussions, but through a life of love shared between us and our Creator, and with all humanity. Our faith urges us to encounter and interact with our Creator who is not derived from any existing thing, for He eternal. We trust in Him for He is eternal; not like the human being who has a beginning and an end to his life on earth.

### 107. Why do we begin by affirming faith in One God?

This protects the faithful from straying into idolatry. St. Cyril the Great says, “Therefore for the destruction of the error of polytheism they name one God following in every way the Holy Scriptures and showing the beauty of the truth to all men throughout the whole world under the sun. The all-wise Moses did this also saying most clearly, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord your God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4; see also Ex. 20:3; Isa. 44:6).”<sup>292</sup>

### 108. What does “we believe in One God” mean?

This means that we interact with God who is everywhere present, and with His attributes, and so walk in the Lord. The apostle James distinguishes the faith of the godly person from the faith of the devil when he says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19–20). So also the apostle Paul speaks of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** says, “there is one God, the Almighty, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word (Logos), not spoken, but essential. For He is not the voice of an articulate utterance, but a substance begotten by divine power.”<sup>293</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** speaks of the One God, not distant from us in heaven, as some think, but working in His beloved creation, saying, “God dwells by His power within His creation and He animates it to exist independently. He dwells above the heights, beneath the depths, within the world and outside it, on every side. Like the soul that dwells within all the members, in the head and in the feet, and in all the senses, while remaining what it is ... there is no place in the body where the soul is not. Through the soul, the eye can see, the hands touch, the mouth speaks, the nose smells, and the ear hears. Without the soul there are no senses, and no member can move without it. In the same way, all creation exists from God, is revealed through Him, and completely rests in Him. Through Him the heights tremble and the depths are bound, as are the regions, the territories, and their inhabitants. Through Him, the ruling lights shine; the sun rises, the moon changes, and the Pleiades and the planets travel in their courses.”

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “unto the lovers of spiritual gifts with rich and readiest hand He distributes blessings.”<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter 55:11* (FOTC 77:19).

<sup>293</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians 8* (ANF 1:62).

<sup>294</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Volume 2 9.1 on John 14:15 (LFHCC 48:298; cf. PG 73:278).

**The Second Article: “God the Father, the Pantocrator (Almighty), Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things seen and unseen.”**

**First: God the Father**

**109. How does the Father’s fatherhood to the Son differ from His fatherhood to the faithful?**

Our Lord Jesus was accustomed to addressing the Father as “My Father” (John 8:19 and elsewhere) and He invites the faithful to share with Him in this relationship. Thus do we say in the Lord’s prayer: “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9). But the sonship of the Only Begotten Son is unique: since He is one in essence with the Father, His sonship is by His nature and eternal. As for the sonship of the faithful to the Father, it is a gift given to them through divine grace: we acquired the right to this relationship when we became members of the body of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Lord Christ distinguishes between His sonship and ours by saying, “My Father and your Father” (John 20:17), rather than “Our Father.”

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says that we use the titles of the two Hypostases, the Father and the Son, but without thinking that they refer to any material concepts or ideas in our minds. Here, fatherhood and sonship denote a unique relationship of love that cannot be conceived. The Father is the origin, and the Son is born of His essence. **St. Athanasius** says, “let every corporeal reference be banished on this subject.”<sup>295</sup>

The One God is love without any physical desires or gender. The Greek and Roman gods fall into desires, are identified as male and female, and struggle and fight among themselves.

The word “Father” refers to a relationship that originates before all ages. This is what it means to say that the Son is co-eternal with the Father. Without a son, there is no father, and without a father there is no son. The scholar **Tertullian** says, “Now a Father makes a Son, and a Son makes a Father.”<sup>296</sup> When we confess that God is the Father eternally, we see in our minds that the Son is also truly eternal.

**St. Augustine** says, “We had a father and mother on earth, that we might be born to labours and to death: but we have found other parents, God our Father, and the Church our Mother, by whom we are born unto life eternal. Let us then consider, beloved, whose children we have begun to be; and let us live so as becomes those who have such a Father ... We have found then a Father in heaven; let us take good heed how we live on earth. For he who has found such a Father, ought so to live that he may be worthy to come to his inheritance.”<sup>297</sup>

<sup>295</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 24, (NPNF II/4:166).

<sup>296</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 10, (ANF 3:604).

<sup>297</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Volume I, trans. R. G. Macmullen, (Oxford University Press, 1844) 7(57) and 8(58) 2: pp. 82, 90, amended.

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “And they also call him Father almighty in order that there may be brought in with the Father the manifestation of the Son, through whom he is the Father, subsisting with him and always coexisting.”<sup>298</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Perfect Father, He begat a perfect Son, and delivered all things to Him who is begotten: (for ‘all things,’ He says, ‘have been delivered to Me by My Father’ (Matt. 11:27)) and is honoured by the Only-begotten: for, ‘I honour My Father’ (John 8:49), says the Son; and again, ‘just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love’ (John 15:10). Therefore we also say like the Apostle, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort’ (2 Cor. 1:3): and, ‘For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named’ (Eph. 3:14–15): glorifying Him with the Only-begotten: for ‘he who denies the Father, denies the Son also’ (see 1 John 2:22): and again, ‘he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also’ (1 John 2:23); knowing ‘that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Phil. 2:11).”<sup>299</sup>

It is fitting for us to cherish the title of the Father, for He is delighted when we call Him “Our Father.” For through baptism, we became children of God and of the Church. We rejoice continually in our acceptance of becoming the children of God and in embracing this. Thus, the apostle affirms: “And now little children abide in Him ... if you know that He is righteous, you know that **everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him**” (1 John 2:28–29). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning ... **Whoever has been born of God does not sin**, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:1–10).

#### **110. Why do we call God called the Almighty (Pantocrator)? What does the word Pantocrator or Almighty mean?**

This term refers to God’s power to manage all life and to fulfill His will in it. The One God is the source of the power of all creation, whether heavenly or earthly. His authority guarantees human free will and does not threaten it. His authority is in harmony with His love, all-powerful in accompanying humanity and sanctifying the faithful, even when He was in the tomb amongst the dead. We can never compare His power with that of any other being, or else He would merely be a pagan God.

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<sup>298</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter 55:12* (FOTC 77:20).

<sup>299</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures 7.5*, (NPNF II/7:45) amended.

We cherish our Father the Almighty and we are hidden in Him; so we do not fear any powers of darkness, nor does sin find for itself any place in us, nor can death deprive us of the eternal inheritance.

### 111. Why do we cherish God as the Creator of all things?

Since we proclaim through the Creed that God is our Creator, we ought to hold fast to Him and so live according to His holy will, as we journey on our way to His divine embrace. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “For the difference of creator and creature, of unbegotten [that is, without beginning] and begotten [that which has a beginning], of a nature under the yoke and slavery and a nature bedecked with the dignities of the master and possessing divine and supramundane glory is inestimable.”<sup>300</sup> God may be known through His works.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Let us glorify the supreme Artificer for all that was wisely and skillfully made; by the beauty of visible things let us raise ourselves to Him who is above all beauty; by the grandeur of bodies, sensible and limited in their nature, let us conceive of the infinite Being whose immensity and omnipotence surpass all the efforts of the imagination.”<sup>301</sup>

### 112. Why did the Church employ the term “Creator of heaven and earth”?

The all-powerful and the all-good God, who created heaven and earth and all that is in them, is good. The Gnostics were incapable of comprehending that everything created by God is good. Thus, they considered the body, matter, sex, marriage, and having children as the creations of an evil god, or of a god inferior to the sublime God; and that salvation is only achieved through escaping the material world by secret wisdom. This is why the Church was impelled to include this article in the Creed; so that the faithful might see all the creation as good. This is clearly apparent in the Evangelist’s words: “All things were made through Him” (John 1:3). The Gnostics ask: why is there much evil in the world? And their reply is: it is the work of an evil god! Thus, the Gnostics see the world as a demonic prison, and in their view, the whole physical world is evil, including the human body, and they seek to be saved from it.

Instead of considering the origin of evil to be the unsanctified evil will, they seek to destroy all that is material, for it is evil. They fail to understand that darkness is the absence of light and that evil is the fruit of the will that deviates from the straight path to misuse material things. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “But if, when the light shines very brightly in a clear sky, a man of his own accord shuts his eyelids to shade his sight, the sun is clear of blame on the part of him who does not see.”<sup>302</sup>

<sup>300</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter 55*:13 (FOTC 77:20).

<sup>301</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron 1*:11 (NPNF II/8:58).

<sup>302</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism 7* (NPNF II/5:480) amended.

If a man strikes another with a lit lamp, neither the lamp nor the power of the striker's hands are evil. The evil resides in the will of the man who misused both the lamp and the abilities of his hands, which are gifts from God. The abundance of evil in the world is not a shortcoming in the good Creator but arises from the deviation of humans and their need of healing. That is the difference between Christianity and Gnosticism.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “But some one will say, If the Divine substance is incomprehensible, why then do you speak of these things? So then, because I cannot drink up all the river, am I not even to take in moderation what is expedient for me? Because with eyes so constituted as mine I cannot take in all the sun, am I not even to look upon him enough to satisfy my wants? Or again, because I have entered into a great garden, and cannot eat all the supply of fruits, would you have me go away altogether hungry? I praise and glorify Him that made us; for it is a divine command which says, ‘Let every breath praise the Lord’ (Ps. 150:6). I am attempting now to glorify the Lord, but not to describe Him, knowing nevertheless that I shall fall short of glorifying Him worthily, yet deeming it a work of piety even to attempt it at all. For the Lord Jesus encourages my weakness, by saying, ‘No one has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18).”<sup>303</sup>

**The Third Article: “We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten not created; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made.”**

**Second: God the Son**

### **113. Why do we believe in our Lord Jesus?**

**First:** Faith in Christ Jesus may be considered the center of the Christian faith. Evangelism begins by talking about the Lord Jesus (*Kyrios Iesous*), for St. Paul says, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus” (Rom. 10:9). He also says, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

Thomas proclaimed his faith, after he had asked to see Him after the resurrection and touch His wounds with his own hands, when he said, “My Lord and My God” (John 20:28). And at the end of the Revelation of John the beloved, the seer proclaims the Church's longing for the second coming of our Lord Jesus, saying, “Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

**Second:** This faith impels us into a sincerely loyal personal relationship with Him. Faith chiefly revolves around the sense that all my being — spiritual, psychological, and physical — delights in the divine Savior, our Lord Jesus. This personal faith lifts me to a life shared

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<sup>303</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 6.5 (NPNF II/7:34) amended.

with the heavenly beings and the saints, as the apostle says, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth [hence, the heavenly beings, humans, and even the devils bow to Him in fear and humility], and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11).

**Third:** Loyalty to our Lord Jesus opens the gates to all the faithful to delight in the true spirit of fellowship, for there is neither a Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free (Gal. 3:28).

The apostle Paul restored the runaway slave, Onesimus, to his master Philemon, saying, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave — a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philem. 15–16).

The **School of Alexandria** began as a school for catechumens,<sup>304</sup> including those seeking baptism from among both gentiles and Jews. Here they learned the Christian faith, engaging in a program of study to prepare them to receive the sacrament of baptism. The School opened its doors to all, enrolling people of different religions, cultures, social classes, and ages; “So, Christian education began as uniform and universal, **without discrimination between classes or conditions, slaves or masters,**”<sup>305</sup> and this at a time when slaves were cheap, a commodity to be bought and sold!

The writings of the apostolic Fathers<sup>306</sup> testify to the deep concern of the Church from the earliest times for captives, those forced to work in the mines, and for those in prison. Thus, some of the ancient liturgies contain prayers devoted for their sakes. St. Justin<sup>307</sup> mentions five kinds of offerings gathered after the liturgy, one of which was to help **those in captivity**. Aristides<sup>308</sup> counts among the virtues of Christians that they deal with slaves as brothers and sisters, and that they work together to liberate those who are imprisoned for the sake of Christ. The scholar Tertullian<sup>309</sup> mentions a monthly donation, some of which was distributed to meet the needs of aged slaves, those in the mines, or exile, or in prison for the faith. The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* mention the same matter.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>304</sup> The word “catechumen” comes from the Greek word *katekhomenos*, one being instructed; which in turn stems from the word *katekhein*, to teach orally. In the Church context, a catechumen is one who is preparing to be baptised.

<sup>305</sup> Fr. Makary el-Souriany, *Ancient and Contemporary Christian Education in the Coptic Church of Egypt*, (MRE Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1955): 3.1, p. 77.

<sup>306</sup> See St. Ignatius of Antioch’s *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 6:2 (ANF 1:89) and *Epistle to Polycarp* 4:3 (ANF 1:95, 99); and *The Pastor of Hermas* 2.8 (ANF 2:25).

<sup>307</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 (ANF 1:186).

<sup>308</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15 (ANF 10:277).

<sup>309</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46).

<sup>310</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 4.1.9 (ANF 7:435).

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** wrote many treatises on the liberation of slaves, arguing not from the human right to freedom, but from the duty of all humanity to obey one Master, one Lord who enslaves no one, but calls all to freedom.<sup>311</sup> And in his homily on the feast of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, he urges masters to free their slaves, as Christ’s resurrection set us free from the slavery of sin: “Now is the prisoner freed, the debtor forgiven, the slave liberated by the good and kindly proclamation of the church ... You masters have heard; mark my saying as a sound one; do not slander me to your slaves as praising the day with false rhetoric, take away the pain from oppressed souls as the Lord does the deadness from bodies, transform their disgrace into honour, their oppression into joy, their fear of speaking into openness; bring out the prostrate from their corner as if from their graves, let the beauty of the feast blossom like a flower upon everyone.”<sup>312</sup>

It is befitting for all humanity to be loyal to Jesus Christ who granted us to be children of the Father through the work of His Holy Spirit in baptism. By this, slavery was abolished; not through a revolt against masters, but through the opening of the gates of faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ.

#### **114. What does the title “the Lord Christ” mean to us?**

His name was **Jesus**; the word “Jesus” in Hebrew means, “God saves.” The Archangel Gabriel gave this name to St. Mary: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.” (Luke 1:31). The angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:20–21).

This name expresses **His person and His mission**. Regarding His person, He created Adam in His image, according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26). But Adam lost this likeness and his nature was corrupted by his sin, for he disobeyed the command. There is no one in heaven or on earth who is able to forgive sins except God. There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12, 9:14; James 2:7). Thus, Jesus, who is God, is the one who saves; through His incarnation He became a human being who gathers the faithful into Himself and grants them forgiveness (John 3:18; Acts 2:21; 5:31; Rom. 10:6–13).

He was also called the **Christ** or the **Messiah**, meaning, “the anointed one.”

In the Old Testament, there were three categories that were considered “the Lord’s anointed”: kings; priests; and sometimes prophets. The anointed king from the tribe of Judah

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa: *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes 335:11: pp. 73–74.

<sup>312</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Sanctum Pascha, in The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, eds., Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock, Patristic Monograph Series 9 (Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981): pp. 8–9.



was not permitted to perform the role of the priest, since he was not a descendant of Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi. And once a king was anointed, no other person could become king, unless the king became corrupt and was rejected by God, as was the case with King Saul (1 Sam. 16:1).

As for Christ the Lord, He is the King of kings (Rev. 17:14) who makes the faithful to be kings and priests of God His Father (Rev. 1:6, 5:10). He Himself is the heavenly High Priest (Heb. 7:26) who alone is without sin, who does not need to offer sacrifices for Himself as Aaron did (Heb. 5:3). At the same time, He reveals the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom to the faithful and grants to them to experience an earnest of heaven. This divine heavenly King came not to be served but to serve and to give Himself as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). His service is manifest when those who believe in Him receive the life of communion with Him by His Holy Spirit, and so come to bear His resemblance. He was anointed to proclaim His kingdom on the cross (Acts 2:36). In this proclamation, the right hand thief delighted, and witnessed of Him: “Remember me O Lord when You come in Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “For He is called a **Door** (John 10:7, 9); but do not take the name literally for a thing of wood, but a spiritual, a living Door, discriminating those who enter in. He is called a **Way** (John 14:6), not one trodden by feet, but leading to the Father in heaven; He is called a **Sheep** (John 1:29; Isa. 53:7–8; Acts 8:32), not an irrational one, but the one which through its precious blood cleanses the world from its sins, which is led before the shearers, and knows when to be silent. This Sheep again is called a **Shepherd**, who says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd’ (John 10:11): a Sheep because of His manhood, a Shepherd because of the loving-kindness of His Godhead. And do you know that there are rational sheep? The Saviour says to the Apostles, ‘Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves’ (Matt. 10:10, 16).

“Again, He is called a **Lion** (Gen. 49:9; Rev. 5:5), not as a devourer of men, but indicating as it were by the title His kingly, and steadfast, and confident nature: a Lion He is also called in opposition to the lion our adversary, who roars and devours those who have been deceived (1 Pet. 5:8). For the Saviour came, not as having changed the gentleness of His own nature, but as the strong ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (see Rev. 5:5), saving them that believe, but treading down the adversary. He is called a **Stone**, not a lifeless stone, cut out by men’s hands, but a ‘chief corner-stone’ (Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:4–6), on which ‘he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’”<sup>313</sup>

### 115. Why does the Creed proclaim that He is the Only Begotten Son of God?

The heavenly Father witnessed of Him during His baptism and transfiguration. Of His baptism, the Gospel of Matthew says, “and behold, the heavens were opened to Him ... and

<sup>313</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 10.3 (NPNF II/7:57–58) amended.

suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘this is **My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matt. 3:16–17). And of His transfiguration on Mount Tabor, it was also said: “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’” (Matt. 17:5).

When He asked His disciples: “‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’” (Matt. 16:15–17). Christ the Lord distinguished between His eternal sonship to the Father by nature on the one hand, and our being the children of God through grace on the other (Matt. 5:48); for He says, “My Father and your Father” (John 20:17). And after His resurrection and ascension, St. John the Beloved says, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Yet when they spoke of the Son, in order that they may not seem to attribute an ordinary name to him, one which perhaps could be assigned even to us ourselves, for we are also called sons (Gal. 4:6), they very prudently affix those names ... they say that he was begotten not created, knowing him to be in essence untouched by creation by not being created, but rather affirming confidently that he was begotten of the essence of God the Father independently of time and incomprehensibly for ‘in the beginning was the Word’ (John 1:1) ... The incorporeal will not beget according to the body, but rather in this way, namely, as light of light ... Thus we say the Son is in the Father, and the Father in the Son (John 14:9–10) ... Accordingly he is consubstantial with the Father ... so that the begetting might be incorporeal and simple and have the concept of being from him and in him and that each subsists in his own person, for the Father is the Father and not the Son, and the Son is the one begotten and not the Father.”<sup>314</sup>

### **116. Why do we recite our faith that He is the one “by whom all things were made” (i.e., He is the Creator)?**

God the Father created all things by His Son, who is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), His eternal Word (John 1:1–3). Above, we spoke of the Father as the Creator, and here we speak of the Son “by whom all things were made.” John the evangelist says, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3).

The phrase, “by whom” means “by His agency,” “through Him,” and “in Him.” He created and continually administers His creation, cares for it, and preserves it. The apostle Paul puts it this way: “For by Him all things were created ... all things were created through Him and for Him ... and in Him all things consist” (Col. 1:16–17). And “upholding all things

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<sup>314</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter* 55:14–16 (FOTC 77:20–21).

by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3), “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). St. John Chrysostom points out that the evangelist focuses on the unity of the Word and the Father in the act of creation between, revealing the divinity of the Word and His equality with the Father. He says, “**without Him nothing was made that was made**” (John 1:3), affirming the fundamental role of the Word in creation. Without Him neither the act of creation nor its continual existence are possible.

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.’ We believe that all things were created through the Son. We cannot count Him as one among the rest of the creation. He is utterly different; for He is not part of created nature, rather, we confess that He alone is by nature the true God.” He also says, “He did not receive power from another in order to create, for He is the power of God the Father, the only Son, who works all things with the Father and the Holy Spirit. For all things are from the Father by the Son; for if the Son created apart from the Father, the Son could not have said, ‘I am in the Father and the Father in Me’ (John 14:10).”

**The Fourth Article: “Who for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary.”**

#### **117. How can we say “came down from heaven” when He is present everywhere?**

Truly, He is present everywhere; He is always in heaven and on earth. Although He is not visible on earth, He appeared upon it when He was incarnate, which is why we say, “came down from heaven.” The Master Himself says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13).

#### **118. Did He leave heaven?**

The Creed first presents to us the oneness of God, lest we fall into polytheism. Our faith is in the one almighty God, the Pantocrator. Then, the Creed presents the Hypostasis of the Father as being the Father of the only-begotten Son before all ages; one in essence with Him, granting us to be His children through divine grace. Now, the Creed proclaims to us the **descent of the Son for our sake**. The psalm says of Him, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent” (Ps. 50:3; Ps. 49:3 LXX).

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “It is usual in the Holy Scriptures to clarify what is above thought by words suited to us. And therefore he said when conversing with the holy disciples, ‘I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father’ (John 16:28), and again, ‘You are from below, I am from above’ (John 8:23) ... Although being in the highest heights and according to substance above all with his own Father seeing that he is crowned in identity of nature with him ‘he did not consider being

equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and being made like unto men. And being found in form as a man he humbled himself' (Phil. 2:6–8). For when the Word being God put on our flesh, even so he remained God ... For he was God, as I said, in a form like unto us, and not having taken inanimate flesh, as it seems good to some of the heretics to think, but rather flesh animated with a rational soul ... [He] endured birth according to the flesh from a woman, and came forth in our form, for this is being made man ... being in the weakness of the flesh the Lord of power, and in the measure of his humanity having as his own that which is above all creation. For, what he was before the flesh, he has, being incapable of losing it, for he was God, true Son, the only begotten, light, life, and power. But what he was not, these he is seen to have taken in addition through the Incarnation ... And thus John wisely says, 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1:14) And he became flesh not because he turned into the nature of the flesh according to a transition, or a change, or an alteration, nor because he underwent a confusion, or a blending, or the fusion of essences being babbled about by some, for that is impossible since he is by nature unchangeable and is unalterable."<sup>315</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, "Therefore also Christ says, 'I **came** out from the Father, and am come' (John 16:28.) But when I say that He left the Father, do not imagine such a thing as happens among men, a change of place; for just in the same way as the word 'go forth' is used, not because He literally came forth, but because of His incarnation."<sup>316</sup>

**St. Hilary, the bishop of Poitiers** says, "He says '**I came forth from God**' (John 16:27) in order that no one might believe that there is any other nature in Him except that arising from His birth, for what else can it be but God? And He declares: '**I came forth from the Father and have come into the world**' (John 16:28) ... the [second] refers to the plan of salvation, the [first] to [His divine] nature."<sup>317</sup>

### **119. Why do we say, "Who for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven"?**

He did not descend for the sake of any particular group of people, but for the whole human race; to save us from sin, and from the curse that fell upon us through sin, and from death. St. John says, "Sin is lawlessness, and you know that He was manifested to take away our sin, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:4–5).

### **120. What does the Holy Bible say about the incarnation of the Son of God, of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary?**

When the Virgin was astonished by the annunciation of the archangel Gabriel, she asked him: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her,

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<sup>315</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter* 55:20–22 (FOTC 77:22–24).

<sup>316</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF I/13:147).

<sup>317</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 6.31 (FOTC 25:201) amended.

‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” (Luke 1:34–35).

### **121. What does the phrase “was incarnate and became man” mean?**

The Son of God took for Himself a body from the womb of the Virgin, St. Mary and became a fetus without sin. He became a human being without ceasing being God. The evangelist says, “and the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). This God who became man intercedes for all humanity, offering Himself as a sacrifice for their sake. Therefore, the apostle Paul affirms that He became a man in truth, and not just as the illusion of a body, as the Gnostics claimed. He said, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

### **122. How is there only one nature in Christ?**

In Christ there is one nature of two natures, without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration. This is the nature of the Word who became Man. The Church equally rejects the Nestorian concept of Christ being two persons, and the faith of Eutyches who proclaimed that His humanity was swallowed up by His divinity or was dissolved in it.

Through the unofficial and official dialogues between the Chalcedonian Orthodox and the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox, both affirmed their rejection of both the Nestorian and the Eutychian understandings. Further, both families asserted their rejection of any division or confusion between His divinity and His humanity.

### **123. Why does the Creed include the phrase, “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary”?**

The history of the people of God is marked by a number of miraculous births, such as: God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 17:16–19); Hannah and the birth of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 1:1–20); Manoah and his barren wife and the birth of their son Samson (Judg. 13:2–3); and Zacharias the priest and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5–25). But a young, unknown virgin conceiving and bringing forth Jesus the Savior of the world surpassed all previous divine promises; for the Virgin bore in her body the promise of the salvation of the world. At the annunciation of the incarnation, the angel Gabriel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35).

The existence of polytheism in the world cried out for the Son to come, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains: “Was it without reason that the Son came? or was it in order that the Father might be acknowledged? You have learned what moved the Only-begotten to come down from the throne at God’s right hand. The Father was despised, the Son must needs

correct the error: for He Through Whom All Things Were Made must bring them all as offerings to the Lord of all. The wound must be healed: for what could be worse than this disease, that a stone should be worshipped instead of God?”<sup>318</sup>

#### **124. Was the incarnation essential?**

No one could be saved from sin and attain true righteousness that pleases God without the incarnation of the Son of God, who is one in essence with the Father, and His sacrifice for the sake of sinners. As the apostle Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5–8). In offering His sacrifice on the cross He also offered the sacrifice of obedience to the will of the Father, in place of the sin of disobedience committed by the first Adam. The apostle says, “Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’”” (Heb. 10:5–7).

Through the incarnation and the sacrifice of His life, He presented divine love in its most sublime form, saying, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

Christ the Lord, the new Adam says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me” (Matt. 11:29). Our Messiah accepted the yoke of our suffering and transformed it from the suffering that results from sin into the suffering that results from love. By sharing our suffering, He made it beautiful and blessed. And if He calls us to carry His yoke, it is so that our lives may be blessed. Thus, he teaches us to practice the acceptance of His joyous yoke, something that no being in heaven or on earth can offer us.

In the same spirit, when the disciples of John the Baptist came and told Jesus that the head of John had been brought to Herod’s daughter Herodias on a platter (Matt. 14:11–12), Jesus made no comment, but departed from there to a deserted place by Himself (Matt. 14:13). As an incarnate human being, He showed us a practical way to deal with disasters and persecutions; that is to go to a deserted place — whether our churches or our homes — to be alone with God who alone can deal with all disasters, according to His divine good will. He is indeed the matchless teacher, this new Adam!

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<sup>318</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 6.11 (NPNF II/7:36) amended.

By His incarnation He founded the Church, His body. We emulate the Head through our mutual love for each other, our humility, and our service. Therefore He says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). On another occasion, when He washed His disciples’ feet, He said to his them, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15).

That we might enjoy partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), as Pope Athanasius the Apostolic says, “For [the Word] became man, that we might be made god.”<sup>319</sup>

**The Fifth Article: “and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.”**

### **125. Why did the Lord Christ keep His silence during the religious and civil trials?**

The Greek philosopher Celsus wrote an attack on the Christian faith. The scholar **Origen** was asked to respond, so he wrote, “Jesus, however, is at all times assailed by false witnesses, and, while wickedness remains in the world, is ever exposed to accusation. And yet even now He continues silent before these things, and makes no audible answer, but places His defense in the lives of His genuine disciples, which are a pre-eminent testimony, and one that rises superior to all false witness, and refutes and overthrows all unfounded accusations and charges.”<sup>320</sup>

The Lord did not author books, nor provide answers to ethical questions, but instead presented a way of life that He passed on to His disciples by living it with them; whether by practicing love, or by participating in feasts in a properly spiritual manner, or in His forgiveness of those who resisted Him and crucified Him, or even in His style of teaching and His submitting to death. He never asked His disciples to *study* His life or His sermons, but rather to *partake* of His life, His suffering, and His crucifixion.

Our Lord Jesus Christ’s response to false accusations against Him is nothing more than the life of His followers. Through this life, they make disciples of others. The Church accepts this principle and therefore focuses on the fellowship of the saints.

**The Sixth Article: “suffered and was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures.”**

<sup>319</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 54: p. 167 (PG 25:192) amended. See also his *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.34 (NPNF II/4:413).

<sup>320</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* Book 1, Preface 2 (ANF 4:395).

**126. Why does the Creed mention the suffering of Christ?**

The Creed does not mention Adam and Eve’s disobedience and their fall, but it does mention the Second Adam’s offering for the salvation of humanity. Christ’s Church is concerned with the salvation of humanity, the restoration of God’s image (or icon) in us through the suffering and crucifixion of the Master. “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). The Creed furnishes no details about the service of the Lord Christ and His miracles but focuses on the world’s rejection of Him. For the purpose of the Creed is not to record the history of our Lord Jesus on earth, but to enflame our hearts with love towards God and people, so that we hasten to read the four gospels and the other books of the Holy Bible.

The word “suffered” summarizes all the events from His birth to His resurrection. He suffered as an infant when Herod sought to kill Him. He suffered even after His death, when the priests requested His tomb to be sealed and guarded lest His disciples steal His body and claim that He was risen. The apostle sums up the life of the Master thus: “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). The apostle Peter further clarifies this, saying that “Christ suffered for us in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1), so that the faithful might not fall into Gnosticism which portrays the Lord Christ as not being a true man. And the apostle Paul affirms that we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

**127. What is the significance of including “under Pontius Pilate” as part of the Creed?**

The mention of the ruler of that time affirms the historical reality of the crucifixion of Christ. The story of the suffering and crucifixion of the Lord Christ in the era of Pontius Pilate is a true story, which the believers live throughout their daily lives, and which will remain alive till the day of the second coming of the Lord.

**128. How was the crucifixion transformed from being a humiliation into being honor and glory?**

The apostle Paul says of Christ that He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7–8). Therefore, His faithful followers were the first group in the history of humanity to consider humiliation to be a virtue; for it was not due to sin committed by Christ that He was crucified, but out of love for the whole human race. Therefore, the apostle Paul calls us to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5), renounce temporal honor, and devote ourselves to loving others. Crucifixion was considered the most horrible of deaths, for it signifies the curse of God and people upon the crucified. The psalmist devoted a psalm to the topic of humiliation: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? ... But I am a worm, and no



man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head” (Ps. 22:1, 6–7).

If Christ became a slave because of His love for us, we ought to say with the apostle Paul that each of us is “the bondservant of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1), considering slavery to Christ as the most exalted honor in the world. The cross transfigured the way we see the world; many now prefer to serve than to be served (Matt. 20:28). Through the Cross He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly (Luke 1:52).

### **129. What is the mystery of dying and being buried with Christ?**

By His shameful death, which the Lord desired, He conferred great honor upon us. “Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). When we accept His death within us, we can say of our body: “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:43–44). His death transformed the darkness of the grave into light and bestowed upon us victory over the powers of darkness.

“... not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race ... becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants ... a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord ... Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be ‘the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence’ (Col. 1:18).”<sup>321</sup>

### **130. Why did the Lord Christ die?**

**To proclaim His perfect participation in our nature.** In **St. Gregory of Nyssa’s** view, human nature is bracketed by two events: birth and death. He who participates in one but not the other cannot be considered to have participated in our nature. The saint says, “Why, that the death is rendered necessary by the birth, and that He Who had determined once for all to share the nature of man must pass through all the peculiar conditions of that nature. Seeing, then, that the life of man is determined between two boundaries, had He, after having passed the one, not touched the other that follows, His proposed design would have remained only half fulfilled ... there was needed a lifting up from death for the whole of our nature, He stretches forth a hand as it were to prostrate man, and stooping down to our dead corpse He came so far within the grasp of death as to touch a state of deadness.”<sup>322</sup>

In Christ Jesus we fully partake of God, and no one can take us away from communion with Him. “If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom.

<sup>321</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.22.4 (ANF 1:391).

<sup>322</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 32 (NPNF II/5:497).

8:17); if we die with Him, we will also rise with Him. In dying with Him our human weakness passes away and we enter into His life of victory over death. The apostle says, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39). No longer do we fear death, for we find our Messiah, who accompanied us our whole lives, waiting for us and welcoming us.

### 131. Why was He buried in a tomb?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “He was truly laid as Man in a tomb of rock; but rocks were rent asunder by terror because of Him. He went down into the regions beneath the earth, that thence also He might redeem the righteous.”<sup>323</sup> For, tell me, would you wish the living only to enjoy His grace, and that, though most of them are unholy; and not wish those who from Adam had for a long while been imprisoned to have now gained their liberty? Isaiah the Prophet proclaimed with loud voice so many things concerning Him; would you not wish that the King should go down and redeem His herald? David was there, and Samuel, and all the Prophets, John himself also, who by his messengers said, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ (Matt. 11:3). Would you not wish that He should descend and redeem such as these?”<sup>324</sup>

### 132. Why did the Lord Christ descend into Hades?

The psalmist says, “If I make my bed (sleep) in hell, behold, You are there” (Ps. 139:8), for the Lord Christ descended into Hades and set free those imprisoned in it. He opened His arms and embraced them, so that now Hades has no authority over them, to keep them, for its gates are broken. Our Lord Jesus accepted our humanity even unto death to give us new life in Him. By death, the Son of God descended into death, and proclaimed eternal life, granted to us through our union with Him.

The Jews were accustomed to building their tombs outside the cities, since anyone who touches the dead was considered to be defiled; but now, in Christ Jesus, Christians cherish the relics of the saints, kiss them, and offer praise to God. **St. John Chrysostom** describes the tombs of the saints as “tombs with life, tombs that give voice.”<sup>325</sup> And **St. Athanasius** says, “For one who sees a snake trampled down, especially if he knows its former ferocity, no longer doubts that it is dead and completely weakened, unless he is perverted in mind and does not have even his bodily senses sound. For who, seeing a lion being played with by children, does not know that it is either dead or has lost all its power? Just as it is possible for the eye to see that these things are true, so when death is played with and despised by those

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<sup>323</sup> See also St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 14.18–19 (NPNF II/7:99).

<sup>324</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.11 (NPNF II/7:22) amended.

<sup>325</sup> *On Saint Eustathius* 4, in St. John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints: Select homilies and letters*, trans., Wendy Mayer, Bronwen Neil (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006): p. 54.

believing in Christ, let no one any longer doubt, nor be unbelieving, that death has been destroyed by Christ and its corruption dissolved and brought to an end.”<sup>326</sup>

By nature, we are all on our journey from birth to death; but by grace, we are on a journey in the opposite direction. In baptism, we were buried with Christ, and now we are journeying towards eternal life. We die in order to be glorified together with Him. The apostle Paul says, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:12).

### **133. Why do the Jews reject the resurrection of the Lord Christ?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “But He who descended into the regions beneath the earth came up again; and Jesus, who was buried, truly rose again the third day. And if the Jews ever worry you, meet them at once by asking thus: Did Jonah come forth from the whale on the third day, and has not Christ then risen from the earth on the third day? Is a dead man raised to life on touching the bones of Elisha, and is it not much easier for the Maker of mankind to be raised by the power of the Father?”<sup>327</sup>

**The Seventh Article: “Ascended into the heavens; He sits at the right hand of His Father.”**

### **134. What is the Gnostic understanding of the ascension?**

The Gnostics believed that there is a dualism in the creation. They believed that the creator of spirits is the good god, while the creator of physical matter — especially the body — is an evil god. This impelled them to discard the stories of the birth of Christ and His ascension, for they believed that He came to save humanity from the evil physical body. The Holy Bible affirms the story of the ascension (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9–11). Some scholars — influenced by Gnosticism — claim that the story of the ascension is merely spiritual, for the Savior has no body. That is why the Fathers of the early Church felt it important to insist upon the incarnation of the Word, the resurrection of His body, and His physical ascension.

### **135. By ascending, did the Lord Christ depart from the world?**

The ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven in no way implies His absence from the world. He sits at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20), being Lord of the cosmos, the Lord of heaven and earth. His divinity fills heaven and earth. When the faithful gather together, He

<sup>326</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 29: p. 103.

<sup>327</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.12 (NPNF II/7:22) amended.

is present with them (Matt. 18:20). The psalmist says, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? ... if I ascend into heaven, You, are there, if I make my bed (sleep) in hell, behold You are there” (Ps. 139:7–8), for He sits at the right hand of the great Father. By His bodily ascension to heaven, He became our predecessor in His resurrection and ascension.

His ascension into heaven opened the door for our hearts to see Him and delight in His presence; but he who rejects Him, deprives himself from delighting in His light. The evangelist says, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). The Lord Christ, for His part, is filled with grace and truth (John 1:14); he who rejects this grace deprives himself of truth and of light.

For the Fathers of the Church, the One God is light without any darkness. St. Isaac the Syrian’s view was that all humanity will encounter the Lord on the day of judgment; some will be rejoice in the divine light, relishing God’s love; but the unbelievers will be tormented because they deprived themselves of divine love, so the light will become a condemnation to them, or judge them.<sup>328</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** held that the bitterness that those in Hades taste is the bitterness of the scourging of the love that they reject, saying that there is nothing more bitter than the scourging of love.

**The Eighth Article: “And He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom has no end.”**

### **136. What does the great day of the Lord mean in the mind of the Church?**

The future second coming of the Lord Christ occupied the mind of the early Church, as is evident in its engagement with the word of God, its worship, and its instruction. This future event is the consummation of human history, when the Lord Christ shall appear on the clouds, and carry His Church comprised of all the faithful from Adam to the end of ages into the Father’s bosom, to partake of eternal glory. The great day of the Lord, as the Holy Bible calls it, shall be when the eyes of the heavenly and earthly are opened to discover the pinnacle of boundless divine love, offered to sanctified humanity. They shall enter into an exalted eternal communion with the heavenly beings, and the heavenly and the earthly shall exult together in this divine love which unites all to itself.

Early in his life, St. Peter witnessed the Lord’s transfiguration on Mount Tabor, and his heart was inflamed with anticipation, longing to hasten the coming of this joyous day, when we shall dwell in the “land of the living” with all the saints who are alive by the spirit; when

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<sup>328</sup> Cf. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) Homily 27.

the faithful shall bask in radiant glory. Later, he wrote: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:11–13).

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “Beware, my brothers, lest one of you be deprived of this joyous inheritance. For behold, He is standing at the door! The Light descended to us and enlightened us, drew us closer to Him, and raised us up with Him. He descended to us and for our sakes became like us, that He might make us like Him. He who does not die, descended to be among the dead, and made them dead no longer. He ascended to the Father, and He will come again in the glory of His blessed Father to judge the living and the dead. He became for us the path of life, filled with light and glory, so that we may walk in the light to the Father.”<sup>329</sup>

**Cyprian the martyr** says, “Oh, what and how great will that day be at its coming, beloved brethren, when the Lord shall begin to count up His people, and to recognise the deservings of each one by the inspection of His divine knowledge ... What will be the glory and how great the joy to be admitted to see God, to be honoured to receive with Christ, your Lord God, the joy of eternal salvation and light—to greet Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs—to rejoice with the righteous and the friends of God in the kingdom of heaven, with the pleasure of immortality given to us—to receive there what neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man!”<sup>330</sup>

So also the scholar **Origen**: “The account, therefore, of the entire and whole life is exacted by that which is called the kingdom of heaven which is likened to a king, when ‘we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad’ (2 Cor. 5:10); and then when the reckoning is being made, shall there be brought into the reckoning that is made also every idle word that men shall speak (Matt. 12:36), and any cup of cold water only which one has given to drink in the name of a disciple (Matt. 10:42).”<sup>331</sup>

### 137. What does the Lord Christ ask of us?

He asks of us that we receive Him and come to know Him. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Receive Christ, receive sight, receive your light, ‘In order that you may know well

<sup>329</sup> From a manuscript of the memres of St. Ephrem the Syrian found in the Syrian monastery, *Memre* no. 2000, dated 14 Amshir 1207 AM, edited by the monk Samuel el-Suriani, article 21: pp. 130–131.

<sup>330</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian Epistle 55 To the People of Thibaris, Exhorting to Martyrdom* 10 (ANF 5:350) amended.

<sup>331</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew* 14:8 (ANF 10:499).

both God and man’ (*Iliad* 5.128). ‘Sweet is the Word that gives us light, precious above gold and gems; it is to be desired above honey and the honey-comb’ (Ps. 19:10).”<sup>332</sup> “For each [name of God] by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent ... It remains that we understand, then, the Unknown, by divine grace, and by the word alone that proceeds from Him.”<sup>333</sup>

**The Ninth Article: “Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”**

### **Third: God the Holy Spirit**

#### **138. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives?**

One of the fruits of the entry of sin into human life was that ungrateful humanity united together to defy the Creator, thinking that they could mock the God who brought the flood in the days of Noah: “Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly’ ... ‘Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’ ... And the Lord said: ... ‘Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’” (Gen. 11:1–7). After the incarnate Word of God gave Himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and all those who were present with them to establish a new community that gathers humanity together; not by re-uniting them again with one language, but by His work in their lives, that they may be filled with the spirit of love and unity, and sanctified that they may bear the image of God. This is the work of the Spirit in the universal Church which embraces all nations and tongues, and thereby fulfills God’s plan for humanity.

Because the apostle Paul understood this he said, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). This is the same Holy Spirit who hovered over the face of the waters, transforming the earth, without form, and void (Gen. 1:2) into an earth bright and fruitful, a world very good in the eyes of God. Thus also the Spirit of God hovers over the water of baptism, granting humanity the gift of being the children of God, that the community of humanity may become “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

**St. Basil the Great** says of the Holy Spirit: “He is like a sunbeam whose grace is present to the one who enjoys him as if he were present to such a one alone, and still he illuminates

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<sup>332</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:203) amended.

<sup>333</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 5.12 (ANF 2:464).

land and sea and is mixed with the air. Just so, indeed, is the Spirit is present to each one who is fit to receive him, as if he were present to him alone.”<sup>334</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Jesus therefore went up into heaven, and fulfilled the promise. For He said to them, ‘I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter’ (John 14:16). So they were sitting, looking for the coming of the Holy Spirit; ‘and when the day of Pentecost was fully come,’ here, in this city of Jerusalem ... the Comforter came down from heaven, the Guardian and Sanctifier of the Church, the Ruler of souls, the Pilot of the tempest-tossed, who leads the wanderers to the light, and presides over the combatants, and crowns the victors.

“But He came down to clothe the Apostles with power, and to baptize them; for the Lord says, ‘you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence’ (Acts 1:5). This grace was not in part, but His power was in full perfection; for as he who plunges into the waters and is baptized is encompassed on all sides by the waters, so were they also baptized completely by the Holy Spirit ...

“And why are you surprised? Take an example from matter; poor indeed and common, yet useful for the simpler sort. If the fire passing in through the mass of the iron makes the whole of it fire, so that what was cold becomes burning and what was black is made bright,— if fire which is a body thus penetrates and works without hindrance in iron which is also a body, why wonder that the Holy Spirit enters into the very inmost recesses of the soul?”<sup>335</sup>

### 139. Why is the Holy Spirit called “the Giver of Life”?

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “He is called a life-giving Spirit. For it says: ‘He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you’ (Rom. 8:11). The Lord is the very life, and ‘author of life’ (Acts 3:15), as Peter put it. And as the Lord himself said: ‘The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life . . . But this he spoke concerning the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive’ (John 4:14, 7:39). But the creatures, as has been said, are given life through him. He who does not partake of life, but who is himself partaken of, and gives life to the creatures, what kinship can he have with things originated? How can he belong to the creatures which in him are given life from the Word?”<sup>336</sup>

And **St. Ambrose** says, “So when the Spirit was moving upon the water, the creation was without grace; but after this world being created underwent the operation of the Spirit, it

<sup>334</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 9:22: p. 53.

<sup>335</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 17.13–14 (NPNF II/7:127) amended.

<sup>336</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (Epworth Press, 1951) Epistle 1.23: p. 123, amended.

gained all the beauty of that grace, wherewith the world is illuminated. And that **the grace of the universe cannot abide without the Holy Spirit** the prophet declared when he said: ‘You will take away Your Spirit, and they will fail and be turned again into their dust. Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be made, and You will renew all the face of the earth’ (Ps. 104:29–30). Not only, then, did he teach that no creature can stand without the Holy Spirit, but also that the Spirit is the Creator of the whole creation ... do we doubt that the Spirit of God is the Creator of all things? But why do I delay with matters not to the purpose? Let them accept a plain proof that there can be nothing which the Holy Spirit can be said not to have made; and that it cannot be doubted that all subsists through His operation, whether Angels, Archangels, Thrones, or Dominions.”<sup>337</sup>

**The Tenth Article: “And in one holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic Church.”**

**140. What does it mean for the Church to be “catholic (universal)”?**

In the water of baptism, the Holy Spirit expels the spirit of division. The Church of Christ, the One Lord, should have one faith and one Holy Spirit, working within her, despite her diverse languages and cultures. No social barriers can deprive a genuine believer from being a member in the universal Church. Multilingualism and multiculturalism cannot negate the universality of the Church.

This universality is deeply felt by every believer. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the soul, body, mind, emotions, and all the talents and gifts of the believer. Not even death is able to overcome this characteristic of the Church, for the faithful who have departed become a for us cloud of witnesses that is not far from us, nor estranged from us. The apostle Paul says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ...” (Heb. 12:1). He also says, “raised us up together” (Eph. 2:6). Thus, the risen life has become ours in Christ Jesus. We are one — the departed with those who still struggle on earth — together with the generations yet to come. We are one family, one sanctified bride of the heavenly Bridegroom.

Whenever we see divisions within the human community, or the human family, then with a heart set aflame with love we ought to plead with the Holy Spirit to work in people’s hearts, that we might fulfil the words of the apostle Paul: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:3–7).

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<sup>337</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.5.33, 36–37 (NPNF II/10:118–119) amended.



**The Eleventh Article: “We confess one baptism, for the remission of sins.”**

**141. What is the purpose of baptism?**

In the Creed we declare: “We confess one baptism, for the remission of sins.” When some among the priests and laymen renounced their faith during the time of persecution, some of them repented and wished to return and become members of the Church once more. This raised questions such as: “What is the status of the believer if priest who baptized him later denied the faith? Should his baptism be considered to have been annulled? And what is the status of the believer who denies the faith and later wishes to return to the Christian faith? Should he be baptized again?” We often read in the writings of **St. Augustine**, “of no one let us despair.”<sup>338</sup> The Creed therefore answers these questions thus: “We confess one baptism, for the remission of sins.” Baptism is *not* to be repeated if one returns to the faith. This clause was added to the Creed in 381 A.D. at the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople.

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “As a handful of sand thrown into the ocean, so are the sins of all flesh as compared with God's mind. As a fountain that flows abundantly is not dammed by a handful of earth so the mercy of the Creator is not vanquished by the wickedness of the creatures.”<sup>339</sup>

**The Twelfth Article: “We look for the resurrection of the dead.”**

**142. What will be our fate when the earth passes away?**

The Creed is chiefly concerned with bringing out the significance of our life here on earth, for God is our Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier so that we may be His ambassadors in this world. The end-goal of the Creed is: “We look for the resurrection of the dead.”

The Word of God assumed our body in order to restore its dignity, and the Holy Spirit fashions from our body a temple for God to dwell in; for on the great day of the Lord the body will rise from the dead and share the glory of the soul. The Holy Bible affirms *that* the resurrection of the Lord Christ occurred and confirms that the tomb was empty. What it does not explain is just *how* the resurrection occurred. The apostle Paul makes it clear that the Lord Christ is the first of those who will rise from the dead, and that our body is like a seed that is buried and then grows into a fruitful tree. No one can see, just by looking at the seed that is buried, an image of the tree that will grow from it. He also says that this mortal body must put on immortality in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul calls this “a mystery” (1 Cor. 15:51): “we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

<sup>338</sup> E.g., St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 56.18 (NPNF I/8:225).

<sup>339</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh Homily*, trans., A. J. Wensinck, (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 50: p. 231.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

On the great day of the Lord the faithful will rise because they are members in the one body of Christ. Here we see the depth of Christ’s love for humanity as His heavenly bride and body.

### **The Thirteenth Article: “And the life of the age to come.”**

#### **143. What is the life of the age to come?**

It is the indescribable eternal life, of which St. John the Evangelist said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3); “In Him was life” (John 1:4); and “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25–26). If the believer finds delight in the presence of the Lord Christ in this life, then even at his death he shall find Christ meeting him and welcoming him. He sees death as a liberation into Christ, the source of life.

### **The Fourteenth Article: “Amen.”**

#### **144. What does the word “Amen” mean?**

It is the seal of the faithful upon this Creed; not sealed by hand, but by one’s whole inward being. The apostle Paul says, “our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Cor. 1:18–20).

## 3

## Faith in God and Our Knowledge of Him

### 145. Is it necessary to believe in God?

St. John proclaims that “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). God wants to be very near to humanity, that He might make us one with Him, dwell within our souls, and grant us the power to partake of His glory. In other words, God declares Himself to humanity — not to engage in abstract philosophical disputes, nor to impose His authority over them — but to attract them to Himself, as a human father attracts his children. In our heavenly Father we find the fountain of life, eternity, eternal joy, and glory. In his paschal letters, **St. Athanasius** wrote, “the contemplation of God, and the word (Logos) which is from Him, are enough to nourish those who hear, and be for them in place of all food. For the angels are not sustained except by beholding at all times the face of the Father, and of the Saviour who is in heaven.”<sup>340</sup>

### 146. Does faith cancel the gift of reason?

In Christianity, the term “**mystery**” does not mean that the believer blindly accepts doctrines without understanding, or that these doctrines make no sense. When we speak of divine mysteries concerning the essence of God and His nature and work, we mean that God reveals these matters to us as rational beings, granting us divine enlightenment that reveals to us this divine knowledge which is truly surpassingly sublime. Yet by their nature, our minds remain incapable of grasping these mysteries, without the intervention of God’s grace and revelation. A mystery does not oppose human reason — although without God’s help, it remains beyond human comprehension.

God created us as rational beings, not beastly ones. When He reveals Himself and His work to us, it is not cancel our reason, but to exalt it; so that our human nature might receive Him and confess His mysteries: “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11); “having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself” (Eph. 1:9–10).

God, who loves humans as rational beings, spoke with Moses “as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11) and He longs to enter into dialogue with every believer. I quote below some of the words of **St. Clement of Alexandria** that demonstrate that Christianity elevates the human mind; and that when the mind engages in faith and receives revelation from God, its reason is by no means cancelled, but rather its wisdom is increased.

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<sup>340</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 1:6 (NPNF II/4:508) amended.

“... the soul is raised to God: trained in the true philosophy, it speeds to its kindred above, turning away from the lusts of the body, and besides these, from toil and fear.”<sup>341</sup>

“A noble hymn of God is an immortal man, established in righteousness, in whom the oracles of truth are engraved. For where but in a soul that is wise can you write truth?”<sup>342</sup>

**St. Clement** also explains that human knowledge is necessary to understand the holy Scriptures, yet not without the help of God.<sup>343</sup>

#### 147. Why is God called *Theos*?

G. L. Prestige<sup>344</sup> says that some of the early Church Fathers, such as **Clement** and **Dionysius of Alexandria**, followed Herodotus<sup>345</sup> in drawing a connection between the words *theos* (god) and *titheme* (to dispose). **St. Clement** says, “God is called *theos*, from *thesis* (placing), and order or arrangement.”<sup>346</sup>

Aristotle says that God is the First Mover, who initiated movement in the world, then acts no more. But we believe that God is infinite love — loving action that springs from within the eternal internal relationship of Holy Trinity. The love of God is evident in His creation of the world, and this love continues always to operate, never ceasing until Christ’s second coming.

The Alexandrian Fathers strongly affirm that God cares individually for each person with a unique love — even if that person is unaware of it — for the kingdom of His heavenly love is founded in the depths of the human soul (Luke 17:21). The power of God is love perpetually in motion. **Pope Athanasius** says, “but God is self-existent, enclosing all things, and enclosed by none; within all according to His own goodness and power, yet without all in His proper nature.”<sup>347</sup>

#### 148. What are the characteristics of the One God?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “God (the Father) is One, alone unbegotten, without beginning, change, or variation; neither begotten of another, nor having another to succeed Him in His life; who neither began to live in time, nor ever comes to an end: and that He is both good and just; that if ever you hear a heretic say, that there is one God who is just, and

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<sup>341</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4:3 (ANF 2:410).

<sup>342</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 10 (ANF 2:201).

<sup>343</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.9 (ANF 2:309–310).

<sup>344</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (London: SPCK, 1936): p. 1.

<sup>345</sup> *The Histories of Herodotus* 2.52.

<sup>346</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.29 (ANF 2:341).

<sup>347</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Decretis* 3 (NPNF II/4:157).

another who is good,<sup>348</sup> you should immediately remember, and discern the poisoned arrow of heresy. For some have impiously dared to divide the One God in their teaching: and some have said that one is the Creator and Lord of the soul, and another of the body,<sup>349</sup> a doctrine at once absurd and impious. For how can a man become the one servant of two masters, when our Lord says in the Gospels, ‘No man can serve two masters’ (Matt. 4:24; Luke 16:13)? There is then One Only God, the Maker both of souls and bodies: One Creator of heaven and earth, the Maker of Angels and Archangels: of many the Creator, but of One only the Father before all ages,—of One only, His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom He made ‘all things visible and invisible’ (John 1:3; Col. 1:16).”<sup>350</sup>

#### 149. Does the Holy Bible avoid discussion of the characteristics of the essence of God?

It is said of God that He is a Spirit: “God is **Spirit**, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The Holy Bible does describe characteristics of God, for God is:

**Eternal** (everlasting, without beginning or end): “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Ps. 90:2; cf. Rev. 4:8; Rom. 16:26).

**Good**: “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Matt. 19:17); “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps. 145:8–9).

**All-knowing**: “God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 John 3:20); “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

**Just**: “For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (Ps. 11:7); “For there is no partiality with God” (Rom. 2:11).

**Almighty**: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

**Everywhere present**: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there” (Ps. 139:7–8).

<sup>348</sup> Irenæus, I. c. xxvii. says that Cerdo taught that the God of the Law and the Prophets was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: for that He is known, but the other unknown, and the one is just, but the other good. Also III. c. 25, § 3: “Marcion himself, therefore, by dividing God into two, and calling the one good, and the other judicial, on both sides puts an end to Deity.” Compare Tertullian, c. *Marcion*. I. 2, and 6; Origen, c. *Cels*. iv. 54.

<sup>349</sup> This tenet was held by the Manichæans.

<sup>350</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.4 (NPNF II/7:20) amended.

**150. If God is Spirit, why does the Holy Bible describe God as having bodily members such as the heart of God, the eyes of the Lord, His ears, and hands?**

The Bible uses the language familiar to humans so that they can understand the message. The heart of God means compassion and love; the eyes and ears of God refer to His knowledge of all things; and the hand of God refers to His power.

**151. If God is everywhere present, why is it said that He dwells in heaven, or in the Church, or in the believer?**

God dwelling in heaven refers to His eternal glory; His dwelling in the Church refers to His receiving holy worship; and His dwelling in the believer refers to His work within the inward life of the believer. He is present wherever two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20). Thus we see how He cherishes the life of communion among the faithful in the Lord.

**152. Is it possible for a person to know the essence of God?**

The human being is the only creature in heaven or on earth who is said to have been created in the image of God, according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26–27). For our sake God created the world and planted a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8). Therefore, He endowed us with the ability to know Him, yet the essence of God remains indescribable and beyond our knowledge. If we are unable to comprehend our own soul or spirit though we do not doubt its existence, how can we comprehend God our Creator, or comprehend His divine essence?! A philosopher once said to **St. Athanasius**: “Show me your God and I will believe in His existence,” to which the saint replied, “Show me your soul and I show you my God!”

**153. What does the Holy Bible say about our inability to know God’s essence?**

The apostle Paul says of God that He “alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:16).

**154. Does the Holy Bible testify that it is possible for us to know God?**

The Holy Bible tell us that there are many ways by which we can know God:

**First:** we can know God through His amazing creation. The apostle Paul says, “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19–20).

**Second:** God endowed humanity with an instinctive law: “who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom. 2:15).

**Third:** when we observe God’s dealings with us and with other people through history, we realize that God does not forsake people, but looks to their needs at the appropriate time. This urges us to fortify ourselves with the knowledge of God as a powerful, loving, and wise Father.

**Fourth:** on the other hand, when the faithful ponder on God’s dealings with them, they come to realize that God has a plan for their lives, so they sing, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’” (Rom. 11:33–34).

**Fifth:** the righteous people of God delight in encountering Him, witnessing His glory, and seeing Him sitting upon the throne. When they attempted to speak of God’s characteristics, they called Him the Judge, Almighty, Longsuffering, Truth, Merciful, etc. Gathering all these titles together, **St. Clement of Alexandria** says that God is above every name. And on this, the apostle Paul — who was caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2) — said, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). How much more does this apply to the One who is responsible for this glory?

God is named Light, Truth, Life, Almighty, All-Perfect, etc. These titles do not reveal the ineffable essence of God; they were granted to us that we might come to know Him insofar as our human weakness allows. We are a creation that is unable to know the essence of the Creator.

**Sixth:** we can know God through His divine revelation or inspiration. God proclaims His divine mysteries and His plan towards His beloved human beings to His prophets through visions or holy dreams; at times, through symbols, and at other times, more obviously. This is for the edification and salvation of humanity. We shall discuss divine revelation when we come to the relevant section.

### 155. What does “no one can see Me and live” mean?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “To look upon God with eyes of flesh is impossible: for the incorporeal cannot be subject to bodily sight: and the Only begotten Son of God Himself has testified, saying, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18). For if according to that which is written in Ezekiel any one should understand that Ezekiel saw Him, yet what does the Scripture say? ‘He saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord’ (Ezek. 1:28); not the Lord Himself, but ‘the likeness of His glory,’ not the glory itself, as it really is. And when he saw merely ‘the likeness of His glory,’ and not the glory itself, he fell to the earth in fear. Now if

the sight of the likeness of the glory brought fear and distress upon the prophets, any one who should attempt to behold God Himself would to a certainty lose his life, according to the saying, ‘No man shall see My face and live’ (Ex. 33:20). For this cause God of His great loving-kindness spread out the heaven as a veil of His proper Godhead, that we should not perish. The word is not mine, but the Prophet’s. ‘If You should rend the heavens, trembling will take hold of the mountains at sight of You, and they will flow down’ (Isa. 64:1 LXX).

“And why do you wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing ‘the likeness of His glory,’ when Daniel at the sight of Gabriel, though but a servant of God, straightway shuddered and fell on his face, and, prophet as he was, dared not answer him, until the Angel transformed himself into the likeness of a son of man (Dan. 10:9, 16, 18). Now if the appearing of Gabriel wrought trembling in the Prophets, had God Himself been seen as He is, would not all have perished?”<sup>351</sup>

**156. Why did God call Himself “Jehovah” (Ex. 3:14–15) when Moses the prophet asked for His name?**

The name “Jehovah” comes from the Hebrew word YHWH, which means the one who is, the one who exists. God exists or is present in heaven, on earth, and in all the world, and He dwells in the midst of His people. He is the one who gives existence to all other things. He cannot be compared to any other being.

**157. Why does the Holy Bible emphasize the oneness of God and that there is no other God beside Him (2 Sam. 7:22)?**

If there were more than one God, it would be possible to compare among them; God would not have been absolute in His perfection. Also, if there were more than one God, God would not be ineffable, nor would it be impossible to describe His essence.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** insists, “God is one, and He is more than one, beyond unity.”<sup>352</sup> And **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** finds the unity of God reflected in the order and harmony of the world. If there were many gods, the world would not be harmonious.

Some philosophers thought that there are many gods, they believed that these gods wage war upon each other, and they ascribed a vain glory to these false gods; none of which is worthy of the One God who is absolute in His perfection.

**158. What are the characteristics of God?**

The Holy Bible contains some names of God that positively describe what He is like, so that we may delight in His characteristics working within us. It also contains other names of

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<sup>351</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 9.1 (NPNF II/7:51) amended.

<sup>352</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.8.71 (FOTC 23:63).



God that negatively describe what He is not, that we may beware of falling into a destructive negativism.

On the positive side He is called Good, Holy, Light, Life, etc. On the negative side He is called Undying, Infinite, Unapproachable. And yet, we will see Him face to face, not as He is in essence, but insofar as the weakness of our limited nature can bear, etc. So, we are able to know Him and exult in Him eternally. We can know that He is great, but we cannot comprehend the extent of His greatness. We perceive His eternal presence, but can we ever understand it?

**159. How can God possess all these kinds of characteristics, and yet be described as simple?**

Although we are aware of all these characteristics that inflame our souls with His sublime love, we cannot say that His essence is composed of many elements, or that there are elements external to Him that are incorporated into His simple essence.

**St. John Chrysostom** observes that the Seraphim and the Cherubim upon whom He is enthroned cannot comprehend His essence; they can only come to know Him through His glory and His divine works, as far as they can.

**160. Why does the Holy Bible use human expressions to speak about God?**

God reveals Himself to us who are human using the human language that we can understand, so that we may enter into loving relationships with Him, and for the sake of our growth. So, when it is said of Him that He regretted the evil that He had threatened, this does not mean that there is evil in Him, nor any change in His intentions. He wants us to be a living icon of Himself. Divine wrath contains no human emotions — it is an expression of the divine grace that urges us to take action that will lead us to enjoy His love and care, to be liberated from the fear of divine justice, and to contemplate unchanging divine mercy.

If we seek His grace, we shall find it, and then we can actively come to know His eternal nature; namely love, mercy, and compassion, together with divine justice. This is what the incarnate Word of God has revealed to us. We know that love is God's nature from eternity, within the co-essential Holy Trinity. And by the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we experience this divine love in practice, in our lives on earth. Our knowledge, though it is in part, is growing in us, for we consider ourselves to be children in the bosom of God, favored by His love, which is inexpressible, indescribable and immeasurable. The apostle Paul captures this in his first epistle to the Corinthians (13:9–12).

**161. How are God’s divine characteristics related to His divine being?**

We can identify some divine characteristics as pertaining exclusively to His divine being, but not to the creation. God alone is self-existent, absolutely perfect, transcends space and time, unseen, not derived from any another existent, and without beginning or end. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow; without change, and perfect in all His attributes, for His characteristics do not stand in need of any created thing in order to be manifest.

**162. What does it mean that God is all-sufficient?**

God is all-sufficient within Himself. He has no need to be served, worshipped, or glorified by others. Rather, it is we who need to serve Him, worship Him and glorify Him, entering into a relationship with Him through His grace working within us, overflowing with holy life, inner joy, and fulfilment; “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

**163. What does it mean that God is without beginning or end?**

He was not created by some other being and did not begin at a certain time. He has no end and no successor. The whole life of the universe is for Him as a split second compared to His eternity. For Him there is no past, present, and future, but all is eternal present. The apostle Peter says, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8; Ps. 90:4). Time began when God created the visible world. So, God’s concern for humanity is for them to attain eternal life through the work of salvation.

**164. What does it mean for God's characteristics to be unchanging?**

God’s characteristics are absolute; He does not increase or decrease, but remains as He is without change. He says in Malachi the prophet, “For I am the Lord, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6). “He first loved us” (1 John 4:19) and His love did not just begin after Christ was crucified for us. The apostle says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

**165. What does it mean that God is everywhere present?**

God’s continual presence does not begin with the creation, nor with the existence of this limited world. His presence is not restricted by the limitations of space or matter; He transcends every place. God’s being everywhere does not imply any kind of mingling of His divine presence with the material world. His presence in the world does not mean that part of His divinity is in one place, while another part is in another place. He is completely present throughout the whole world and no particular location could ever contain Him. His complete

presence in every location indicates His perfect knowledge, His absolute power, and His indescribable and unlimited essence.

**166. What does it mean that God is unseen and incomprehensible?**

God has no body that can be seen and touched. The prophets were unable to see God, except within the limits that He allowed, through a tiny part of splendor of His divine glory. He is not seen as He is, but He reveals what He will to each person — just enough for their edification. “No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27).

**167. What is the foreknowledge of God?**

God knows all things that happen in His creation — not just that which concerns the irrational creation, but also the ranks of heaven, and humanity; everything that happens in both the visible and the invisible worlds. He knows every last detail of what the future holds, and He knew all this even before He created time. His knowledge is not due to gradual learning; it is His simple essence. For Him, the past and the future are always present before Him. His knowledge does not compel humanity or angels to perform what He knows will happen, for He has sanctified the free will of rational beings. He is not responsible for what they do, as if He were the cause of their actions; yet all matters are displayed before Him with perfect accuracy and clarity.

**168. What does the divine characteristic of being “all-wise” mean?**

God is all-good and all-wise. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says of the goodness of God that it means more than just God’s generous giving of benefits; it means that He transforms evil into goodness. This is what Joseph understood and explained to his brethren, telling them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:19–20).

God took all the evil directed at His holy Son — the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of the Lord Christ — and transformed it into a way of salvation for all humanity.

**169. What is the characteristic of divine power?**

God is all-powerful. By His power, He proclaims His Fatherhood to humanity, His wisdom in guiding us, and His delight in our salvation. His marvelous power is evident in that He grants us absolute freedom to ask and supplicate and knock on the door of His mercies, assuring us that “everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matt. 7:8).

**170. What is the characteristic of divine holiness?**

God in His Holiness does not know sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He loves righteousness and goodness and despises sin. His exceeding power works to sanctify those who seek Him. God, by nature, is perfectly holy, and the source of holiness to all who ask for it. In His Holiness, He alone can judge, for it is He who searches the depths of the heart; it is He who will judge the nations and the tribes without partiality. In the great day of the Lord, He will judge the living and the dead.

**171. What are the characteristics of divine love and compassion?**

“God is love” (1 John 4:8) and long-suffering. He offers the chance of repentance even in the last moments of the sinner’s life, as He opened the gates of Paradise to Dimas, the right-hand thief. When the first man fell, rather than repenting he blamed God who gave him Eve, who in turn gave him the forbidden fruit. God responds to this behavior by offering His life as a sacrifice for Adam and his children! With His love, He remains faithful to His promises despite our unfaithfulness (Rom. 3:3).

**172. What did Moses ask of God regarding service when he first encountered Him?**

Moses asked of God that he might know His name. Moses was the first leader of God’s people in the Old Testament, and as their representative God revealed to him that His name is “Jehovah,” which means, “I Am.” What does this name, “I Am,” mean? It means that He exists, working for His chosen people — in contrast to the Greek religions, which often held God to be a lofty being too distant to care about the world’s trivial affairs.

**173. Do the angels, as far as they are able, see God?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “What then, some man will say, is it not written, ‘The little ones’ Angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven’ (Matt. 18:10)? Yes, but the Angels see God not as He is, but as far as they themselves are capable. For it is Jesus Himself who says, ‘Not that any man has seen the Father, save He which is of God, He has seen the Father’ (John 6:46)”<sup>353</sup>

**174. What does God’s absolute perfection mean?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Not great in loving-kindness only, and little in wisdom, but with wisdom and loving-kindness in equal power: not seeing in part, and in part devoid of sight; but being all eye, and all ear, and all mind: not like us perceiving in part and in part not knowing; for such a statement were blasphemous, and unworthy of the Divine substance.

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<sup>353</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 6.6 (NPNF II/7:34) amended.

He foreknows the things that be; He is Holy, and Almighty, and excels all in goodness, and majesty, and wisdom: of Whom we can declare neither beginning, nor form, nor shape. For ‘you have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape’ (John 5:37), says Holy Scripture. Wherefore Moses says also to the Israelites: ‘And take good heed to your own souls, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire’ (Deut. 4:15). For if it is wholly impossible to imagine His likeness, how shall thought come near His substance?”<sup>354</sup>

**St. Augustine** talks to us about this matter, saying, “Let no thought be entertained here of a bodily face. For if enkindled by the desire of seeing God, you have made ready your bodily face to see Him, you will be looking also for such a [bodily] face in God ... Mark well who it is to whom you say, if indeed you do say it, and say it in sincerity, ‘My heart said to You ... Your face, Lord, will I seek’ (Ps. 27:8). For so will you seek it well, because you seek with your heart. Scripture speaks of the ‘face of God, the arm of God, the hands of God, the feet of God, the seat of God,’ and His footstool; but think not in all this of human members. If you want to be a temple of truth, break down the idol of falsehood.”<sup>355</sup>

### 175. Who is able to express divine love?

When **St. John Saba** was asked why he did not write about the hidden mysteries, he replied that he is like a young child whose father has filled his house with many precious things. But when he goes out to the children who are his friends, he can only share with them a few small things, lest he lose his treasure.<sup>356</sup>

I dared to speak of “**divine love**”; and so I spoke of “God,” for “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Moreso, I found myself daring to write about matters that my weakness cannot utter, nor can any tongue of human or even of angel express, for “no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:1–11).

The apostle Paul says, “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What shall I do?! I am human and I speak with human language. My tongue is of this world, so I seek pardon from my Lord. I do not use these expressions of the spirit out of disrespect, but because of the poverty of my abilities, which is due to my weakness and the nature of my human tongue. Have compassion upon me O

<sup>354</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 6.7 (NPNF II/7:35) amended.

<sup>355</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Volume I, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) 3.7: p. 52, amended.

<sup>356</sup> See St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) Letter 41: p. 188.

Lord, for I do not utter these words out of impertinence, but because I can do no other. And yet, I am certainly not content with the meaning of my words, though I soar upon the wings of my understanding.”

**The spiritual elder (St. John Saba)** says, “Whoever seeks to speak of the love of God proclaims his ignorance because he has not perceived that it is utterly impossible to do so”<sup>357</sup> ... “This love is wonderful! It is the language of the angels, difficult to pronounce or to translate. Love is the name of the noble God. Who is able to scrutinize it or to know its boundaries?” ... “There is no one who is capable of speaking about Your love as it truly is, O our Good Father. Those in whom You shine do not know!” ...

“It is not for us, O my Lord, to speak out of what is ours about what is Yours, **but You speak in us about Yourself** and about all that is Yours, as seems good to You. O Lord, shine the light of Your knowledge in them that those who are in Your bosom may see and know that they are protected.” ... “Reveal to me (my God) the land of Your love that I may speak of it as far as my weakness allows. Pour out in me, O Lord, Your grace and mercy that I may speak of it. Set the hearts of those who love You on fire so that they go forth seeking it.”

**St. Augustine** says, “My God, where can I find a tongue that is able to express the glory that befits You because of Your free grace? You created me when I was not and made me to exist by Your will. Before I existed, You were glorified as befits Your majesty ... You are true glory, so I have no right to call upon Your creation to tell of Your majesty.

“The heart is too small to contain Your majesty; speech is impotent to define it, hearing is incapable of perceiving it ... all these shall pass away, but Your majesty remains forever ... Thought has a beginning and an end, the voice does not linger and its echoes dissipate; the ear hears it but it does not persist; it comes to an end. But Your majesty remains forever.

“Behold, who can praise and glorify You as befits Your majesty? So, again I conclude that Your glory is everlasting and unchanging. O Everlasting Glory, O God, my God, the fountain of every enduring glory; without You I am incapable of praising You, for any other glory apart from You is vanity. Therefore, I hasten to glorify You! Indeed, who am I to lift up Your name? I am nothing but dust and ashes, a dead dog decaying, a worthless worm, a lifeless corruptible corpse.

“Yea, who am I to glorify You, O exalted Lord, eternal King, God? A wisp of breath from your mouth is a thousand times more precious than all the earthly creation. Does the darkness glorify the light? Does death praise life? ... O God, my God, You are glorified for Your power, Your infinite wisdom, and the breadth of Your tenderness.

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<sup>357</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) Letter 34: p. 142.

“You are glorified in Your true mercy, Your infinite compassion, Your everlasting perfection, and the majesty of Your divinity. Be glorified in the splendor of Your exalted might and Your benevolent love through which You created us O my God, life of my heart.





## 4

# The Holy Trinity <sup>358</sup>

### 176. What is the Church’s teaching concerning the Holy Trinity?

God is one, in one unique, undivided, and inseparable essence; a Trinity of Hypostases<sup>359</sup> that can be distinguished from one another; eternal Hypostases with no beginning, belonging to a single essence, and having a single will. The apostle Paul speaks of “one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6). “Above all” refers to the Father who is the source of all; “and through all” refers to the Son or “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24); and “in you all” refers to the Holy Spirit who perfects all and sanctifies all.

### 177. How did the Lord Christ communicate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to us?

The incarnate Word of God did not use theological terms in speaking to us, nor did He set out for us an overtly theological system of Trinitarian faith. With simplicity, He revealed the Holy Trinity to us through His works of salvation, as the following examples show:

Our Lord Jesus proclaimed the **Father** as the lover of humanity who sent His only Son to save the whole world (John 3:16). He asks us to call Him “our Father” (Matt. 6:9), trusting in His fatherly love, for He gives us more than we ask.

**When our Lord Jesus discloses His relationship with the Father, He does so for our benefit.** He says, “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (John 3:35–36). He also says, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17); and again, He says, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

**Jesus Christ reveals His divinity through His works for our sake.** He discloses Himself as Creator by turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana of Galilee (John 2:1–12) to grant us spiritual joy; opening the eyes of the man born blind (John 9:1–12); calming the sea and the winds (Mark 4:35–41); and by expelling demons and evil spirits (Mark 1:23–27) so that His beloved might live in peace. He also reveals Himself as the one who forgives sins (Matt. 9:2; Luke 7:48) and presents Himself to us as the Life, the Truth, the Resurrection,

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<sup>358</sup> Translated by Magda Said and Ehab Barsoum.

<sup>359</sup> The term *hypostasis* (plural: *hypostases*) is derived from two words: *hypo* meaning “under,” and *stasis* meaning “standing.” Thus, the literal meaning of this term is “standing under,” or that which stands or is set, under a foundation. In Alexandrian theology, it is the preferred term for denoting the three members of the Holy Trinity, i.e., the three Hypostases of the Father, Son, and Holy Trinity, who are one *ousia*, meaning “being” or “essence.” See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church*, ed., Maryrose Halim, (1986): p. 40.

and the Bread coming down from heaven; as well as the Way, the Door, the Physician, the Groom, etc., so that we may find in Him the satisfaction of all our needs.

**The Holy Spirit is presented to us as the Comforter and another Helper** (John 14:26) who dwells within us (John 14:17), teaching us all things (John 14:26); who convicts the world of sin (John 16:8) and gives the power to witness to Christ (Acts 1:8).

### **178. What are the earliest Trinitarian formulas?**

The Lord Christ clearly and frankly proclaimed the divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as being evident from their works for our salvation.

Before His ascension to the heavens, He commanded His disciples to baptize believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 19:28). He gave them a simple formula for baptism that makes no mention of the term “Hypostases,” although His implicit purpose was to grant believers the grace of the divine Hypostases through baptism. The person being baptized accepts the Fatherhood of God (the Father) through baptism, membership in the body of the Lord Christ, and the indwelling of Holy Spirit in his inward being.

One of the most important expressions concerning Trinitarian doctrine in the Apostolic Age is that used by St. Paul: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). The apostle Peter attests to the Holy Trinity, proclaiming divine grace, love, and communion, which the faithful accept in God who works in them, that they might become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3).

It is clear that the chief goal of the Church organization in the Apostolic Age was to testify through its worship that God sent His Word, Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will return in glory to raise us with Him so we can delight in His Father's presence. He also sent His Holy Spirit into His Church to prepare His heavenly kingdom and to make the Church ready for the eternal wedding. In other words, the faith of the Apostolic Church was a purely Trinitarian faith that imbued its preaching, its worship, and its behavior; but was not proclaimed in any theological formula in the modern sense.

### **179. What are the positions of the Old Testament and the New Testament on the doctrines of the oneness of God and the three Hypostases?**

Both the Old and New Testaments affirm the doctrine of One God. But one purpose of the Old Testament was to prevent the faithful from worshipping idols — inanimate gods — and from practicing the abominations of those nations associated with pagan worship (2 Kings 21:2). The New Testament, however, testifies to the one God from a more positive perspective, for it not only proclaims the oneness of God, but also deepens our faith in the

One God by highlighting the Trinity. This does not actually contradict divine oneness but supports it by revealing some of the mysteries of the One God and His relationship with humanity. Without Trinitarian faith, divine oneness would remain obscure. Trinitarian faith is a fundamental path to our salvation, touching our practical lives, our relationship with God, and our eternal future. Such faith causes no dissonance in a mind that is spiritual, but rather fulfills it and exalts it to meditate on divine mysteries with joy.

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus**<sup>360</sup> understands the Old Testament as proclaiming the Father openly, but the Son in a more obscure manner. Then, the New Testament proclaims the Son clearly, and suggests the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Trinity was revealed gradually, lest people become like those who are weighed down by eating more food than they can stomach, or like those who gaze upon the sun with eyes too weak to bear its light; lest they therefore lose even that which was within their grasp. But as David says, gradually they ascend, progress, and grow from glory to glory (Ps. 84:7; 2 Cor. 3:18), as the light of the Trinity shines on those who are enlightened.

### **180. Does the Holy Bible explicitly teach the doctrine of the Trinity?**

The Holy Trinity is evident at the baptism of our Lord Jesus (John 1:27–33), which is the template for our own baptism in the name of the three Hypostases according to St. Matthew (Matt. 28:19). We also find this doctrine in St. Paul’s blessing in 2 Cor. 13:14. The three Hypostases are also mentioned in John 14:16; Eph. 2:18; and 1 Pet. 1:21–22.

The work and titles of both our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Bible attest to their divinity.

From the Old Testament shines forth the threefold sanctification of “Holy, Holy, Holy,” found in the vision of Isaiah (6:3); and its connection to the phrase “who will go for Us?” (6:8). The three Hypostases are also evident in the Bible’s frequent use of the plural form of the name “Elohim” (plural) for God, sometimes even connecting it to God’s oneness: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord (*Jehovah*) our God (*Elohim*; plural), the Lord (*Jehovah*) is one” (Deut. 6:4). It is also used in certain phrases such as “And God (*Elohim*; plural) said ‘Let Us make man in Our image’” (Gen. 1:26), and again “Let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech” (Gen. 11:7).

The Old Testament prepared the world to believe in the Holy Trinity, but it did not expressly reveal the Trinity since most of the gentiles of the time were deeply mired in polytheism (the belief in many gods). The Israelites were drawn towards idolatry, and at times, worshipped the pagan gods and fell into their abominations, even after their victory over these same gentiles.

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<sup>360</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 31.25–26 (NPNF II/7:325–326; PG 36:161).

God was preparing His people Israel for the incarnation of the Word of God among the Jews, who feared the Lord more than the tribes that surrounded them. Israel was distinguished in the Old Testament by the appearance of many pure and God-fearing people, as well as its many prophets who communicated divine revelations concerning the coming of the Savior of the world.

### **181. Why does the Old Testament focus on the Hypostasis of the Father?**

The Old Testament emphasizes the love and compassion of God the Father for those who fear Him. It says, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him ... As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:11, 13). God is described as a father to the people of Israel (Deut. 32:6; Mal. 2:10; Isa. 63:16; 64:8); not because He neglects the gentiles, but because he was preparing the whole world to receive the incarnate Word of God, the Savior of the world.

We cannot deny that some gentiles were concerned for the salvation of their souls, such as Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite harlot; both of whom appear in the genealogy of the Lord Christ (Matt. 1:5). The former is a symbol of gentile acceptance of faith in the Savior; and the latter is a symbol of opening the door to the salvation of sinners who come return to the Lord, believe in the Savior, and become members in the Church.

As for the New Testament, God the Father proclaims that He is the Father of all those who accept Him and believe in Him, without distinction between Jews and other peoples. As they return to their Father, they hear His voice, saying, “for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24). Thus, the New Testament reveals the mystery of the Holy Trinity to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles.

### **182. What does the New Testament teach about the Holy Trinity being of one essence?**

At the Archangel Gabriel’s Annunciation to St. Mary, he said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

At the baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity was clearly revealed. He who was baptized was the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased; the Father testified of Him from heaven; and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Matt. 3:16–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:22).

At the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor before the disciples Peter, James, and John, the Holy Spirit appeared as a bright cloud; and the Father testified: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5).

In His parting prayer, the Lord Christ spoke of the Holy Spirit as another Helper, whom He would send from the Father (John 14:16–17, 26).

In the last commandment that the Lord Christ gave to His disciples before the Ascension, He proclaimed to them the oneness of the essence of God, commanding them to baptize believers in the name (not in the names) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19–20).

The three Hypostases have equal knowledge because they are one essence.

The first ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325 A.D. resolved, after inquiring into the Holy Bible and the tradition the Church, that Jesus Christ is “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten not created; of one essence with the Father” (the Creed of Faith).

**183. How can we accept the Trinitarian faith if the God’s divine nature is simple? Does Trinitarian faith contradict divine unitary simplicity?**

Some accuse Christianity of lacking simplicity; in other words, they accuse it of complexity because it believes in three Hypostases in one divine essence. They see this doctrine as liable to being interpreted as a kind of polytheism, and so claim that it is unnecessary. However, we note that most religions that reject this doctrine and believe in one absolute God do themselves believe in many divine mysteries that the mind cannot comprehend. They speak of God’s hands, face, throne, etc., despite their common belief that God is a simple Spirit with no body and therefore incapable of physically resting on a throne. Further, they accept these expressions and consider them to be mysteries although their use is liable to misinterpretation. In the same vein, we say that our faith in the Holy Trinity is a mystery revealed by God Himself to humanity. Only through divine grace can the human mind comprehend it and recognize that it confirms the oneness of God and makes sense of it.

Trinitarian faith in no way no way contradicts divine simplicity; on the contrary, to deny this faith is to distort divine simplicity, for the following reasons:

Many religions believe that the word of God is eternal, for God cannot exist without His Word, even before time began (John 1:1). Indeed, some religions even hold that the very words and letters that comprise the word of God are themselves eternal. Without the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in one divine essence, the eternity of the words of God and His sayings would mean that God’s nature is not simple, since He must be eternally united with His words. But according to our faith, the Word of God is not “external” to God; it is His eternal Word, born of Him as light is born of light, existing with Him in the selfsame essence. That is, the Word is one with the Father in divine essence (*ousia*).

Many non-Christians believe that the word of God is co-eternal with Him; that it is revealed to the prophets as a sign of God’s love for humanity; and that this word does not conflict with divine simplicity. We say that the Word “the Logos” is not outside God, but is one with Him eternally. God is not like a human being; He is an eternal being, and therefore,

His Word “the Logos” co-exists eternally with the Father, like a ray of light. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “But God’s Word is one and the same, and, as it is written, ‘The Word of God endures for ever’ (Ps. 119:89), not changed, not before or after other, but existing the same always.”<sup>361</sup>

Trinitarian faith does not contradict divine simplicity for we believe not in three divine essences, but in one divine essence. To help make sense of this divine mystery, we can say that the divine essence has truly existed from eternity. This is an existence that is rational and eternal; that is, existence characterized by *mind*, or *wisdom*, or *Logos* emanating from its own being rather than being external to it; having no independent divine essence. Therefore, when we call the divine being “Father,” and we call the Word “Son,” we affirm that the Son is the Word of God, so that no one can misuse the two titles, as if the Father and the Son have two separate essences or think that we believe in two distinct gods; for we believe in One God. Divine simplicity cannot mean the existence of God without His Word or His mind or His wisdom. How could God exist without His mind!

On this topic, **Athenagoras**,<sup>362</sup> the dean of the School of Alexandria, says that the eternal God has a mind (*logikos*), the Logos, existing in Him eternal; so the Son as the Logos did not come into existence but is co-eternal with the Father.

This divine being, “the Father,” is an eternal being. Life proceeds from Him; it is not something independent of Him. While His “being” is distinct from His “life,” they are not independent of each other, nor do they have two distinct divine essences, because “life” is specific to being itself. **St. Dionysius of Alexandria** says that it is necessary to believe in the living, rational divine Being; one essence, simple and eternal, because the Trinity is inseparable and none existed before the others. They are like fire that has flames, light, and heat at the same time. “Thus then we extend the Monad indivisibly into the Triad, and conversely gather together the Triad without diminution into the Monad.”<sup>363</sup>

God is unique in every respect. Even when the Bible speaks of Him as the “One God,” this does not mean He is subject to mathematical rules, for He cannot be limited like that. In other words, we need to understand the word “one” here is not a number among other numbers but means an unutterable “monad.” We cannot seek to understand this oneness or think of it as a kind of counting; that would be to make God a kind of material being who can be confined within a number. Hence, Athenagoras<sup>364</sup> says that God is one, but not in the way that a human being is an individual; created, mortal, composite, and divisible (into parts). God is neither born nor variable nor divisible; He is not composed of parts. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “God is one, and He is more than one, beyond unity.”<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.36 (NPNF II/4:368).

<sup>362</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 10 (ANF 2:133).

<sup>363</sup> Cf. St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Defence of Dionysius* 17 (NPNF II/4:182).

<sup>364</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 8 (ANF 2:132–133).

<sup>365</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.8.71 (FOTC 23:63).

#### **184. Which verses are used by those who deny the divinity of Christ?**

Jesus says, “For My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), because He was embodied and took the form of a slave.

The apostle Paul says, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6–8).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). This expression does not imply that the Son depends on the Father because He is inferior to the Father. Rather, it reveals their equality and the harmony of their cooperation together, the unity of their will, and the unity of their authority in all things. They share one essence with the Holy Spirit, with whom they cooperate in action.

The Lord Christ says, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). This expression does not refute the equality of the Father and the Son, because the phrase, “the only true God” excludes false gods, not the Son.

The Lord Christ refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” (Matt. 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; etc.) because He wants to affirm that He had indeed become human; contrary to those among the Gnostics who claimed that He had no real body, but only appeared to have a body.

The apostle Paul says, “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). He did not say, “The firstborn of those who were created.” Rather, “firstborn” refers here to His birth from the Father before all creation.

#### **185. How could the eternal God be Love before He created anything to love?**

How could God have been the Creator, and Love, and the Peacemaker for all eternity, *before* He created the universe? Can He possess these attributes before He created the world? The answer of some intellectuals who do not believe in the Holy Trinity is this: God always has these titles and characteristics *potentially* but not in actuality; only after the creation does He have them *actually*. This would mean, on their view, that creation was necessary for the divine attributes of love, peace, mercy, etc., to become actually realized — to become actions rather than just the potential to act.

The Trinitarian doctrine of three Hypostases in one divine essence renders this problem easy to solve: all these characteristics reduce to a single attribute — “love.” Out of love, God created the heavenly and earthly beings. God is merciful, and a peacemaker, and compassionate, etc., because He loves humanity. The Holy Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8); endless love. The Father has always loved the Son, and there was no time when the

Father did not actually love the Son. Thus, as a divine characteristic, love is timeless and eternal both potentially and actually. Love is God, who has loved from before the ages, and will love forever. He has no need of the creation to reveal His characteristics. Our Lord Jesus spoke to His eternal Father, saying, **“for You loved Me before the foundation of the world”** (John 17:24).

The relationship between the eternal and absolute Holy Trinity is revealed to us in God’s dealings with us, especially through His work of salvation. Before surrendering Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed to the Father for our sake, saying, “as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us ... And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one ... And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, **that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them**” (John 17:21–26).

Without Trinitarian faith, if we say that God is love from before the ages, we are bound to attribute selfishness to Him — that He loved Himself, since there was no other to love — God forbid! The same holds true for peace, for we would have to ask, **“with whom was God at peace before the ages?”** In this way, we find that many questions have no answer without the doctrine that God is a Holy Trinity in one divine essence.

This Trinitarian doctrine is founded upon a scriptural understanding of the essence of God who is love. God is not one by being distinguished or isolated from others. The Father exists together with the other two Hypostases in one essence. We must distinguish between “one” in the sense of being distinct from others, and “one” in the sense of singularity. **Trinitarian doctrine does not speak of God in terms of a oneness of absolute material individuation, nor does it speak of three separate beings; it speaks of one essence, eternally active both within and without to unite its Hypostases.**

### **186. How can God have a Son?**

Every active essence must generate something. Fire gives birth to light and radiates heat. A radioactive element gives off nuclear radiation. A healthy human mind generates wise thoughts. Therefore, God cannot be an inert being, for the Son is born of Him from before the ages; He is light born of light. **Light that does not give birth to light is darkness!**<sup>366</sup>

**St. Dionysius of Alexandria** says, “But being the brightness of light eternal [cf. Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15], certainly He is Himself eternal; for as the light exists always, it is evident that the brightness [the Son] must exist always as well. For it is by the fact of its shining that the existence of light is perceived, and there cannot be light that does not give light ... The brightness then lies before Him eternally, and is with Him without beginning and ever-begotten, shining in His Presence, being that Wisdom which said, ‘I was that wherein he

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<sup>366</sup> H. E. Metropolitan Pishoy, *Article on ‘Trinity.’*



rejoiced, and daily I was glad in his presence at all times' (Prov. 8:30)' ... The Father then being eternal, the Son is eternal, being Light of Light."<sup>367</sup>

And **Pope Athanasius of Alexandria** says, "For if the Divine Essence be not fruitful itself, but barren, as they hold, as a light that lightens not, and a dry fountain, are they not ashamed to speak of His possessing framing energy? and whereas they deny what is by nature, do they not blush to place before it what is by will? ... His framing Word [is] not external, but proper to Him ... If He has the power of will, and His will is effective, and suffices for the consistence of the things that come to be, and His Word is effective, and a Framer, that Word must surely be the living Will of the Father, and an essential energy, and a real Word, in whom all things both consist and are excellently governed."<sup>368</sup>

And the scholar **Origen** asks, "How else should one understand the 'eternal light' except as referring to God the Father? But he, inasmuch as he is the light, never existed at a time when his radiance (cf. Heb. 1:3) was not present with him—for a light without its radiance could never be conceived, which, if it is true, then there never was a time when the Son did not exist."<sup>369</sup>

The eternal birth of the Son from the Father reveals the nature of the existent, loving God; who in His infinite love, gives birth to the Son, bestowing upon Him His own divine essence, since they are one. This is a unique love — that "I Am" (the One who is existence) bestows His own essence. This vast love was revealed to us, **but only within the limits of what is appropriate to us.**

The second Hypostasis is called the "Son" to affirm His oneness of essence with the Father. And lest it be misunderstood to imply separation from the Father — as if there were two essences and two gods — He is called His "Word" and His "Wisdom." By this, we understand His Sonship in a non-human sense.

**St. Athanasius** says, "As we said above, so now we repeat, that the divine generation must not be compared to the nature of men, nor the Son considered to be part of God, nor the generation to imply any passion whatever; God is not as man; for men beget with pain, having a transitive nature, which waits for periods by reason of its weakness. But with God this cannot be; for He is not composed of parts, but being impassible and simple, He is impassibly and indivisibly Father of the Son. This again is strongly evidenced and proved by divine Scripture. For the Word of God is His Son, and the Son is the Father's Word and Wisdom; and Word and Wisdom is neither creature nor part of Him whose Word He is, nor an offspring begotten with pain. Uniting then the two titles, Scripture speaks of 'Son,' in order to herald the natural and true offspring of His essence; and, on the other hand, that none may think of

<sup>367</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Defence of Dionysius* 15 (NPNF II/4:182).

<sup>368</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.2 (NPNF II/4:349).

<sup>369</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Hebrews* (lost); fragment quoted in St. Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 50 (FOTC 120:56).

the Offspring humanly, while signifying His essence, it also calls Him Word, Wisdom, and Radiance; to teach us that the generation was impassible, and eternal, and worthy of God.”<sup>370</sup>

It is wrong for us look at God through the lens of material reality. He is not a human being or a created being. When we speak of the Father and the Son, we do not mean that God married and gave birth to another God, since there is no physiological reproduction in the essence of God.

The Son is born of the Father as rays of light are born of the sun, or as the mind is born of the human soul, or as brightness is born of light. Yet even these and other examples are inadequate to express what is divine.

### **187. How can we understand the oneness of the Holy Trinity?**

The oneness of the Holy Trinity is unique. It is not a mixture, as happens with liquids or materials; nor is it like the unity of the human body and soul; nor is it like the union of the divinity of Christ with His humanity. Each of the three Hypostases fills the other two and is contained within them, and yet remains distinct from them.

**St. Athanasius** says, “And the Son, being the proper Offspring of the Father’s Essence, reasonably says that the Father’s attributes are His own also; whence suitably and consistently with saying, ‘I and the Father are One,’ (John 10:30) He adds, ‘that you may know that I am in the Father and the Father in Me’ (John 14:10). Moreover, He has added this again, ‘He that has seen Me, has seen the Father’ (John 14:9); and there is one and the same sense in these three passages. For he who in this sense understands that the Son and the Father are one, knows that He is in the Father and the Father in the Son; for the Godhead of the Son is the Father’s, and it is in the Son ... the fulness of the Father’s Godhead is the Being of the Son, and the Son is whole God ... the Godhead and the Form of the Son is none other’s than the Father’s, this is what He says, ‘I in the Father.’ Thus ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19); for the propriety of the Father’s Essence is that Son, in whom the creation was then reconciled with God.”<sup>371</sup>

He also says, “For the holy and blessed Triad is indivisible and one in itself. **When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son.** If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word. For there is from the Father one grace which is fulfilled through the Son in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>372</sup>

**St. Hilary of Poitiers** says of the oneness of the Holy Trinity: “He commanded them to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that is, in the confession of

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<sup>370</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1:28 (NPNF II/4:322) amended. See also *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 17 (NPNF II/4:160–161).

<sup>371</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.23.5 (NPNF II/4:395–396).

<sup>372</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland, (Epworth Press, 1951), Epistle 1:14: pp. 93–94.

the Origin, the Only-begotten, and the Gift. There is one source of all. God the Father is one from whom are all things; and our Lord Jesus Christ is one through whom are all things [1 Cor. 8:6]; and the Holy Spirit is one, the gift in all things [Eph. 4:4]. Everything is arranged, therefore, according to its power and merits. There is one Power from whom are all things, one Offspring through whom are all things, and one Gift of perfect hope. Nor will anything be found wanting to a perfection so great within which there is found in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: infinity in the Eternal, the form in the Image, and the use in the Gift.”<sup>373</sup>

### 188. Does the Son have a will that can contradict the will of the Father?

On the divine will and unity of the Holy Trinity, G. L. Prestige says, “Origen<sup>374</sup> observes that the will of God is present in the will of the Son, and the will of the Son is undeviating from the will of the Father, so that there are no longer two wills but one will, which single will provides the reason for our Lord’s assertion that ‘I and the Father are one.’ He repeats<sup>375</sup> that the Father and the Son are two ‘things’ (*pragmata*) in objectivity, but one in consent and harmony and identity of purpose. Athanasius<sup>376</sup> follows Origen in maintaining the position that there is one will which proceeds from the Father and is in the Son, so that from this fact the Son may be seen in the Father and the Father in the Son.”<sup>377</sup>

G. L. Prestige also says, “As God is one in will, so is He one in operation or ‘energy.’ This doctrine goes back to Athanasius, where it forms part of his proof of the deity of the Holy Spirit. Thus he argues at some length<sup>378</sup> that, since the Father is light and the Son is the radiance from that light, the Holy Spirit, being the agent by the reception of whom mankind receives its enlightenment, must be discernible in the Son; when, therefore, we are enlightened by the Spirit, it is Christ who in Him enlightens us, since St. John has said that it is Christ who is the true light that enlightens every man. Similarly, the Father is the source and the Son is called the river that flows from that source, yet the Scripture says that we drink of the Spirit, because in drinking of the Spirit we drink Christ: and again Christ is the true Son, but it is through receiving the Spirit that we are made sons and have received the Spirit of adopted sonship. So he concludes<sup>379</sup> that there is a holy and perfect triad expressed in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, which contains nothing foreign or derived from an external source; its nature is self-consistent (literally, ‘similar to itself’) and indivisible, and its ‘energy’ is one; for the Father acts invariably through the Word in the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy triad is preserved, and so one God is preached in the Church, who is over

<sup>373</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.1 (FOTC 25:35–36).

<sup>374</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 13–32) 13.228 (FOTC 89:115).

<sup>375</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.12 (ANF 4:644).

<sup>376</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.66 (NPNF II/4:430).

<sup>377</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (London: SPCK, 1936): p. 256.

<sup>378</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland, (Epworth Press, 1951), Epistle 1:19: pp. 108–113.

<sup>379</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland, (Epworth Press, 1951), Epistle 1:28: pp. 133–136.

all and through all and in all; over all, as Father, the arche and fount; through all, through the Word; and in all, in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>380</sup>

**St. Didymus of Alexandria** defends the one will of the Holy Trinity.<sup>381</sup> And **St. Cyril**<sup>382</sup> affirms the unity of the work of the Holy Trinity: “the Father works, but through the Son in the Spirit; and the Son works, but as the power of the Father, since His individual [hypostatic] being is from the Father and in the Father; and the Spirit works, because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, universally active.”<sup>383</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “The one who gives the divine Spirit, the Life-Giver, is the Son born of God, who shares life, and receives the divine nature, the Word, from the Father; in whom are the Son and life-giving Spirit, and the latter creates life for those who partake of Him.”<sup>384</sup>

“In the one divine nature, the three distinct Hypostasis unite in a single sublime beauty; and we too are molded by accepting the seal of the Son in the Spirit.”<sup>385</sup>

“Thanks to the Spirit, who molds us according to the beauty of the divine exalted Son, so that we partake of the divine nature.”<sup>386</sup>

“The Son endows us with the perfection of the aroma of the One who begat Him (the Father). By Him and in Him we receive the aroma of the knowledge of God, and are enriched by it.”<sup>387</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** says, “who, as regards His greatness, is indeed unknown to all who have been made by Him ... but as regards His love, He is always known through Him by whose means He ordained all things. Now this is His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ ... in order that man, having embraced the Spirit of God, might pass into the glory of the Father.”<sup>388</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “with absolutely no exceptions, the Son has the same will that the Father has.”<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (London: SPCK, 1936): pp. 257–258.

<sup>381</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *De Trinitate* 2:1 (PG 39:448–454).

<sup>382</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* Dialogus 6 (PG 75:1053–1056 [618]); see also his *Commentary on St. John*, vol. 2, 10.2 (on John 15:1): pp. 363–375.

<sup>383</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (London: SPCK, 1936): pp. 261–262.

<sup>384</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* Dialogus 5 (PG 75:964B).

<sup>385</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* Dialogus 5 (PG 75:964B).

<sup>386</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* Dialogus 3 (PG 75:837C).

<sup>387</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* Dialogus 3 (PG 75:856C).

<sup>388</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 4.20.4 (ANF 1:488; PG 7:1034B).

<sup>389</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 2.6.51 (NPNF II/10:230) amended.

### 189. How does Trinitarian faith affect our daily life?

Faith plays an essential role in our worship, our way of thinking, our desires, and our behavior. Here are some examples:

We must distinguish between the Trinitarian monotheism of the Christian faith on the one hand, and the absolute monotheism that arose in response to polytheism on the other. It is possible that the belief in many gods who were constantly in conflict with each other arose as a projection of people's sense of the internal conflict within themselves, within their own lives, and with others. In the Old Testament, the concept of monotheism was the remedy that prevented people from falling into the error of polytheism. But if monotheism is understood in isolation from Trinitarianism, God appears to be hard and fearful, and absolute in His character. Such a faith engenders a kind of "isolated individualism." If a person looks to God as His ideal, he finds only One who is immovable, unapproachable, and inactive, dwelling in His unreachable heaven. On the other hand, Trinitarian monotheism offers the faithful the concept of God as "loving unity," which inspires us to practice love ourselves, according to the pattern of the Holy Trinity, through God's work in us.

In this mystery we learn of "Fatherhood and Sonship" in their ultimate sense. The Son is begotten of the Father as the light is born out of light, sharing His own essence with Him. This unique relationship is found nowhere except in God—the Father and the Son are one simple essence. Through this relationship, we are able to be adopted by God, and **we receive the Father as our Father through our union with Him in His Only Begotten Son**. This mystery makes our relationship with God not the narrow, restricted relationship of a master and slave; but the relationship of a Father embracing His children (Rom. 8:15–23; Eph. 5:1).

Through this new relationship, we enjoy a dynamic divine love that never ends. We do not ask God to give us the delights or benefits of this world, or even those of the age to come; rather, we yearn for God Himself, to inherit His bosom as our eternal dwelling. In other words, **Trinitarian faith transforms the nature of our relationship with God from a transaction of self-interest into a communion of mutual love**.

Trinitarian faith gives us a broader understanding of perfection. Some ask: How can the Father be perfect or self-sufficient in His attributes, yet also inseparable from the Son and the Holy Spirit (that is, that They share His attributes)? Likewise also of the Son and the Holy Spirit. We answer that true perfection is not defined by self-contained self-sufficiency, but by the eternal dynamic of love in God and His infinite mutual internal relationships.

A person does not attain perfection by glorifying himself or by being sufficient in himself, but through a loving unity with others. The perfect person is not the one who feeds the ego for the sake of acquiring vainglory and his own profit; it is the one who loves others and receives their love asking nothing in return.

Trinitarian faith permeates all human life, including worship:

In the Old Testament, the faithful were not yet able to receive a truly monotheistic Trinitarian faith. This inability influenced their worship; they saw God as an unapproachable Being, to be worshipped lest He be angry with them. In the New Testament, when the faithful received the Trinitarian faith, they became acquainted with the God who declares His love by embracing humanity and sweeping them up into His Fatherly embrace to enjoy His mysteries and partake of His glory. Now, humans no longer serve God mechanically like robots, but rather have become beloved children who enjoy His divine mysteries.

Trinitarian faith uproots all the seeds of selfishness. When we offer up our prayers, faith draws us to the Holy Trinity, to sublime love; and so we pray for the salvation of all humanity with a heart wide open.

Trinitarian faith has an effect even on our social life. If we choose marriage, we hope our family becomes an icon of Trinitarian love. The believer finds happiness in the happiness of others and behaves as a member of a body striving for the good of the family as a whole. Approached in this way, family becomes a communion of true love, in which every member yearns to give, not to take. On the other hand, if we choose the monastic life, we offer a heart wide open to the entire Church, and indeed, to the entire world. This is what we proclaim through our continuous worship and our constant prayers for all human beings.

#### **190. What analogies of the Holy Trinity did the Fathers use?**

The Fathers explored this mystery that no human language can express. There is no being in nature that is one essence in three distinct hypostases. When we use any analogy for the mystery of the Holy Trinity, we must acknowledge up front that it cannot be anything other than imperfect, capturing some aspects but not others, in order that our minds may be able to comprehend. We cannot approach this mystery without the divine grace that grants us to partake of the Holy Trinity; the communion with the Father, by His Son, through the Holy Spirit. Here are a few patristic analogies of the Holy Trinity:

**Human beings are created in the image of God** (Gen. 1:27; 2:5). A person exists as a rational and living soul. The soul is one, yet its reasoning mind and its life are distinct from each other. Nonetheless, these three entities — soul, mind, and life — cannot be separated from each other.

God promised to protect His Church, saying, “And I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be glory in her midst” (Zech. 2:5). **Fire has three intrinsic properties that resemble the Hypostases: flames; and the light and heat that are emitted from them;** but they are not hypostases, because no one of them fills the others. Through the light and the heat we can come to know the fire.

**The sun exists as a star, and it emits rays of light and radiates heat; yet it is one sun.** The star itself is called the sun, its rays are called the sun, and its heat is called the sun as well.

God is like an apple, as it is said: “Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons” (Song 2:3). **The apple has three properties: the physical material we eat; its taste; and its smell,** and we can know the apple from its taste or smell.

### 191. How do we understand the Hypostatic characteristics?

God, who is simple in His essence, is three Hypostases in one essence. The Hypostasis of the Father bestows on us His fatherhood through our union with His Only Begotten Son, who is Son by nature. Thus, we are granted to be His children by divine grace; we experience the fatherhood of the Father that befits us as His children; and we partake of the Sonship of the Son that grants us the right to be adopted by the Father. The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father, makes it possible for us to be the children of the Father, and sanctifies and renews us constantly, so that we become an icon of the Son, beloved of the Father. Thus does the Holy Trinity work in us constantly to prepare us for everlasting inheritance and everlasting eternal life.

If the three Hypostases are of one essence, then the hypostatic characteristics of any one Hypostasis cannot isolate it from the other two. The Hypostases are not three parts that are assembled together to make up the one essence, but three ways of existing eternally. The Father is the unbegotten Source; the Son is begotten of the Father eternally; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father eternally. These three expressions — source, begetting, and procession — are not to be understood in a material or human sense. The Father is a Father eternally and never existed without the Son. The Son is not inferior the Father because He is begotten of Him; He is Light born of Light. This eternal begetting and eternal procession are unique to God.

Some have translated the words “proceeds from ...” as “issues from ...” or “radiates from ...” But there was never a time when the Father was without the Son or the Holy Spirit. This begetting and this procession from the Father did not occur at some moment in time. The Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from Him without ever being separate from the Father.

The Son is not a part of the Father but is His complete and perfect image; He is the brilliance of the Father. Therefore, the Son is called the *Logos* or the Word of the divine Mind. He is said to be the brilliance of the Father, the Father’s glory that we behold, but without ever being separate from Him.

The begetting of the Son was not a matter of will, but of eternal divine nature. This does not mean that the Father does not will the Son to be, but that His begetting just is the eternal divine nature, for the Father eternally loves the Son (John 3:35). Thus, this characteristic of love in God has no need of any external object of that love. God is love, even before He created the heavens and the earth.

It is beyond us to comprehend how brilliance is begotten from light. How much less can our human minds comprehend how the Son is eternally begotten of the Father! And what we say about the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father, we say also of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father.

### **192. How do the Hypostatic characteristics constitute the divine essence?**

Hypostatic characteristics reveal the relationship between the three Hypostases —that there is no separation between any one and the other two — while at the same time clearly distinguishing each Hypostasis. It cannot be said that the Father is a Son or a Holy Spirit, etc. That would be to fall into Sabellianism, the heresy of Sabellius, which claimed that God the Father Himself appeared by taking the form of the Son to perform the work of salvation, and takes the form of the Holy Spirit in the performance of baptism. In Sabellius’ view, the three Hypostases are nothing more than three modes of appearance of a single Hypostasis.

In saying that there are three Hypostases in one essence, we are certainly not saying that each Hypostasis is one part, which, put together with the other parts, makes up the one divine essence. Each Hypostasis is complete in itself — not a part of an essence — and inseparable from the other two distinct Hypostases.

### **193. What are the essential characteristics shared by the Holy Trinity? And what are the specific characteristics of each Hypostasis?**

The three Hypostases have some characteristics that they share in common, such as the characteristic of having no beginning or end. All three Hypostases are characterized by being loving, good, holy, creative, divinely caring, all-powerful, everywhere present, indescribable, all-knowing, etc.

Of the characteristics of each Hypostasis, **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “the specific distinctive feature observed in them is not confused in the case of each of the hypostases, nor are the identifying signs swapped among them, such that the mark of the paternal hypostasis is transferred to the Son or the Spirit ... Proper to the Father is to exist from no cause; one cannot perceive the same in the case of the Son and the Spirit. For the Son ‘comes from the Father’ as the scripture says (John 16:28), and the Spirit is ‘from God’ (1 Cor. 2:12) and ‘proceeds from the Father’ (John 15:26).”<sup>390</sup> There is no separation of one Hypostasis from the other two Hypostases, because the essence is one.

**St. Epiphanius** uses the phrase, “And the Spirit, is the one ‘proceeding from the Father’ (John 15:26) and ‘receiving from the Son’ (John 16:14) ... the Holy Spirit from the same

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<sup>390</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Our Father, An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*. Eds., Matthieu Cassin, Hélène Grelier-Deneux, Françoise Vinel. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 168. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2021) Homily 3: p. 135.



ousia of the Father and Son.”<sup>391</sup> **St. Gregory of Nyssa** also uses the same phrase: “‘proceeding from the Father,’ ‘receiving from the Son.’”<sup>392</sup>

#### 194. Who is the Father?

Prof. Maximos Aghiorgoussis says “He is not a blind ‘supernatural force;’ nor is He the God of the philosophers, ‘the prime mover that moves everything but remains itself unmoved’ (Aristotle); nor the immaterial ideal form (Plato). He is God manifest as a Person, Creator and Manager of the world, and especially of human beings. He is a compassionate Father to His sons and daughters, who enters into a covenant with them as their God, and they become His chosen people.”

Although the early theologians of Alexandria spoke of God's immutability and transcendence above human emotions,<sup>393</sup> they often spoke of His true Fatherhood, experienced through a love that cannot be expressed in human language, as if He had human feelings and emotions. The scholar **Origen** says “The Father himself too—the God of the universe—who is ‘long-suffering and very merciful’ and one who pities—does he not suffer in some way? Or are you unaware that when he manages human affairs, he suffers human passion? For ‘the Lord your God sustained’ your ways, ‘just as if a man were to sustain his own son’ (Deut. 1:31).”<sup>394</sup>

#### 195. Who is the Logos or Son?

For Christians of Jewish origin, Jesus is the Savior of the whole world from sin. **St. Clement of Alexandria** presents our Lord as “Jesus, who heals both our body and soul.”<sup>395</sup> He is the skillful divine Physician who alone can save us from the consequences of sin.

Some may ask: was it necessary for the Word of God Himself to become incarnate in order to redeem us and heal our human nature?

By disobedience, man chose death (see Gen. 2:17) instead of life. God taught Adam the ritual of animal sacrifice as a sign of the need to shed blood for his salvation (Heb. 10:2). That was a symbol of the unique sacrifice of our Lord Jesus.

It was necessary for our salvation that the Word of God Himself should be incarnate and die for us, not only because He alone is able to fulfill divine justice; but also because being

<sup>391</sup> St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Ancoratus* 7.1, 7.8 (FOTC 128:69, 71).

<sup>392</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit: Against the Followers of Macedonius* 10 (NPNF II/5:319).

<sup>393</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.4.4 (ANF 4:277–278) and *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) Homily 16.3: p. 92.

<sup>394</sup> *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel, the Fourteen Homilies and the Greek Fragments of the Homilies, Commentaries and Scholia. Text and Translation*, trans., Mischa Hooker, ed., Roger Pearse, (Ipswich: Chieftan Publishing, 2014) Homily 6.6: p. 195.

<sup>395</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3:12 (ANF 2:295).

the Creator, He can renew our human nature. He is the almighty God who gives us victory over death and evil spirits; and He is the Heavenly One who can raise us up to His heavens to inherit eternal glory as children of God (Rom. 8:15, 21; 9:4) and become the likeness of God.

Christ is Lord. His nature or essence is one and the same nature or essence as the Father.<sup>396</sup> The Son is eternal; His birth from the Father is without beginning. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The Father is not without a Son, but He is co-existent with Him; He is the Father of the Son.”<sup>397</sup> The Son is one in essence with the Father for He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.<sup>398</sup>

Regarding the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, the Alexandrian tradition insisted on affirming the oneness of the Lord, confirming the true unity between divinity and humanity without separation or fusion.<sup>399</sup>

The divine Teacher, in His unbounded love for the believer, participates in his life and cares for even the least of his concerns. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “For, just as the sun not only illumines heaven and the whole world, shining over land and sea, but also through windows and small chinks sends his beams into the innermost recesses of houses, so the Word diffused everywhere casts His eye-glance on the minutest circumstances of the actions of life.”<sup>400</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says that the Son is begotten of the Father, not by a process of division, but in the same way that the will is born of intellect. He says, “the only-begotten Son of God is His wisdom hypostatically existing ... who that is capable of entertaining reverential thoughts or feelings regarding God, can suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a moment of time, without having generated this Wisdom? ... therefore we must believe that Wisdom was generated before any beginning that can be either comprehended or expressed ... we understand [Wisdom] to be the Word of God, because of her disclosing to all other beings, i.e., to universal creation, the nature of the mysteries and secrets which are contained within the divine wisdom; and on this account **she is called the Word, because she is, as it were, the interpreter of the secrets of the mind** ... But it is monstrous and unlawful to compare God the Father, in the generation of His only-begotten Son, and in the substance of the same, to any man or other living thing engaged in such an act; for we must of necessity hold that there is something exceptional and worthy of God which does not admit of any comparison at all, not merely in things, but which cannot even be conceived by thought or discovered by perception, so that a human mind should be able

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<sup>396</sup> See Richardson, Alan, *Creeds in the Making: A short introduction to the history of Christian doctrine*, (London: SCM, 1979): pp. 54–55.

<sup>397</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.162.5; 5.1.3; 7.5.5 (ANF 2).

<sup>398</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.24.3; 1.53.1; 1.62.4; 1.71.3; 3.101.1 (ANF 2).

<sup>399</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church*, ed., Maryrose Halim, (1986).

<sup>400</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 7.3 (ANF 2:528).

to apprehend how the unbegotten God is made the Father of the only-begotten Son. Because His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that He is made a Son, by any outward act, but by His own nature ... And we must be careful not to fall into the absurdities of those who picture to themselves certain emanations, so as to divide the divine nature into parts, and who divide God the Father ... Rather, therefore, as an act of the will proceeds from the understanding, and neither cuts off any part nor is separated or divided from it, so after some such fashion is the Father to be supposed as having begotten the Son.”<sup>401</sup>

### 196. Is it possible to separate the Father from the Son?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “For the name of the Father, with the very utterance of the title, suggests the thought of the Son: as in like manner one who names the Son thinks straightway of the Father also.<sup>402</sup> For if a Father, He is certainly the Father of a Son; and if a Son, certainly the Son of a Father. Lest therefore from our speaking thus [in the Creed], ‘In One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of All Things Visible and Invisible,’ and from our then adding this also, ‘And in One Lord Jesus Christ,’ any one should irreverently suppose that the Only-begotten is second in rank to heaven and earth,—for this reason before naming them we named God the Father, that in thinking of the Father we might at the same time think also of the Son: for between the Son and the Father no being whatever comes.”<sup>403</sup>

### 197. Does the Son see the Father in His perfection?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “We believe then In One God the Father the Unsearchable and Ineffable, *Whom no man has seen* (1 Tim. 2:16), *but the Only-begotten alone has declared Him* (John 1:18). *For He who is of God, He has seen God* (John 6:46): whose face the Angels always behold in heaven (Matt. 18:10), behold, however, each according to the measure of his own rank. But the undimmed vision of the Father [in His perfection] is reserved in its purity for the Son with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>404</sup>

He also says, “And again on hearing of a ‘Son,’ think not of an adopted son but a Son by nature, an Only-begotten Son, having no brother. For this is the reason why He is called ‘Only-begotten,’ because in the dignity of the Godhead, and His generation from the Father, He has no brother. But we call Him the Son of God, not of ourselves, but because the Father Himself named Christ [and no one else] His Son: and a true name is that which is set by

<sup>401</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1.2.2–6 (ANF 4:246–248).

<sup>402</sup> Compare Athanasius (*de Sententiâ Dionyssii*, § 17): “Each of the names I have mentioned is inseparable and indivisible from that next to it. I spoke of the Father, and before bringing in the Son, I designated Him also in the Father. I brought in the Son, and even if I had not previously mentioned the Father, in any wise He would have been presupposed in the Son.”

<sup>403</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 7.4 (NPNF II/7:44–45).

<sup>404</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 7.11 (NPNF II/7:46) amended.

fathers upon their children ... Again, I say, on hearing of a Son, understand it not merely in an improper sense, but as a Son in truth, a Son by nature, without beginning; not as having come out of bondage into a higher state of adoption, but a Son eternally begotten by an inscrutable and incomprehensible generation. And in like manner on hearing of the First-born, think not that this is after the manner of men; for the first-born among men have other brothers also.”<sup>405</sup>

### **198. Does the Father command us to heed the Son?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “For the Father is indignant when the Only-begotten Son is ignored. For it is grievous to a king that merely his soldier should be dishonoured; and when one of his nobler officers or friends is dishonoured, then his anger is greatly increased: but if any should despise the king’s only-begotten son himself, who shall appease the father’s indignation on behalf of his only-begotten son?”<sup>406</sup>

### **199. What are the most important names of Christ?**

We have already spoken about some of the names of Christ in our discussion of the Creed (see above, question 114. *What does the title “the Lord Christ” mean to us?*)

### **200. Why does Isaiah call Jesus a Savior?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “There is One Lord Jesus Christ, a wondrous name, indirectly announced beforehand by the Prophets. For Isaiah the Prophet says, *Behold, your Saviour is coming, having His own reward* (Isa. 62:11). Now Jesus in Hebrew is by interpretation *Saviour*. For the Prophetic gift, foreseeing the murderous spirit of the Jews against their Lord, veiled His name, lest from knowing it plainly beforehand they might plot against Him readily. But He was openly called Jesus not by men, but by an Angel, who came not by his own authority, but was sent by the power of God, and said to Joseph, *Fear not to take unto yourself Mary your wife; for He who is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus* (Matt. 1:20). And immediately he gives the reason for this name, saying, *for He shall save His people from their sins.*”<sup>407</sup>

### **201. Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The work of Christ for salvation is the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which allows us to partake of the Father through the crucified Christ. At the same time, without the Holy Spirit, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3). And without Him,

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<sup>405</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 11.2, 4 (NPNF II/7:64–65).

<sup>406</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 10.1 (NPNF II/7:57) amended.

<sup>407</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 10.12 (NPNF II/7:60) amended.

the Church cannot have Christ as her Head. So, the Lord says, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7). Therefore, the history of the Church can only be understood as the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church was born as the body of Christ on the day of Pentecost and continues to be nourished by the Holy Spirit, who leads her, guides her, sanctifies her, and helps her in worship and evangelism; for He gives life to the body of the Church and builds it up.

For the Fathers of the Church of Alexandria, the titles given to the Holy Spirit reveal His divinity, as well as His works.

**St. Didymus** says that the One who fills all creation must be of an essence that is different to all the creation.<sup>408</sup> **St. Athanasius** says, “If the Holy Spirit were a creature, we should have no participation of God in him. If indeed we were joined to a creature, we should be strangers to the divine nature ... If he [the Holy Spirit] makes men divine, it is not to be doubted that his nature is of God.”<sup>409</sup> **St. Cyril**<sup>410</sup> says that the Holy Spirit is the One who makes sinners righteous and perfects the elect, performing that which pertains only to the exceedingly glorious divine nature. And he also says that if the Spirit who makes us gods is different from the nature of God then we would have lost all hope.<sup>411</sup>

## 202. Is the Holy Spirit a divine Hypostasis or just a force that supports believers?

St. Peter rebuked Ananias and said to him, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God**” (Acts 5:3–4).

Jesus affirmed that the Holy Spirit is a divine Hypostasis when He said, “For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:12). **St. Cyril the Great** says, “It is as if He says that He is a Teacher who lives in us.” And Christ calls Him “another Helper” (John 14:16) who “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13); for He is sent by the Son and He proceeds from the Father.

In 381 A.D. the Second Ecumenical Council convened in Constantinople to confront the heresy of Macedonius, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>408</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit* 8 (PG 39:1040) in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind*, trans., Mark DelCogliano et al., (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 29–34: pp. 152–154.

<sup>409</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans., C. R. B. Shapland, (Epworth Press, 1951) 1.24: pp. 126–127.

<sup>410</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 7 (PG 75:1101).

<sup>411</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 7 (PG 75:1089, 1097).

**203. How do we know that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father?**

Jesus says, “But when the Helper comes whom I shall send to from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father ...” (John 15:26)

**204. Why did some Fathers use the expression: “The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son?”**

This expression confirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father eternally, just as the Son is born of Him eternally. When they say “through the Son,” they do not mean that the Son is inferior to the Father, but that the Spirit proceeds from the Father as a divine Hypostasis and is sent by the Son to give enlightenment and knowledge of divine mysteries; so that by Him, we enjoy the perfection of His work of salvation through our continuous sanctification and renewal.

**205. Does the Holy Spirit work in each person according to their needs?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Great indeed, and all-powerful in gifts, and wonderful, is the Holy Spirit. Consider, how many of you are now sitting here, how many souls of us are present. He is working suitably for each, and being present in the midst, beholds the temper of each, beholds also his reasoning and his conscience, and what we say, and think, and believe. Great indeed is what I have now said, and yet is it small. For consider, I pray, with mind enlightened by Him, how many Christians there are in all this diocese, and how many in the whole province of Palestine, and carry forward your mind from this province, to the whole Roman Empire; and after this, consider the whole world ... Consider, I pray, of each nation, Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons, Solitaries, Virgins, and laity besides; and then behold their great Protector, and the Dispenser of their gifts;—how throughout the world He gives to one chastity, to another perpetual virginity, to another almsgiving, to another voluntary poverty, to another power of repelling hostile spirits. And as the light, with one touch of its radiance sheds brightness on all things, so also the Holy Spirit enlightens those who have eyes; for if any from blindness is not vouchsafed His grace, let him not blame the Spirit, but his own unbelief.”<sup>412</sup>

**206. Is the Holy Spirit separate from the Father and the Son?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The Father through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, is the giver of all grace; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son, and those of the Holy Spirit; for there is one Salvation, one Power, one Faith; One God, the Father; One Lord, His only-begotten Son; One Holy Spirit, the Comforter. And it is enough for us to know these things; but do not inquire curiously into His nature or substance: for had it been

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<sup>412</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.22 (NPNF II/7:121) amended.

written, we would have spoken of it; what is not written, let us not venture on; it is sufficient for our salvation to know, that there is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>413</sup>

And **St. Cyril the Great** says, “our salvation [is] the work of One Divinity. And if we must apportion the gifts which are bestowed upon us, or those activities which They display about creation, to each person of the Trinity separately, none the less do we believe that everything proceeds from the Father by the Son in the Spirit.”<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.24 (NPNF II/7:121) amended.

<sup>414</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Volume 2 10.2 on John 15:1 (LFHCC 48:364–365; PG 74:333–336).





## 5

# The Wondrous Creator, the Guardian of the World

### Questions about Creation

It should not surprise us that the Holy Bible begins by talking about the six days of creation (Greek: *hexaemeron*, or “six days”). As **St. Basil** points out, a day here cannot mean twenty-four hours, for the sun and moon were only created on the fourth day. More likely, a day signifies an era of time whose length we do not know. And again, the Holy Bible concludes by talking about a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). Many of the early Church Fathers were concerned with contemplation of the all-loving God, the Creator who grants us His divine grace, His shepherdhood as our Lord, and guardianship of the world; who constantly works in that world, proclaiming His love, care, and plan for the creation He protects.

There are many questions we can ask about God’s relationship with His creation and His plan for it. Here are some:

Why did God not reveal to us anything about the era in which He created the heavenly hosts or the way they were created?

Why did God not reveal all the mysteries of creation?

Where does a believer stand with respect to philosophies and scientific research that concern creation?

What is the destiny of this visible world; the earth, the sun, the moon, and all the planets?

What do we mean by the expression: God the Pantocrator, the Manager of all the affairs of the world?

Does the number of hairs on a person’s head concern God (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7)?

Why did God create things that seem to be of no use; some of which are even harmful, like poisonous weeds, predators, poisonous snakes, and scorpions?

Why does God allow natural disasters to occur, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and bushfires that spread over large areas?

How do the Church Fathers interpret the six days of creation?

Is there a relationship between the days of creation and our spiritual growth?

### **207. When were the heavenly hosts created?**

The Holy Bible is not a book about the history of the world. Its sole purpose is to fulfill God's will which is full of love for us, and to support us so God's image can be restored within us, which Adam and Eve lost, and enflame our hearts with love towards Him, and help us realize that we are invited to join the heavenly choir and delight in heavenly glories. That is why the Holy Bible describes the heavenly hosts as shouting for joy when man was created (Job 38:7) in the image of God, and the angels as ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14).

### **208. What is the purpose of contemplating creation?**

**First: faith in God**, in His care for the creation, and in His fulfilling of His wise will, filled with love and goodness. The psalmist sings, saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

**St. Basil the Great** says, "If you see the heavens, he says and the order in them, they are a guide to faith, for through themselves they show the Craftsman; and, if you see the orderly arrangement about the earth, again through these things also your faith in God is increased. In fact, it is not by acquiring knowledge of God with our carnal eyes that we believe in Him, but by the power of the mind we have perceived the invisible God through visible things ... Even if you consider the stone, it also possesses a certain proof of the power of its Maker: likewise, if you consider the ant or the gnat or the bee. Frequently in the smallest objects the wisdom of the Creator shines forth. He who unfolded the heavens and poured out the boundless expanses of the seas, He it is who hollowed out the very delicate sting of the bee like a tube, so that through it the poison might be poured out ... Do not say: 'This happened by chance' and 'that occurred accidentally.' Nothing is casual, nothing indeterminate, nothing happens at random, nothing among things that exist is caused by chance."<sup>415</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** says, "For all things originate from one and the same God. But since created things are various and numerous, they are indeed well fitted and adapted to the whole creation; yet, when viewed individually, are mutually opposite and inharmonious, just as the sound of the lyre, which consists of many and opposite notes, gives rise to one unbroken melody, through means of the interval which separates each one from the others. The lover of truth therefore ought not to be deceived by the interval between each note, nor should he imagine that one was due to one artist and author, and another to another, nor that one person fitted the treble, another the bass, and yet another the tenor strings; but he should hold that one and the same person [formed the whole], so as to prove the judgment, goodness, and skill exhibited in the whole work and [specimen of] wisdom.

"Those, too, who listen to the melody, ought to praise and extol the artist, to admire the tension of some notes, to attend to the softness of others, to catch the sound of others between

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<sup>415</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms*, Homily 15.3, On Psalm 32 (33) (FOTC 46:232).

both these extremes, and to consider the special character of others, so as to inquire at what each one aims, and what is the cause of their variety, never failing to apply our rule, neither giving up the [one] artist, nor casting off faith in the one God who formed all things, nor blaspheming our Creator.”<sup>416</sup>

**Second: replying to some of the errors into which some philosophers have fallen,** such as the claim that heaven and earth came to exist spontaneously, by chance, or of themselves.<sup>417</sup> Some claimed that the world is equal to God, and co-exists with Him eternally. The followers of Mani believed that the visible, material earth and sky were created by demons and the powers of darkness; and are therefore evil by nature. And some Gnostics believed that the world was made by a creator God, the *Demiurge*; who in their view, if he is not an evil god, is still inferior to the greater being who created spirit, but not physical matter.

**Third: embarking on a journey to the depths of the soul.** **St. Basil** affirms that to study creation means to embark on a journey to the depths of the soul, where the believer may discover the world within, which is by far more wonderful than the outside world. The saint affirms that it is easier to know the invisible heavens than it is to know one’s own depths. The inward person is a private and precious world that we can only enter through the grace of the Holy Spirit of God, so that we may know our own souls and grow in the knowledge of God. The saint often spoke of the need to know one’s own self as being more important than knowing that which surrounds him or that which he possesses. **St. Basil** says, “Do not look outside yourself ... but enter into the hidden recesses of your own soul. There, once you have identified and marveled at the God whom you have learned was in the beginning ... once you have worshipped your own Master who dwells in you through this teaching ...”<sup>418</sup>

**St. Basil** often repeats that the human being is the center of the world, who finds his physical needs in the world,<sup>419</sup> and makes the world to be a school that shapes his behavior. Here are a few examples:<sup>420</sup>

Just as the sun gives light, the saints in ancient times dispersed the darkness of ignorance.<sup>421</sup>

Just as the moon waxes and wanes, so also humans can grow in virtue, then in turn, fall again.<sup>422</sup>

<sup>416</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 2.25.1–2 (ANF 1:396).

<sup>417</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 1.1 (NPNF II/8:52).

<sup>418</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Beginning of the Gospel of John* 4 (PG 31:481B) in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, trans., Mark DelCogliano, (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013): pp. 256–257.

<sup>419</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* 6, in *On Fasting and Feasts*, trans., Susan R. Holman and Mark DelCogliano, (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013): pp. 116–118.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994): p. 324.

<sup>421</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 6.2 (NPNF II/8:83).

<sup>422</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 6.10f (NPNF II/8:88).

Some animals are instinctively aware of the coming seasons and prepare for them; so also should Christians eagerly anticipate eternity.<sup>423</sup>

Animals walk bowed down, looking to the ground and to their bellies; but humans were created with their heads lifted up so they would be concerned with what is heavenly rather than what is earthly.<sup>424</sup>

In the creation, we find a school that trains us in how to deal with our fellow human beings by observing the behavior of the irrational creation.<sup>425</sup> Among the examples given by **St. Basil** we find the following:

The crow's protective behavior towards the stork; teaching us **hospitality to strangers**.<sup>426</sup>

The stork's noble treatment of its elderly parents; **teaching children their responsibility towards their parents in their old age**.<sup>427</sup>

Bats hang from each other, interlaced like a chain, **exhibiting natural love**.<sup>428</sup>

**The great fish** do not cross beyond the natural boundaries of their marine territory, set for them by nature, providing an example for those who move boundary markers in order to extort a part of their neighbor's field.<sup>429</sup>

**The queen bee has a sting**; but she does not use it to avenge herself, teaching us to be kind to others.<sup>430</sup>

After the death of the male, the female dove remains a widow, providing a model to those who seek a second marriage after the death of their spouse.<sup>431</sup>

## 209. Did the Fathers ignore the scientific studies of their time?

In studying the School of Alexandria, we saw that it mainly focused on the interpretation of the Holy Bible. But it also undertook studies in many of the scientific and philosophical fields of its time. In this same spirit, **St. Basil** presented his audience with a biblical interpretation of the creation of the world that included somewhat simplified philosophical and scientific concepts that his audience could easily follow. He could do this because of his

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<sup>423</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9.3 (NPNF II/8:103).

<sup>424</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9.2 (NPNF II/8:102).

<sup>425</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Detachment from Worldly Things* 5, in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, trans., Mark DelCogliano, (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013): pp. 170–171.

<sup>426</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8.5 (NPNF II/8:98).

<sup>427</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8.5 (NPNF II/8:98).

<sup>428</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8.7 (NPNF II/8:99).

<sup>429</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7.4 (NPNF II/8:92).

<sup>430</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8.4 (NPNF II/8:97).

<sup>431</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 8.6 (NPNF II/8:98).

own scholarly studies in Greek philosophy and science, which he used for biblical and evangelical purposes. He gave his congregation that which helped them to grow and find salvation, without neglecting the intellectual culture of his time. In this way, he strove to present them with a spiritual interpretation of the story of creation as it is found in the book of Genesis, that would enable them to encounter the Creator.

**St. Basil** used whatever he found useful from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and others. He accepted whatever was beneficial and useful for the building up of our souls.<sup>432</sup> Many scholars have occupied themselves with studies to identify the influence of Greek philosophers on **Basil's** views on cosmology (the study of the existent world).

It would be wrong to think that this saint's reliance on biblical interpretation and his refusal to rely on purely human wisdom implies any kind of rejection of scientific knowledge, whether with regard to the creation or anything else. This is especially clear when we consider that in one of his writings, he explicitly exhorts the youth to accept whatever they may find to be useful in scientific and philosophical writings.<sup>433</sup>

The continuous and swift evolution of modern knowledge shows us that those who lived thousands of years ago had much progress ahead of them; and that God has given human beings a formidable mind that constantly thirsts for knowledge. The more we uncover about the secrets of nature, the more we thirst for greater and deeper knowledge, and realize that we are still just fossicking on the shores of the great ocean of knowledge.

## **210. Do we know why God created the world, and how He created it?**

With the progress of human science and knowledge, people are constantly proposing theories about the creation, and just as quickly, they are replaced by new theories that take their place. Some of the top researchers have wondered whether there might be some unknown force that is responsible for the creation, both visible and invisible. Some of the faithful have presented evidence to the top researchers who rejected the existence of a divine Creator; some of whom, late in life, have considered the possibility that they might soon stand before the Creator when they die and leave this world, and so came to accept the words of the Holy Bible.

## **211. What do we know about the role of God in creation?**

If God created the world at a certain time, through His foreknowledge He also knew that He would create the world according to a certain plan. This He did, not out of some natural inevitability, but through His own free will; not caused by external factors, but through His

<sup>432</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9.1 (NPNF II/8:101–102).

<sup>433</sup> See St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters IV and Address to the Young Men on Greek Literature*, trans., Roy Joseph Deferarri and Martin R. P. McGuire, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934): pp. 363ff.

infinite goodness, His divine love, wisdom, and care that grants peace and joy to all the rational creation — both heavenly and human — who enjoy His grace, become enlightened by His Holy Spirit, taste the sweetness of the blessed life, and experience the surety of eternal life.

## **212. What is the testimony of the Holy Bible and holy tradition about the Creator of all?**

The Old Testament begins by saying, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

David the prophet says in the Psalms. “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:8–9).

Jeremiah the prophet says, “He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: and He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of his treasuries” (Jer. 10:12–13).

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word.”<sup>434</sup>

## **213. Did God change by being called the Creator?**

Since the beginning of time, “God is love.” His love is complete and shared within the Holy Trinity, without any need for the creatures He created. God was complete before the creation. Such titles as the Creator, the Manager of Creation, and the Master of Creation merely reflect His loving nature without adding anything to Him, or to His goodness and holiness. God was, and always will be free. He can create or not create. He is not caused to act by another, beyond His essence; but performs what He Himself freely wills.

## **214. What is the role of the Son of God in the work of creation?**

John, the evangelist says, “All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made, that was made” (John 1:3). Every divine action involved in the creation of the world **comes from the Father, through the Son and is completed by the Holy Spirit.**<sup>435</sup> No divine action is performed by one Hypostasis without the other two. It is the work of the Holy Trinity together in unity and not through three separate acts.

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<sup>434</sup> Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 13 (ANF 3:249; PL 2:26).

<sup>435</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods* (NPNF II/5:331–336; PG 45:125).

**215. What is the connection between creation and time?**

Time began with the beginning of creation; and when the world ends, time will cease to exist, and we shall then enjoy the eternal life.

**216. Was the plan of creation in the mind of God eternally?**

Although the work of creation occurred within time, the plan of creation was in the mind of God from before the world was created and unto the world's end. The creation is not co-eternal with God.

Titles of God such as the Creator, the Orchestrator, the Carer for His creation, and the Lord of creation do not signify any change in the divine essence; for from eternity God is love, and the plan for the visible and invisible creation is just an expression of God's love and goodness that have never ceased since eternity.

He created the world by His own free will, without creating any evil being or thing. At each stage of the creation, it was said: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This phrase reveals that God did not create anything out of need or for His benefit, but only out of His goodness, motivated by love. He does not compel humanity to goodness, but grants us free will, for we are His image. When we abused this gift, He promised to remedy situation: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:11–13).

The present world is very good, yet not perfect; so it will pass away, and the divine promise of a new heaven and a new earth will be fulfilled. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

**217. Why did God choose Moses as the one to whom He described the creation and made known His divine mysteries?**

Moses enjoyed fellowship and affinity with God, which fitted him to see God face to face and learn His mysteries.

**Moses** disdained the royal palace and went down among the people to share in their humiliation. Paul the apostle says, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:24–26). Thus, the believer cannot know the mysteries of God without sharing in the lives of those who are suffering, deprived, and those who have no one to ask about them.

His sojourn in the wilderness for forty years afforded him an opportunity to contemplate the creation and come to know its Creator.

Moses did not submit to weakness, for at the age of eighty he saw God in the burning bush; Him whom no one had ever seen.

It was said of him, “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). Moses did not disdain the wisdom of the Egyptians (and so should we also benefit from all that is around us).

Moses discovered that God created the world out of nothing and that matter is not co-eternal with God. God is Beauty, and capable of bestowing beauty upon us, so that everything in us becomes “very good.”

He also discovered that the Holy Trinity works in the creation: the **Father** spoke; through the **Son** creation took place; and the **Holy Spirit** hovered over the face of the water to establish a marvelous world.

**218. What is the meaning of “and the earth was without form (invisible), and void” (Gen. 1:2)?**

**St. Basil** says, “‘The Earth was Invisible and Unfinished’ ... it may be because **man, the spectator, did not yet exist**, or because being **submerged under the waters** which overflowed the surface, it could not be seen, since the waters had not yet been gathered together into their own places, where God afterwards collected them, and gave them the name of seas ... However, as light did not yet exist, and as the earth lay in darkness, because of the obscurity of the air above it, it should not astonish us that for this reason Scripture calls it ‘invisible.’”<sup>436</sup>

**219. What is the meaning of “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2)?**

**St. Basil** says, “always by the spirit of God the Holy Spirit is meant, the Spirit which completes the divine and blessed Trinity ... **How then did the Spirit of God move upon the waters?** The explanation that I am about to give you is not an original one, but that of a Syrian ... This is the meaning of the word; by ‘was borne’ [or hovered over] the Syrians, he says, understand: it cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart to them vital force from her own warmth. Such is, as nearly as possible, the meaning of these words—the Spirit was borne: let us understand, that is, prepared the

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<sup>436</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 2.1 (NPNF II/8:59).



nature of water to produce living beings: a sufficient proof for those who ask if the Holy Spirit took an active part in the creation of the world.”<sup>437</sup>

## 220. Why did God begin by creating light?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “The first word of God created the nature of light (Gen. 1:3); it made darkness vanish ... and gave to all beings at the same time a sweet and gracious aspect ... So, with a single word and in one instant, the Creator of all things gave the boon of light to the world ... when God proclaimed the goodness of light, it was not in regard to the charm of the eye but as a provision for future advantage, because at that time there were as yet no eyes to judge of its beauty.”<sup>438</sup>

## 221. Why does the book of Genesis repeat: “and God saw that it was good” (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)?

These words refer not to the external charm of the things created, but to their fitness and perfection for the purposes that God intended for His creation.<sup>439</sup> So also, a person’s goodness lies in fulfilling his mission and cooperating with others.

## 222. Why did God command waters to be above the firmament, waters to be below the firmament, and waters to be gathered in seas and rivers?

This was done in boundless wisdom for the benefit of humanity. The aquatic world praises God and glorifies Him: “Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths” (Ps. 148:7). Further, **St. Basil** rejects the interpretation of the waters above the firmament as being the spiritual powers of good, and those in the depths of the seas as the powers of evil.<sup>440</sup>

## 223. What is God's wisdom in saying on the third day, “Let the earth bring forth ...” (Gen. 1:11)?

**First:** He said this before the creation of the sun in order to convince those who worship the sun that the sun is not the source of life.

**Second:** He permitted this to be before the creation of animals so the animals would find nourishment when they are created.<sup>441</sup>

<sup>437</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 2.6 (NPNF II/8:62–63).

<sup>438</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 2.7 (NPNF II/8: 63–64).

<sup>439</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 3.10 (NPNF II/8:71).

<sup>440</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 3.9 (NPNF II/8:70–71).

<sup>441</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 5.1 (NPNF II/8:76).

**Third:** On the third day, the earth brought forth plants and trees that are spiritual, useful, and bring us joy. “If you see the grass of the fields, think of human nature, and remember the comparison of the wise Isaiah. ‘All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field’ (Isa. 40:6).”<sup>442</sup>

**Fourth:** We ask God to work the land of our inward selves and let it be covered with useful spiritual plants and trees.

**Fifth:** God created plants with diverse features and various fruits, so that every human being should glory in God’s gift without being envious or haughty towards others. Even poisonous plants have their benefits and purposes.

**Sixth: St. Basil** answers the question: why did God create poisonous plants along with the beneficial ones?

God created people and gave them a mind that can distinguish between what is useful and what is harmful. God gave the animals the instinct to eat what is nourishing, and not to eat what is deadly.

Some birds and animals eat these plants yet remain unharmed.

Humans use some of these dangerous plants for anesthesia and for the treatment of some incurable diseases.<sup>443</sup>

As believers, it is befitting for us to emulate certain plants: “Be ‘like a green olive tree in the house of God,’ (Ps. 52:8) never destitute of hope, but decked through faith with the bloom of salvation. Thus you will resemble the eternal verdure of this plant and will rival it in fruitfulness, if each day sees you giving abundantly in alms.”<sup>444</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** concludes his sermon on the creation of plants by saying, “nature, receiving the impulse of this first command, follows without interruption the course of ages, until the consummation of all things. **Let us all hasten to attain to it, full of fruit and of good works; and thus, planted in the house of the Lord we shall flourish in the court of our God** (cf. Ps. 92:13), in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.”<sup>445</sup>

## **224. If we are dazzled by the beauty of the sun, how much more should we be by the beauty of its Creator, the Sun of Righteousness?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “If the sun, subject to corruption, is so beautiful, so grand ... if its grandeur is in such perfect harmony with and due proportion to the universe: if, by the

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<sup>442</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 5.2 (NPNF II/8:76).

<sup>443</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 5.4 (NPNF II/8:77–78).

<sup>444</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 5.6 (NPNF II/8:79).

<sup>445</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 5.10 (NPNF II/8:81).

beauty of its nature, it shines like a brilliant eye in the middle of creation; if finally, one cannot tire of contemplating it, what will be the beauty of the Sun of Righteousness? If the blind man suffers from not seeing the material sun, what a deprivation is it for the sinner not to enjoy the true light! (cf. Mal. 4:2)<sup>446</sup>

### 225. What do we learn from the moon?

The moon appears to us to always be changing over time. Sometimes we see it as a full moon, sometimes as a crescent, and sometimes it seems to be hidden or dark. **St. Basil the Great** says, “Thus, the sight of the moon, making us think of the rapid vicissitudes of human things, ought to teach us not to pride ourselves on the good things of this life, and not to glory in our power, not to be carried away by uncertain riches, to despise our flesh which is subject to change, and to take care of the soul, for its good is unmoved. If you cannot behold without sadness the moon losing its splendour by gradual and imperceptible decrease, how much more distressed should you be at the sight of a soul, who, after having possessed virtue, loses its beauty by neglect, and does not remain constant to its affections, but is agitated and constantly changes because its purposes are unstable. What Scripture says is very true, ‘As for a fool he changes like the moon’ (Sir. 27:11)<sup>447</sup>

### 226. Why did God create reptiles in the rivers, seas, and lakes?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Earth had received her [adornment] from her own plants, the heavens had received the flowers of the stars, and, like two eyes, the great luminaries beautified them in concert. It still remained for the waters to receive their adornment. The command was given, and immediately the rivers and lakes becoming fruitful brought forth their natural broods; the sea travailed with all kinds of swimming creatures; not even in mud and marshes did the water remain idle; it took its part in creation ... Every creature that swims, whether it skims on the surface of the waters, or cleaves the depths, is of the nature of a moving creature, since it drags itself on the body of the water. Certain aquatic animals have feet and walk; especially amphibia, such as seals, crabs, crocodiles, river horses and frogs; but they are above all gifted with the power of swimming.”<sup>448</sup>

### 227. What do we learn from migratory fish?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Instances have, however, been known of migratory fish, who, as if common deliberation transported them into strange regions, all start on their march at a given sign. When the time marked for breeding arrives, they, as if awakened by a common law of nature, migrate from gulf to gulf, directing their course toward the North Sea. And at

<sup>446</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 6.1 (NPNF II/8:82).

<sup>447</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 6.10 (NPNF II/8:88) amended.

<sup>448</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 7.1 (NPNF II/8:89–90).

the epoch of their return you may see all these fish streaming like a torrent across the Propontis towards the Euxine Sea. Who puts them in marching array? Where is the prince's order? Has an edict affixed in the public place indicated to them their day of departure? Who serves them as a guide? See how the divine order embraces all and extends to the smallest object. **A fish does not resist God's law, and we men cannot endure His precepts of salvation!** Do not despise fish because they are dumb and quite unreasoning; rather fear lest, in your resistance to the disposition of the Creator, you have even less reason than they. Listen to the fish, who by their actions all but speak and say: it is for the perpetuation of our race that we undertake this long voyage. They have not the gift of reason, but they have the law of nature firmly seated within them, to show them what they have to do. Let us go, they say, to the North Sea. Its water is sweeter than that of the rest of the sea; for the sun does not remain long there, and its rays do not draw up all the drinkable portions. Even sea creatures love fresh water. Thus one often sees them enter into river and swim far up them from the sea. This is the reason which makes them prefer the Euxine Sea to other gulfs, as the most fit for breeding and for bringing up their young. When they have obtained their object the whole tribe returns home. Let us hear these dumb creatures tell us the reason. The Northern sea, they say, is shallow and its surface is exposed to the violence of the wind, and it has few shores and retreats. Thus the winds easily agitate it to its bottom and mingle the sands of its bed with its waves. Besides, it is cold in winter, filled as it is from all directions by large rivers. Wherefore after a moderate enjoyment of its waters, during the summer, when the winter comes they hasten to reach warmer depths and places heated by the sun, and after fleeing from the stormy tracts of the North, they seek a haven in less agitated seas ... A fish traverses the extent of the sea to find what is good for it; what will you say then—you who live in idleness, the mother of all vices? Do not let anyone make his ignorance an excuse. There has been implanted in us natural reason which tells us to identify ourselves with good, and to avoid all that is harmful.”<sup>449</sup>

## **228. How can we learn even from despised little creatures?**

**St. Basil** tells the following story that prompts us to stand before God's astonishing work: “I have heard it said by one living near the sea, that the sea urchin, a little contemptible creature, often foretells calm and tempest to sailors. When it foresees a disturbance of the winds, it gets under a great pebble, and clinging to it as to an anchor, it tosses about in safety, retained by the weight which prevents it from becoming the plaything of the waves. It is a certain sign for sailors that they are threatened with a violent agitation of the winds. No astrologer, no Chaldæan, reading in the rising of the stars the disturbances of the air, has ever communicated his secret to the urchin: it is the Lord of the sea and of the winds who has

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<sup>449</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexameron* 7.4–5 (NPNF II/8:92–93). See also Elias Koyter al-Mukhlessy, *St. Basil the Great*, (Publications of the Pauline Library in Beirut, 1989, Arabic): p. 319.

impressed on this little animal a manifest proof of His great wisdom ... If God has not left the sea urchin outside His providence, is He without care for you?”<sup>450</sup>

### **229. How do we benefit from the creation of wild animals?**

**St. Basil**, in the ninth homily of his work on “The Six Days of Creation” (the *Hexamaeron*), explains the following:

A human being is a heavenly creature, whose back is upright with a head that rests above it, able to easily look up to the heavens; unlike an animal, which is bent down, looking at the ground and its belly. Therefore, it is befitting for us to remember that we are citizens of heaven; our country is the exalted Jerusalem.

Animals have this in common: they do not possess reason and free will to guide their lives. Even so, it befits us to learn from some of them: for a deer is gentle; an ant is diligent and productive; a dog is thankful, faithful, and loyal in his friendship; and a horse is courageous in battle.

Some animals recognize changes in the weather; as spring approaches, they come to the doors of their dens, ready to go out.

A hedgehog often makes two holes at the ends of his burrow; if the wind blows from the north, he closes the northern hole and vice versa.

Animals care for their young or their immobilized parents; yet we sometimes see human families who fail to do this.

### **230. What do these words of the Holy Bible mean: “God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10)?**

In the creation of the world, all that God created at that time was pure, beautiful, and harmless.

### **231. Can the world exist without its Creator?**

All creatures need the Creator as a child needs a nursing mother. In an exquisite homily, **St. Jacob of Sarug** compares a mother’s care for her infant to the Creator’s care for His beloved, the human being. He says:

“A child cannot live without a nursing mother, and a creature cannot exist without the Creator.

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<sup>450</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexamaeron* 7.5 (NPNF II/8:93).

“If a mother abandoned her child after she gave birth, it would have been better for that child never to have been born at all.

“And if the Lord of the world had abandoned the world after creating it, it would have been annihilated. It would have been better for it never to have existed from the beginning.

“But He does not abandon it, just as the mother does not leave her child. Even if the mother forgets her child, God never forgets His creation (Isa. 49:15).”<sup>451</sup>

### **232. Can anyone describe the worth of the human soul, except for the Creator?!**

No one — no matter how accomplished in wisdom, knowledge, education, or piety — can see *his soul*; although he is certain of its existence and its heavenly value. And it is impossible for him to contain or measure his rational mind by merely physical or material means.

When we meet Jesus the Lord of glory in the clouds, the faithful will gather together as a holy heavenly bride; adorned with the righteousness of the heavenly Bridegroom who is the habitation of wonder for the heavenly beings and their love. We will stand in wonder at how we were not able— while we lived in the world — to comprehend the truth about our souls; for which God Himself cares, and pours out His splendor upon them, and which will live with Him in the exalted Jerusalem, among the heavenly hosts of exceeding beauty.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “were the Creator to hold the whole world in one hand, and the soul in another hand, the soul would outweigh all other creatures. He knows how precious is the pearl (the soul) and He alone is able to describe its worth. He measures the soul the against the whole world and sets its value, for it is more precious than the whole world. Nothing in the world compares with it, nothing in the whole world is more valuable. Indeed, the whole world is nothing, but the soul is something. The world shall fail, but the soul shall not dissolve away with it. The world is like grass (worthless), but the soul is the image of divinity ... If a person gains the whole world but loses his own soul, what would he own if his soul is no longer his? When the Son of God created the soul He gave it His image. And He Himself put on its image from the womb, when He saved it. He says to us: What is its worth, and how good is it? No one else knows what the soul is but He. When He taught the multitudes, He said to them that a person’s soul is more precious than all possessions.”<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 27 (see Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): pp. 138–139).

<sup>452</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 30 (see Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug*, 1995).

## 6

**The Exalted Nature of the Human Creation**<sup>453</sup>

The Early Church Fathers often invite us to marvel with them at the reality of human being, which is the wonder of wonders, so to speak. We stand in joy and exultation and take pride not only in what we have, but also that our human existence is a gift from God who will continue to give to us until He takes us into heavenly glory. One of the main things that work to bestow a balanced personality upon the true believer is the realization that God created him with an exalted nature and restored it to him after he lost it.

**233. What did God bestow upon Adam when he was created?**

The Holy Trinity said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26), that he may taste communion with Him.

God appointed humans as a kings and queens to rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over all the earth (Gen. 1:26).

God formed Adam from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7), that he might live humbly, yet cherish his human nature.

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden (Gen. 2:8), that he might feel that he lives in a royal palace.

God gave him an extremely easy commandment, that he might exchange love with God through his obedience to Him.

God created Eve to be his helpmate, comparable to him, that they might be companions in enjoying the presence of God (Gen. 2:22).

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, that people might sanctify a day for worship (Gen. 2:3). Thus, all our days are sanctified.

The human being is God’s most beloved creature.

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** deems the lives of the saints in this world to resemble the life of Paradise. He says, “The assembly of saints bears resemblance to Paradise: in it each day is plucked the fruit of Him [i.e., Jesus Christ] who gives life to all.”<sup>454</sup> He also says, “Among the saints none is naked, for they have put on glory, nor is any clad in those leaves or standing

<sup>453</sup> For more details see Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and Bishoy Boshra Fayeze, *Man’s Eminence*, trans., George Ishack, ed., Morgan Stagers, Queen Mary and Prince Tadros Coptic Orthodox Church, Pope Shenouda Centre. (South Brunswick NJ, 2013).

<sup>454</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 6.8: p. 111.

in shame, for they have found, through our Lord, the robe that belongs to Adam and Eve.”<sup>455</sup>  
**St. Ephrem** affirms that Adam was in all things complete when he was in the Paradise of the Garden of Eden; and that none shall enter except those who have the same purity, and the body that is raised from death.<sup>456</sup>

### **234. Was the Paradise that God gave to Adam material or spiritual?**

For the body, Paradise was material, a visible and blessed dwelling. But for the soul, it was enjoyment of the grace of God, and spiritual contemplation upon the things created.

### **235. What is the tree of life, whose fruit Adam should have eaten in Paradise?**

**St. Ephrem** thinks that in the Garden of Eden, there were two different trees. One symbolizes the Holy of Holies while the other symbolizes the sanctuary. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the gate that leads to the Tree of Life.<sup>457</sup>

### **236. Why did God create Eve for Adam?**

**First:** so that together they might come to know God who created them and loves them.

**Second:** that each of them might feel that they are called to have fellowship with the heavenly beings; for their souls are spirit, not flesh. But also, so that they should not feel that the earth is foreign to them, since their bodies were formed from the dust of the earth.

**Third:** that they might glorify God, so that their souls rejoice.

### **237. Why did God create Eve from Adam’s rib?**

**First:** so that she should not feel like a stranger to him, since she is from his flesh and bone.

**Second:** that both Adam and Eve might feel that each of them needs the other.

**Third:** that they both might experience love towards one another.

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<sup>455</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 6.9: p. 112.

<sup>456</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 8.9: p. 134.

<sup>457</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 3:13: p. 95.



### 238. What is the image of the Lord that was bestowed upon Adam?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “attend neither to the goods you possess nor to the objects that are round about you, but to yourself alone. We ourselves are one thing; our possessions another; the objects that surround us, yet another. We are soul and intellect in that **we have been made according to the image of the Creator**. Our body is our own possession and the sensations which are expressed through it, but money, crafts, and other trappings of life in this world are peripheral to us.”<sup>458</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Man is therefore justly dear to God, since he is His workmanship. The other works of creation He made by the word of command alone, but man He framed by Himself, by His own hand, and breathed into him what was peculiar to Himself. What, then, was fashioned by Him, and after His likeness ... was created by God Himself as being desirable on its own account.”<sup>459</sup>

**The Apostle Paul** says, “you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).

The scholar **Origen** says, “I see, however, something indeed even more distinguished in the condition of man, which I do not find said elsewhere: ‘And God made man, according to the image of God he made him.’ We find this attributed neither to heaven nor earth nor the sun or moon ... But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made ‘according to the image of God.’ For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood.”<sup>460</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Better is he that has been deemed worthy of seeing himself, than he that has been deemed worthy of seeing the angels. The latter partakes of the eyes of the body, the former of the eye of the soul.”<sup>461</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** often uses the expression, “Adam is the noble image of God” to describe human nature before the Fall. He says that God bestowed beauty upon the soul in order to elevate it above all creatures.<sup>462</sup> God also granted the soul freedom, intellect, wisdom, thought, and senses replete with discernment. Here are some more of St. Jacob’s words:<sup>463</sup> “He gave to each creature its form, but He imprinted His own image on none but Adam. The earth is broad, the heavens high, the sun brilliant, the moon beautiful, and the march of the heavenly hosts glorious. In creating all this beauty, it was never heard that the

<sup>458</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Words, ‘Give Heed to Thyself’* (FOTC 9:434–435; PG 31:203A) amended.

<sup>459</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.3 (ANF 2:210).

<sup>460</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.13 (FOTC 71:63).

<sup>461</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, Trans., A. J. Wensinck, (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) Homily 65: p. 311.

<sup>462</sup> See St. Jacob of Sarug, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, trans., Edward G. Mathews, (Gorgias Press, 2009) Homily 3.123–124: p. 22.

<sup>463</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 30.

Lord created something in His own image, except for Adam, His (the Son's) only image; and for this reason, he was named the image of God.”

“The Lord chose not the archangels, but the human soul to bear the imprint of His image and likeness. He adorned it with beauty surpassing all other creatures.”

“God's image gave them favor before God; so they could beseech Him without reticence through His own image.”

“O Son of God, look upon the soul, and it will be filled with Your beauty. Do not leave, O Lord, for if You distance Yourself from her, she will **perish**.”

“Neither paradise nor its spiritual fruits became the image of the Great Being on the day they were created ... His likeness is borne by neither the Cherubim nor the Seraphim; by neither the hosts or the ranks of flame. He did not will to have His image borne by the flame of the archangel Gabriel, nor by the spirit of the archangel Michael. He passed over all the high places of heaven and instead made the human His image, bearing His likeness.

### **239. What is the role of the soul in human life?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Know also that you have a self-governed soul, the noblest work of God, made after the image of its Creator: immortal because of God who gives it immortality; a living being, rational, imperishable, because of Him who bestowed these gifts: having free power to do what it wills.<sup>464</sup> For it is not according to your birth date that you sin, nor is it by the power of chance that you commit fornication, nor, as some idly say, do the conjunctions of the stars compel you to give yourself to wantonness.<sup>465,466</sup>

### **240. Why did God grant people free will?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The soul is self-governed: and though the devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to you the thought of fornication: if you will, you accept it; if you do not will, you reject. For if you were a fornicator by necessity, then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, why did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness: since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature.”<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.6: It was proper that he who is the image and likeness of God should be formed with a free will, and a mastery of himself, so that this very thing, namely freedom of will and self-command, might be reckoned as the image and likeness of God in him.

<sup>465</sup> Compare Augustine, *City of God* 5.1, where he says that the astrologers (*Mathematici*) say, not merely such or such a position of Mars signifies that a man will be a murderer, but makes him a murderer.

<sup>466</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.18 (NPNF II/7:23) amended.

<sup>467</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.21 (NPNF II/7:24) amended.

### 241. How do we restore the image God in us?

We ought to look upon this divine gift, i.e., His image, as a precious talent that we should not neglect. When we corrupted this gift, He who loves us did not abandon us in our loss. He therefore descended to us and attained our salvation by offering Himself as a sacrifice for us, thus restoring our lost image to us. It behooves us henceforth not to neglect this precious image. This is what our Lord Christ affirmed when He said, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).

The scholar **Origen** gives us an allegorical interpretation of these words of the Lord, saying, “There are two images in man. One he received from God when he was made ... The other image is earthly (1 Cor. 15:49). Man received this second image later. He was expelled from Paradise on account of disobedience and sin, after the ‘prince of this world’ (John 12:31) had tempted him with his enticements. For, just as the coin, or denarius, has an image of the emperor of this world, so he who does the works of ‘the ruler of the darkness’ (Eph. 6:12) bears the image of him whose works he does. Jesus commanded that that image should be handed over and cast away from our face. He wills us to take on that image according to which we were made from the beginning, according to God’s likeness. And thus it happens that we give ‘to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God’s’ ... Paul also uttered this conclusion and said, ‘As we bear the image of the earthly man, we should also bear the image of the heavenly man’ (1 Cor. 15:49). When Christ says, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,’ he means this: ‘Put off the person of the earthly man, cast off the earthly image, so that you can put on yourselves the person of the heavenly man and give ‘to God what is God’s.’”<sup>468</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The soul of each one of us is his talent and it bears the great image of Divinity. Do not bury it in the world of filthy lusts, thus corrupting the great image portrayed upon the soul. The Judge will demand this image from you; so go forth and present it to Him, lest His image be defaced because of you. If you cannot make a profit like the steward (Luke 16:2), then return to Him unblemished that which He gave you. As the image of the king is clearly imprinted on the denarius, so the great image of divinity is engraved on the soul. If the beautiful image imprinted on the soul is corrupted, it will be rejected before God and will not be accepted. The Lord who depicted in us His great likeness; His great compassion will defend us on the Last Day, and save us.”<sup>469</sup>

### 242. How can the gifts of mind and discernment be sanctified?

If we bear the image God, we realize that He granted us a human mind, and offered us the gift of discernment, that we might seek the knowledge of God, even in our worship of

<sup>468</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 39.5–6 (FOTC 94:161–162).

<sup>469</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 83 On the Beatitudes of which our Lord Spoke in the Gospel* (see Paul Beyjan’s text translated by Behnam Sony). Militos Barnaba, “Poems of Mar Jacob of Sarug on the Beatitudes of Gospel,” in *The Patriarchal Magazine*, 48–74 (1985): pp. 388–395 (Arabic).

Him. As the scholar **Origen** says, “as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so our mind is possessed with a becoming and natural desire to become acquainted with the truth of God and the causes of things. Now we have received this desire from God.”<sup>470</sup> **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “We do not come to church without discernment, as if we were animals that lack understanding. No one visits a physician out of habit; only when illness forces him to visit in order to seek healing.”<sup>471</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** speaks imaginatively of the exaltedness of the mind in human life. Since the mind is situated in the human head, he likens it to the heights wherein God dwells — namely, heaven. “[God] perfected the brain as a dwelling for the mind; the mind thus resides in the upper level, as does God.”<sup>472</sup> He warns us not to neglect to sanctify it, nor to allow it to stray into accepting the lusts of the flesh that darken the mind and cast down the soul under the slavery of the body, till its being becomes carnal. “The mind is darkened with lusts, lest it understand ... **his soul falls and becomes carnal.**”<sup>473</sup>

#### **243. What does the Original require of the image?**

There ought to be a dialogue between the image (i.e., the human being) and its Original (i.e., God), a mutual conversation with God, and the entering into a covenant with Him. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “[God] engraved His likeness upon him, He bestowed His image upon Him, He wove His love into His image, He strengthened His handiwork with His mercy, He established His covenant with His image, and He made him master of creation ... He made him gentle so that whenever He might converse with him He converses with His own image, and whenever He appears to him, He appears as His own image. Therefore, **He speaks to our race in our own language.**”<sup>474</sup>

#### **244. Who can describe the value of the soul that bears the image of God?**

The Creator of humanity who granted us that we might bear His own image is alone able to measure the worth of the soul. Therefore, when the soul was corrupted, its Creator sacrificed His life that He might restore it to incorruption. The Lord Jesus Christ affirms the soul’s value when He says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). He wants us to care for our souls, rather than for our possessions.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The Creator placed the whole world on one side of the scale, and the soul on the other side; and the soul outweighed the creation. He knows how the **pearl** is exceedingly precious; no one can describe its value but He. He set it against the whole

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<sup>470</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.11.4 (ANF 4:298).

<sup>471</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 22.

<sup>472</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 26.

<sup>473</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 67.

<sup>474</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 109.

world and set its price, for it is more valuable than the whole world, and there is nothing like it ... The world shall come to an end, but the soul shall not be pass away with it; **the world is like the grass, but the soul is the image of the divine.** The whole world shall pass away like the shadows at sunset, but the soul does not pass away, for it is the image of the Great Being. If a person gains the whole world but loses his soul, how can he possess anything, since his soul can no longer possess?"<sup>475</sup> "The Son of God gave us His image when He created us, and He put on our image from the womb when He saved us."<sup>476</sup>

#### 245. Can the image of God increase or decrease?

God did not created humans to be frozen, static, immobile beings. Rather, He formed us as beings whose nature is that of continuous dynamic movement, that He might pour upon us the reflections of divine light. Thus, when St. Mary says, "My soul magnifies the Lord," (Luke 1:46) she does not mean that she is somehow adding some new magnificence to God, but that when she receives God's magnificence, her soul is exalted and ascends from glory unto glory. In praising God, she is herself lifted up. This is what we are requesting from God when we say "Hallowed be Your name," for the holy name of God needs no hallowing (or sanctification); rather, the one who prays these words is sanctified by God's name, and God's holiness transfigures the life of the worshipper of God.

On these words of St. Mary, the scholar **Origen** comments that although God is unchangeable, His image in us is capable of either progressing or regressing: "Therefore, when I make the image of the Image — that is, my soul — large, and magnify it by work, thought, and speech, then the Lord himself is magnified in my soul, because it is an image of him. And, just as the Lord is thus magnified in our image of him, so too, if we are sinners, he diminishes and decreases."<sup>477</sup>

#### 246. What is the royal palace that God prepared for Adam and Eve?

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says that God created the world in all its ingenuity as a magnificent palace prepared for Adam and Eve as a king and queen; and that God afforded to humans every possibility of joy and authority over the creation that He created for their sake.

In his article "A Comparison between a King and a Monk" (*Comparatio Regis et Monachi*)<sup>478</sup> St. John Chrysostom describes the Christian idea that whether a believer is a

<sup>475</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 30.

<sup>476</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 30.

<sup>477</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 8.2 (FOTC 94:34).

<sup>478</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk; against the Opponents of the Monastic Life: Two Treatises*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, V. 13, trans., David G Hunter (Lewiston, N.Y., USA: E. Mellen Press, 1988); (PG 47:387–392).

monk, priest, or layperson, he aspires to the grace of God that works in him to make him a king possessed of an authority greater and more powerful than many worldly kings.

A king rules over nations and armies. However, a monk (or a genuine believer) governs anger, envy, greed, contemptible desires, and the whole throng of lusts. Whoever rules over people while he himself is ruled by wrath, greed, and contemptible lusts can seldom be a good ruler. The monk (or believer) wages war upon the demons and defeats them with divine aid, and is crowned by Christ. On the other hand, a king fights only barbarians, aiming to acquire land or treasures, or to satisfy his thirst for power.

And when the moment of death draws near, it is frightening for the king. But the monk (or believer) does not find this moment remotely disturbing. Should one of them suffer a violent death, the monk dies as a martyr and goes to heaven, while the king surrenders to his adversary's sword. After death, the righteous monk enters into the glory and splendor of the Lord, whereas the king's honor and blessing, even if he were righteous, would be of a lesser degree than that of the monk.

#### **247. Were they king and queen, or bride and groom, in the Garden of Eden?**

The story of the creation of Eve is a type of the establishment of the Church, the bride of Christ, the incarnate Word of God, for whose sake He emptied Himself in order to cleave unto her, and to carry her to His heaven. **St. Augustine** comments on the words of the apostle Paul, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5:32), saying, “We are with Him in heaven through hope; He is with us on earth through love.”<sup>479</sup>

So also **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Since then Christ made a covenant with us (for He was about to take me as a bride) he also assigned a dowry to me not of money, but of blood. But this dowry which He assigns is the bestowal of good things ‘such as eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man’ (1 Cor. 2:9). He assigned them for the dowry — immortality, praise with the angels, release from death, freedom from sin, the inheritance of a kingdom (so great are his riches), righteousness, sanctification, deliverance from present evils, discovery of future blessings. Great was my dowry ... He came; He took me: He assigns me a dowry: He says, ‘I give you my wealth.’ How? ‘Have you lost paradise?’ He says, ‘Take it back. Have you lost your beauty? take it back; take all these things.’ But yet the dowry was not given to me here ... ‘Why do You not give me the dowry here?’ ‘It will be given when you have come to my Father, when you have entered the royal palace. Did you come to me! Nay I came to you. I came not that you should abide here but that I might take you and return. Seek not the dowry here: all depends on hope, and faith.’”<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 55.3 (NPNF I/8:210) amended.

<sup>480</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Two Homilies on Eutropius* 2.12–13 (NPNF I/9:260) amended.

### 248. What was the state of Adam and Eve in Paradise?

How jubilant was the earthly creation — indeed the entire universe — when Adam, then Eve, were created! They were both in the Garden of Eden, dressed in wedding garments of unsurpassed luminous splendor! **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The bride and groom stood in garments of light with which they were clothed, and they captivated the world with joy for them and His gifts. The Day laughed before the bridegroom and gave him all its light for his enjoyment ... Paradise opened its lofty gates for the bride and groom to enter the bridal chamber of joy that had been prepared.”<sup>481</sup>

### 249. Did Adam and Eve underestimate their bodies?

The body was just as important as the soul and the spirit for Adam and Eve, with all three necessary to form the complete person. **St. Jerome** says, “Our body and soul and spirit — our harp — are all in harmony, all their strings in tune.”<sup>482</sup>

### 250. What was Adam’s view of his bodily members, senses, and emotions?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** introduces us to a marvelous image of the body. Here are some examples of his writing:

“In his great beauty Adam was even more glorious than a crown, and among creatures there was no other beauty comparable to his.

“His Jeweler [God] set **springs of light [eyes]** atop his crown, so as if from on high he might gaze upon the creatures that surrounded him.

“Beneath him He fashioned **feet** for racing like a chariot, so that with them he might travel wherever he wished to go.

“On his flanks He fashioned **hands** and on them **ten fingers**, that with them he might lay hold of the sea, the dry land and the whole world.

“He fashioned a **brain** to be a home for his mind, so that it might reside in a lofty dwelling like a god.

“He made for him a **palate** that he might be able to discriminate tastes, and He set taste therein that he might distinguish sweet from bitter.

“He opened **nostrils** for him so that they might be a path for odors by which he might discern a putrid smell from a sweet one.

<sup>481</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 71.

<sup>482</sup> St. Jerome, Homily 21, *On Psalm 91(92)* (FOTC 48:166).

“He bore out a passage for **hearing** and surrounded it with the form of a seashell, that sounds might circulate and enter in gently through it.

**“In his breast is the heart wherein all his thoughts are gathered, so that as if from a great storehouse it may put forth all its treasures.**

“Speech is through his **mouth** and with his lips the distinction of sounds, **eyebrows** for expressions, and He adorned the **pupils** with **eyelashes**.

“In one member He placed bitterness and anger like a fire, by which he might be inflamed against wickedness whenever it occurred.

“In another He placed them to be the receptacle for sadness, that he might feel remorse for evils when they were committed.

“To yet another He granted that it should serve for cheerfulness, so that when good is done his countenance might be glad and joyful.

“Various things for each limb did the Wise One of the ages form and arrange on that beautiful image when He fashioned it.”<sup>483</sup>

“When the Creator created the **mouth** He planted in it a voice and words with which to praise Him.

“It is therefore incumbent on all who sense the presence of the Creator to praise the Lord Who created them.

“The human mouth is not intended for trivial gossip or improper speech.

“In creating the mouth, the Creator designed it for praise, and not for vain speech.”<sup>484</sup>

“Let your body be upright, lest it become stooped like the animals that bow before you.

“For He raised you and made you upright and lifted your sight to the heights that you may perceive the beauty of your surroundings and contemplate it.

“Turn your face towards your first dwelling, because this place where you reside now is not yours.

**“Behold, the very form of your body cries out, saying that you are not of the earth.**

“You are a stranger sojourning in this place, so do not dwell upon that which is not yours  
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<sup>483</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 8 On the Return of Adam* (Coptic); *Memre 72.3 in Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Creation of Adam and the Resurrection of the Dead*, trans., Edward G. Mathews (Gorgias Press, 2014): pp. 26–28.

<sup>484</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 1*.



“Why do your deeds resemble those of beasts, thinking of nothing but your belly?”

“Do not liken yourself unto those that stoop [animals], that bow down before you; lest you should become like a beast and resemble them.”<sup>485</sup>

### 251. Does the human soul rule over the body?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The nature of the soul is great and beautiful in its very essence ... it is therefore considered to be the ruler of the body, and the body does not command it. It commands the body in holiness and is not disobeyed. When it is purified from all carnal inclinations, it spiritually beholds the hidden mysteries. Should an angel pass before it, he shall not be hidden from it. It beholds angels and demons face-to-face.”<sup>486</sup>

### 252. Does the body partner with the soul in everything?

The body is the partner of the soul in its sins as well as in its repentance. If the will is corrupted, the body becomes a burden to the soul until it destroys it; but if the will is sanctified, the body supports the soul through the practices of reading, fasting, prostration, and giving. Thus does the body fulfil the holy desires of the spirit and cherish this fellowship through which it partakes of eternal glory in fellowship with the soul. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “a person mindful of a life lived virtuously and not in evil clearly knows that the body does not cause their sufferings but free will which gives rise to the passions.”<sup>487</sup> He also says, “The body is the instrument of the spirit ... working in company with the soul.”<sup>488</sup>

### 253. Is the human being a creature that is both mortal and immortal?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** distinguishes three classes of created beings. First, **mortal creatures**, such as animals, that lack free will. Their actions do not influence their nature, whether they are good or evil. The destiny of such beings is death. Second, **immortal creatures**, angels and demons; free creatures just like humans. Third, **creatures that are both mortal and immortal**, that is, humankind, who possess free will and can choose between eternal life and death. They are dying, yet not dying.

**St. Jacob of Sarug**’s view is that the body cannot live in the world alone; but neither can the soul live in the world alone. We find this view held also by the scholar **Athenagoras**, the second century dean of the School of Alexandria. He rejects the Aristotelian belief that the soul is the form of the body and therefore cannot be separated from it. Thus, his view is closer to that of Plato who held that the body and the soul are distinct beings; although he differs

<sup>485</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): pp. 92–93.

<sup>486</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 53.

<sup>487</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Concerning Those Who Have Died (De Mortuis)*: p. 24 (PG 46:529A).

<sup>488</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Christ, Resurrection 3*.

from Plato in holding that human existence is incomplete without both the body and the soul being united together. The two come together to make a single being, and all his actions are attributed to this single being.<sup>489</sup> Plato, on the other hand, holds that a human being is a soul that merely uses a body.

Thus, **Athenagoras** considers the body and soul to comprise a single human being, and all that comes from him comes from both the body and the soul. **Plato** considers the body to be merely an instrument used by the soul.<sup>490</sup> Athenagoras considers the members of the body to be the instruments by which the human being acts, and through them, thoughts and words become manifest; but they cooperate with the soul in these matters. Therefore, worship is incomplete if the body does not participate with the soul; neither will the judgement be just if it is not administered to both.<sup>491</sup>

#### **254. Was man created mortal or immortal?**

We can find three different views among the Syrian Fathers on this question.

**The first view** is that of **Theodore of Mopsuestia**, **Narsai**, and the **Fathers of the Nestorian School**. God created human beings with a nature that is subject to corruption. The commandment allowed the human being to practice free will and to know that he is subject to death.

**The second view** is that of Miaphysite Fathers such as **St. Severus of Antioch** and **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug**. They believed that God created human beings immortal by nature, but that they became subject to death when they sinned. Thus, humanity inherited death from Adam and our nature became a mortal nature as an inheritance from our father Adam. Some scholars believe that **St. Jacob of Sarug** adopted the same view. He considered the human being, into whom such beauty was poured, to be immortal; and that the incarnate Lord Christ was in the state of the first Adam before his fall into sin: “For God did not make death, neither does He have pleasure over the destruction of the living” (Wisd. of Sol. 1:13). And the apostle Paul says, “Through one man sin entered the world and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12).

**The third view** is that of **St. Ephrem the Syrian**, **Diodore of Tarsus**, and **Theophilus of Antioch**. This is the view that human beings are by nature neither mortal nor immortal. If they were immortal from the moment of their creation, they would have been God Himself; and if they were mortal from the moment of their creation, then God would be responsible for their death. Rather, the human being himself chooses by his own free will whether to be immortal or mortal. Some scholars consider **St. Jacob of Sarug** to have held this view. Adam’s nature was beautiful and perfect, for it was immortal, yet also subject to death;

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<sup>489</sup> Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 12 (ANF 2:154–155).

<sup>490</sup> J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*. A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Vol. 1. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964): p. 47.

<sup>491</sup> Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 18, 20 (ANF 2:158–160).

composed of a soul like the angels and a body like the animals. And it was capable of free will through which it could tend towards whatever it willed. Here we see the ingeniousness of the Creator in that He created a being that would not die, unless it so chose.<sup>492</sup> He says, “He formed Adam and gave him life rather than death; but when he accepted evil counsel, this was by nothing but his own free will.”<sup>493</sup>

### 255. Who plants a paradise in my soul?

God adorned the world as a palace for the man to inhabit as a king, and He prepared the Garden of Eden for Adam to inhabit with Eve as a bride and groom. God willed to cherish the depths of the human being, so through His exceeding grace, He made the human soul a fruitful paradise.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The soul is the earth of this blessed paradise; it cannot receive stolen seeds ... it cannot receive pride or envy, the germ of evil, lest it become estranged from God. Neither can resentment, malice, or wrath dwell in it, lest the beautiful earth of the soul be corrupted ... Let your soul be as the Garden of Eden, so that its seeds may flourish and bear fruit.”<sup>494</sup>

The Psalmist mentions two musical instruments: the harp and the ten-stringed psaltery,<sup>495</sup> which means that the human being, as a gifted musician, should offer praise to God by skillfully “playing” the instruments of his body as well as his soul; his tongue as well as his heart; his voice as well as his silence. **St. Augustine** says, “We should not think of musical instruments in the context of theatrical performances. The intent here is internal matters, as stated in another Psalm (56): ‘In God I will praise His word; in the Lord I will praise His word’.”

The harp refers to the sanctified body that glorifies God, thanks and praises Him, not with the tongue only, but with its entire human being: the body, through its five senses; and the soul, through its senses, or its five inner faculties. The ten strings of the psaltery represent the body, soul, intellect, emotions, senses, etc. All of them praise God in unison and harmony under the direction of the Holy Spirit, through powers and abilities both seen and unseen. **St. Jerome** says, “Our body and soul and spirit—our harp—are all in harmony, all their strings in tune.”<sup>496</sup>

<sup>492</sup> See the section on “The Christian Giants of History” in Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995).

<sup>493</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 196.

<sup>494</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 66 On the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and on Charity and Poverty* (see the text in Paul Began translated by Behnam Sony).

<sup>495</sup> Translator’s note. *Psaltery*: an ancient musical string instrument like a dulcimer, played by plucking the strings. See St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 43.5 (NPNF I/8:139).

<sup>496</sup> St. Jerome, *Homily 21 in The Homilies of Saint Jerome*, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms), (FOTC 48:166).

**St. Clement of Alexandria** interprets Psalm 150 — which is chanted by the Church when partaking of Holy Communion — in a beautifully symbolic way. He portrays the Church, risen from the dead through her Bridegroom who has risen from the dead, as a living musical instrument upon which the Holy Spirit plays a song of true love for God.

“The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, ‘**Praise Him with the sound of trumpet;**’ for with sound of trumpet He shall **raise the dead**. ‘**Praise Him on the psaltery;**’ for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. ‘**And praise Him on the lyre.**’ By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum. ‘**Praise with the timbrel and the dance,**’ refers to the Church **meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin** [this refers to the dead since the skin of a drum is made from a dead animal]. ‘**Praise Him on the chords and organ.**’ Our body He calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices. ‘**Praise Him on the clashing cymbals.**’ He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. Therefore He cried to humanity, ‘**Let every breath praise the Lord,**’ because He cares for every breathing thing which He has made. For man is truly an instrument of peace.”<sup>497</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** considered himself a lyre whose strings are useless until the Lord lovingly plucks the strings, producing praise that befits Him. God does not need our praise; but rather, by praising Him, it is we who are glorified!<sup>498</sup>

## **256. Are the heavenly creatures perplexed by humans?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** imagines the hosts of heaven glorifying God their Creator in amazement at the work of creation. They prepare flowers to adorn two crowns for the bride and groom, and all the creation prepares to present these to them: “The heavenly soldiers were astonished at this skillfulness, for they did not know for whom this was intended ... so, the created beings bore dowries and gifts to present to the bridegroom and the bride which had not yet been created ... the sun rose and traversed and set for their sake, and the moon hastened to change the seasons for their sake. The days and nights alternated, seeking for Adam, yet Adam was not among the trees. The house was built, but there was none to inhabit it; and there were many possessions, yet none to possess them. The light was good, but there was no one to behold it. The site was pleasant, but there was no dweller to desire it. Fruits abounded in the trees, but there was none to eat of them; the vines were beautiful with their clusters, but there was none to harvest them. The fish played in the rivers, but there was no fisherman. The wilderness awaited the heir, but he was not to be found. The garden was open and awaiting the coming of its gardener, its delicious fruits were ripe for the plucking.”<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 2.4 (ANF 2:248) amended.

<sup>498</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 36.

<sup>499</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 71.

**257. The human being cannot see his own soul, so how can God call him to behold Him?**

The human being is called to behold the invisible God: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). But God is Spirit, so flesh cannot see Him. For this reason the Son of God was incarnate to grant us the new spiritual birth, that we might see Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27) and live by Him. He alone opens the seals (Rev. 5:9) that we might know the mysteries of God the Father.<sup>500</sup> **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The human soul is like a beautiful mirror. If it is clean, you can look and see in it even the things that are invisible. But, if it is covered with dirt and dust, it will not even be able to see how filthy it is.”<sup>501</sup>

**258. Do humans partake of God’s goodness?**

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “For since man is the work of God, who through His goodness brought this creature into being, no one could reasonably suspect that he, of whose constitution goodness is the cause, was created by his Maker in the midst of evil ... For He who made man for the participation of His own peculiar good, and incorporated in him the instincts for all that was excellent, in order that his desire might be carried forward by a corresponding movement in each case to its like.”<sup>502</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Save me from evil, for great is Your power. Do not deliver me to the enemy who fights against me, without Your help. You defeat him through me, I who am weak! Let not Your hidden power be far from me; yea, Your power which does not tempt me, for I am certain that I am weak. Let every struggle be Your struggle, you shall be victorious; every victory of the victorious is Your victory. Be victorious, for victory befits You. But as for me, lead me not into temptation. Save me from the enemy who attacks me; I cannot defeat him without Your help ... Take over the battle and seize the victory that befits You. Save me from him! ... With Your mercies, save me from the devil who wars against me, for You are worthy of every victory, and they are attributed to You.”<sup>503</sup>

**259. Who is the happiest being on the face of the earth?**

This truly describes how the person feels who communes with God, the source of true joy. **St. Augustine** says, “whoever possesses God is happy”<sup>504</sup> Also, “To strive after God, then, is to desire happiness; to reach God is happiness itself.”<sup>505</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The soul is enriched by God when it loves Him; it eats and drinks from Him when it follows Him ... For when Moses spent a long time with Him, he

<sup>500</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty’s book, *The Vision of God according to the Church Fathers* in Arabic.

<sup>501</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 55.

<sup>502</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 5 (NPNF II/5:477).

<sup>503</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 155.

<sup>504</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Happy Life* 2.11 (FOTC 5:59).

<sup>505</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* 11.18 (FOTC 56:17).

shone exceedingly; he drank of Him so that he shone like the sun. The soul eats from God and is sated from Him, until the body itself lives without care (Matt. 6:26–34). Moses lived forty days without food or drink and did not hunger.”<sup>506</sup> “Eating bread weighs one down and makes one lazy; but knowledge gives the soul wings with which to fly.”<sup>507</sup>

## **260. Does the human being grow continually, both here and in the age to come?**

**St. Augustine** says, “May I remember You, understand You, love You. Increase these things in me, until You renew me wholly.”<sup>508</sup>

**St. Basil** also says, “Examine the actions of each day, compare them with those of the previous day and press on toward improvement. Advance in virtue, that you may become a companion of the angels. Spend your time in retirement, not for days nor months, but throughout many years, praising your Lord in song, night and day, in imitation of the Cherubim. If thus you begin and thus make an end, traveling the straight road for the short time of your probation, you will, by the grace of God, enter into paradise with the lamp of your soul brilliantly alight, to rejoice with Christ for ever and ever. Amen.”<sup>509</sup>

And **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Whoever strives to pursue perfection and hopes to ascend to heaven and aspires to walk the path of elevation, cannot stop at a certain level, thinking that he has completed his work and has no need of climbing further to another level. He must hasten daily to rise to the heights, until death opens before him the door that conveys him to the harbor of the saints.”<sup>510</sup>

## **261. Which sacrifices do human beings offer?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug’s** view is that God established Adam as a priest, offering Him sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise with unblemished hands and a pure soul. However, he lost this priestly character by defiling his nature. It is likely that he meant that priesthood which is attributed to the faithful in the general sense, to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise, alms-giving, and all the rites associated with individual and family worship. He says, “From the beginning, the Lord created Adam as a priest to serve Him.”<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): pp. 69–70.

<sup>507</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 53.

<sup>508</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Holy Trinity* 15.28.51 (NPNF I/3:227–228) amended.

<sup>509</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Renunciation of the World* (FOTC 9:31).

<sup>510</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Letter 5*.

<sup>511</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 5 On Aaron the Priest*.

## 7

**Divine Providence**<sup>512</sup>**262. What is divine providence?**

The book of Genesis states that God created the world in six days and then **rested** on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). This rest does not mean that He left the world to function alone according to its own natural laws, or that He no longer thought of the world or cared for it. That was the view of Aristotle who thought that God was the First Mover who began the universe but then abandoned it, leaving it to follow its natural laws. Rather, God rested on the seventh day because He saw that all things were very good, rejoiced at this world, and began to tend and care for it.

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible reveal God’s providence for all things large and small in the world, and especially for human life. However, His care and plan — especially for the faithful — are largely unknown to human beings.

**263. Is divine providence the work of the Holy Trinity?**

Divine Providence emerges in the cooperation between the Holy Trinity, for the sake of human salvation, our flourishing in the life of godliness, and our knowledge and enjoyment of the eternal inheritance. God the Father loved humanity and gave His only Son for us. The Son was pleased to be crucified and to die for our sake, so that we could live the resurrected life. And the Holy Spirit sanctifies, renews, and offers gifts in order to transform the believer, to imprint upon him the icon of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

Just as the Holy Trinity participated in creation, so also the Trinity continues to tend the creation. The Psalmist chants saying, “Who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things [the lowly] that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust . . . He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children” (Ps. 113:5–9). And in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus says, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). He also says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered . . . you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31).

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<sup>512</sup> See Malaty, Fr. Tadros Yacoub. *The Divine Providence* (The Orthodox Church, Church of Alexandria, 1990) and St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015).

#### **264. What is the relationship between divine providence and divine grace?**

The Fathers of the School of Alexandria thought much about God’s love for the human race. So, what is the relationship between grace and divine providence?

**First:** we cannot separate one from the other, for the very purpose of grace is to awaken the believer to realize **that he cannot regain the image of God in himself without grace. And the purpose of divine providence is to enable the believer to accompany God in every aspect of his life**, even during sleep, that it may carry him into the divine embrace. God’s love for humanity is the essence of divine grace and His providential care for us.

**Second: grace protects a person from deviation.** This deviation may be behavior that is inappropriate to God’s children. Or it may be the appeasing of one’s conscience by performing outward acts and attending to one’s moral reputation, yet never experiencing ongoing life, renewal, and flourishing in the knowledge of God, and liberation from glory unto glory through tasting the sweetness of the pledge of heaven while still in the flesh in this world. At the same time, grace reveals God’s care for us in that He sanctifies us, and in our conduct as sojourners in this world until we meet with the Lord face to face.

**Third:** divine providence reveals to us how God created the earth, the seas, and all of nature, even what seems trivial to us; in order for us to grow in knowledge and holiness. If He cares so for all creation, how much more must He care for the salvation of humanity?

#### **265. What does the Holy Bible say about divine providence?**

The Lord Jesus says, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt. 6:26). The Psalmist extols God’s care for him, saying, “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.’ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence ... You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day ...” (Ps. 91:2–5).

#### **266. How did the Church Fathers experience God’s protection?**

**St. Justin** found definite proof of God’s care for us in the prophecies of scripture; and the prophecies that relate to the attainment of our free salvation were fulfilled on the cross.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** also says “The holy Word of the Father, then, almighty and all-perfect, uniting with the universe and having everywhere unfolded His own powers, and having illumined all, both things seen and things invisible, holds them together and binds them to Himself, having left nothing void of His own power, but on the contrary giving life and sustaining all things everywhere, each severally and all collectively.”<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 3.42 (NPNF II/4:26) amended.



**St. Irenaeus** thought that it was appropriate for rational beings to know the One who cares for them and who manages their affairs.<sup>514</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** likens God to a river that divides into many branches to water the whole earth; there is no one who does not benefit from God's providence.<sup>515</sup>

### **267. How does God perserve the creation?**

God instituted natural laws to preserve creation. The Psalmist says, "O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all ... These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What you give them they gather in; you open Your hand, they are filled with good." (Ps. 104:24–28). It is true that some plants, animals, and birds become extinct; but the faithful live with God forever.

### **268. How does divine providence work in our lives?**

Divine providence works even in the seemingly insignificant matters in our lives, so that we do not feel that anything happens to us by chance. God gives the lilies of the field a supreme beauty. He feeds birds and animals, so how can He not sustain the human race? His general care for the earthly creation continues for a while, but His care for His righteous faithful is eternal.

### **269. How does the Church of Alexandria understand divine providence?**

Many ancient philosophers such as Philo, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and others contemplated the universe with its mighty laws, potential, beauty, etc. They believed in God's providence for the universe as a fact about reality, but they mostly considered His role to be limited to creating the universe with its natural laws, but then abandoning the universe after He had created it, leaving its laws to govern it.

However, the Alexandrian Fathers — who considered philosophy to be a divine gift that reveals part of the truth but not the whole — believed in divine providence based upon scripture rather than philosophy. I mean that **providence encompasses all creation** in general, and humans in particular, and it transcends and surpasses time and place. It cared about humanity even before we were created, that is, when we were still in the mind of God. This divine providence is still concerned with human affairs on earth and will continue its work even in the age to come. It embraces the faithful, and even irrational creatures. This is evident in God's tender mercies, His compassion upon us, and His discipline of us, through all the events of our lives, both happy and sad. Divine providence is tied to divine grace,

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<sup>514</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Againt Heresies* 3:25:1 (ANF 1:459).

<sup>515</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Psalms* 46.1 (PG 28:3).

which was manifest in the incarnation of the Word of God, His crucifixion, and His resurrection, that we might become children of God, and be worthy of the eternal inheritance.

## **270. What is the the extent of divine providence for the universe?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** affirms the transcendence of God and His exaltedness above the universe, perhaps to clarify the chasm that exists between the essence of God and the nature and essence of the universe. He says, “For human speech is by nature feeble, and incapable of uttering God ... [I do not say] His essence; for this is impossible, but the power and the works of God.”<sup>516</sup>

While St. Clement describes this chasm between God and the creation, he also declares that God is not far from the world, particularly from His noblest creation, that is, humanity. For God created the universe out of His love for humanity, as a gift to us; and for the same reason, He continues to care for all the affairs of the universe. He intervenes in our world out of His infinite love and heavenly fatherhood towards us.

**St. Clement** believes that the universe is an obvious proof of God’s providence. W. E. G. Floyd says, “Clement’s proof for the existence of divine providence, if proof is needed, is a teleological argument based on order and design in the universe. This is so evident, he argues, even from the most superficial glance at the world, that to deny it is an attack on the true doctrine.”<sup>517</sup>

**St. Clement** describes the strong relationship between God and the universe, saying, “But He who is far off has—oh ineffable marvel!—come very near. ‘I am a God that draws near,’ says the Lord (Jer. 23:23) ... But He is very near in virtue of that power [providence] which holds all things in its embrace.”<sup>518</sup>

**St. Athanasius** speaks of God's transcendence, and also confirms His presence, saying, “[God] comes wholly in each and in all ... he holds together all things and is with all.”<sup>519</sup> The saint declares that God, by His goodness and grace, is not far from any one of us, “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

**St. Athanasius** also says, “The Word then is in the Father as being His own; but things that have an origin, being external, are attached, as being by nature foreign, and attached by free choice. For a son by nature is one with him who begat him; but he who is from without, and is made a son, will be attached to the family. Therefore he immediately adds, ‘What nation is there so great who has God drawing nigh unto them?’ (Deut. 4:7 LXX) and

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<sup>516</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.18 (ANF 2:519).

<sup>517</sup> W. E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's treatment of the problem of evil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971): p. 36.

<sup>518</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.2 (ANF 2:348).

<sup>519</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 42: pp. 141–143.

elsewhere, ‘I am God drawing nigh’ (Jer. 23:23 LXX). For to created things He draws nigh, as being strange to Him, but to the Son, as being His own, He does not draw nigh, but He is in Him. So for the creation, He (the Father) approaches them even though they are foreign to Him but as for the Son (since He is begotten of Him), He does not approach Him since the Son is in the Father.”<sup>520</sup>

O, the wonderous love of God! We who once were foreigners have become attached to the unapproachable God through His goodness and grace!

**St. Clement of Alexandria** explains that “God’s resting is not, then, as some conceive, that God ceased from doing. For, being good, if He should ever cease from doing good, then would He cease from being God.”<sup>521</sup> He says that the universe resembles an axe that has no power in itself, but needs the hand of God hand to wield it in a suitable way to achieve the purpose of its existence: “just as the axe does not [cut] without one to cut with it, or a saw without one sawing with it. And as they do not work by themselves, but have certain physical qualities which accomplish their proper work by the exertion of the artisan; so also, by the universal providence of God.”<sup>522</sup>

**St. Macarius the Great** described God’s immanence in our spiritual life in these words: “If then, you seek the Lord in the depth, there you find Him. If you seek in the water, you find Him there, doing wonders (Ex. 15:11). If you seek Him in the den, there you find Him between two lions, guarding the righteous Daniel. If you seek Him in fire, there you find Him, succouring His servants. If you seek Him in the mountain, there you find Him with Elijah and Moses. He is everywhere beneath the earth, and above the heavens, and within us as well.”<sup>523</sup>

## 271. Does God have authority over the heavenly and earthly creations?

God has authority over His creation and has set natural statutes and laws to govern it. He manifests His compassion and wisdom in the ordering of His creation. His purpose is to achieve the ultimate perfect goal. If God grants His rational creatures freedom of the will, He allows them to fulfill even their evil will, and at the same time, He turns their evil to good. This is what happened with Joseph’s brothers who intended evil for their righteous brother, and sold him as a slave. But in due time, he became the second man after Pharaoh and saved the lives of his father Jacob and his brothers who had wronged him. This also is that which the Lord affirmed through the mouth of Isaiah the prophet: “My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure” (Isa. 46:10). People may think that God does not act to resist the injustice that falls upon the righteous. Because He is long-suffering, some think that He does

<sup>520</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 4.5 (NPNF II/4:435) amended.

<sup>521</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.16 (ANF 2:513). See also 5.14, 6.12.

<sup>522</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.16 (ANF 2:515).

<sup>523</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 12.12: p. 95, amended.

not care about the wrongdoings committed by the wicked, yet His will is all-powerful and all-knowing.

**272. Do events happen in the creation through coincidence or destiny?**

The very hairs of our heads are all numbered by God (Matt. 10:29–30), for He is the Almighty who know all things. Nothing escapes His sight and knowledge, and nothing happens without His permission. Therefore, the believer knows that all things work together for good for those who love God (Rom. 8:28) and that He does not allow anything to happen by chance.

**273. Do miracles break the laws of nature?**

From the believer’s point of view, a miracle is not the occurrence of an event that is against nature; it is an event that transcends nature. God, perfect in His power, wisdom, and provision, allows things that seem to be beyond nature to occur, not to break the laws of nature that He Himself laid down, but to fulfil that which is according to His love, His goodness, and His power. The laws of nature cannot govern God, since He established them for edification. Nonetheless, He can perform things that are beyond nature, perhaps for the sake of the repentance of a sinner, or for the edification of a holy person, or for some purpose that is revealed only in due time.

**274. What does it mean that God manages the affairs of the world?**

The all-good God cares for the human being and presents him with opportunities to enjoy the holy life, to fulfil God's plan for him, and to enjoy the eternal inheritance. God gives us the opportunity to ask, seek, and knock (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9) so that we may feel His love and delight when He grants us more than we ask and beyond that which we request. Through our dealings with Him, we experience His compassion, wisdom, and holiness. God, in His providence, is long-suffering and never ceases to provide opportunities for sinners to return to Him, even to the last moments of their lives. We always hear Him saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa. 46:10).

**St. Theophilus of Antioch** and **St. John Chrysostom** likened God to the captain of a ship sailing towards a safe port, manifesting His wisdom and holy will, carrying those who trust in Him to reach safe haven. Nothing that happens in the world is just fate — God’s providence precedes, sees, and knows that will happen. Nothing happens by chance, as some think.

### 275. What is the role of divine providence in our creation?

We are indebted to the beneficent God for His love for us, with which He loved us even before we ever existed. **St. Clement of Alexandria** declares that the human being was in the thought of God before he was created. In His endless love, He created the world for the sake of the human being, and then created the human being in His own image and likeness, that he might taste communion with Him. He says, “Man is therefore justly dear to God, since he is His workmanship. **The other works of creation He made by the word of command alone [He said, and it was], but man He framed by Himself, by His own hand, and breathed into him what was peculiar to Himself.**”<sup>524</sup>

**Origen** says, “For there is no one who does not have experience of this law, which is naturally innate within men, both Jews and Gentiles ... One finds that God has in fact given to man every disposition and every drive by which he can press forward and advance toward virtue. Over and above the power of reason God has ensured that man should know what he ought to do and what he ought to avoid. One finds then that God has supplied these things universally to all men.”<sup>525</sup>

### 276. Why did the beneficent God give a commandment to Adam and Eve in Paradise?

This commandment was not a burden upon Adam and Eve, but a gift to them out of His divine providence. How?

God created humanity in his own likeness, that is, bearing the nature of love, longing to love and to be loved by others. God fulfilled them with His own personal love, and humanity needed to reply to God’s love with love. So, the commandment was a means that enabled our first parents to show their practical love for their Creator, if they so chose.

Without commandments, humanity cannot not experience one of God’s greatest gifts — namely free will. Through commandments, humanity has the right to choose whether to accept God in their lives and nature or to reject Him and disobey His commandments.

God did not leave them alone, but He was their Helper; not by coercion, but only if they so willed with complete freedom. **St. Macarius the Great** speaks of Adam’s potential in God thus: “So long as the Word of God [the Logos] was with him, and the commandment, everything was his. The Word Himself was to him an inheritance; He was his clothing, and a glory that was his defence; He was his instruction ... The Word Himself being with him was everything to him, whether knowledge, or experience, or inheritance, or instruction ... and so long as he abode in the commandment he was a friend of God.”<sup>526</sup>

<sup>524</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.3 (ANF 2:210). See also 1.8.

<sup>525</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1–5, 3.6.1–2 (FOTC 103:203–204).

<sup>526</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 12.6–8; pp. 91–92.

**277. What is the extent of divine providence in human life?**

Out of His love for humanity, God concerns Himself with every aspect of our lives. His providence encompasses all things, even the number of hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7). Thus, we should be aware that everything that happens occurs according to God's providence. The scholar **Origen** says, "so completely does the Divine Providence embrace all things, that not even the hairs of our head fail to be numbered by Him."<sup>527</sup>

**278. Does divine providence include animals?**

The scholar **Origen** says, "God manifestly watches over the movement of the heavens and the stars and over all the animals and plants of all kinds that on the earth and in the sea through His divine art are brought to perfection in birth, development, nourishment and increase. So it would clearly be absurd for us to close our eyes to this and not to look to God."<sup>528</sup>

**279. Does divine providence ever cease from working?**

**St. Clement** says that God's goodness is always at work, like the care of a shepherd for his sheep, a king for his subjects, and a father for his children.<sup>529</sup> The scholar **Origen** also says, "And as a husbandman performs different acts of husbandry upon the soil and its productions, according to the varying seasons of the year, so God administers entire ages of time, as if they were, so to speak, so many individual years, performing during each one of them what is requisite with a reasonable regard to the care of the world; and this, as it is truly understood by God alone, so also is it accomplished by Him."<sup>530</sup>

**280. What is the purpose of divine providence for every human being?**

**St. Clement** explains that divine providence embraces the human being as a whole: body; mind; and soul. As the true friend of humanity, God works to sanctify us, so that we might become icons of our Holy Creator. The scholar **Origen** says, "'No one is holy like the Lord' (1 Sam. 2:2). No matter how great a man's growth in holiness, or his attainments in purity and faithfulness, no one can ever attain the holiness of the Lord. It is God who gives holiness; man merely receives it. God is the fountain of holiness; man merely drinks of it. God is holy light; man merely gazes upon it."<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.70 (ANF 4:667).

<sup>528</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 1.4 (ACW 19:144).

<sup>529</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.17 (ANF 2:515–518).

<sup>530</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.69 (ANF 4:528).

<sup>531</sup> Origen, *Homilies on 1 Samuel*, Homily 2; see Benjamin Drewery, *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace* (University of Michigan, 1960).

### 281. What do the Alexandrians seek from divine providence?

The Alexandrian Fathers — who sought the knowledge of the truth, and who realized that our Savior is the Truth and the true Teacher of Truth, and the Way and the Door that leads to Truth — aspired to declare Truth or to divine knowledge or “gnosis” as one of the greatest gifts of divine providence. The human being does not relate to God as a slave to a master or as a lifeless tool in the hand of a craftsman; but as a child who knows his father with true knowledge and trust; or as a bride going in to a bridal chamber together with her bridegroom, united together in mind and heart as they become one in body. The scholar **Origen** says, “For that which sees God is not the eye of the body; it is the mind which is made in the image of the Creator, and which God has in His providence rendered capable of that knowledge.”<sup>532</sup>

### 282. Where do the angels, both good and evil, stand in relation to divine providence?

In the early centuries of Christianity, this question arose: how do we explain the existence of evil demons who control humanity in a world governed by the providence of God? The Alexandrian Fathers replied thus:

Humans became the children of Satan (John 8:44) completely of their own free will, rather than embracing God and enjoying union with Him.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** and the scholar **Origen** explained that the plan of the demons is to try to make humans fall, bind them into slavery, and to win them over to their side. But divine providence supports us with the angels for our protection if we accept their service on our behalf (Heb. 1:14), and leads us to the heavenly wedding, if this is indeed what we desire and yearn for.

The battle is waged between God and demons. If we shelter in God, the demons will be defeated. The scholar **Origen** says, if a person accepts faith, then Christ “who has redeemed us with His own blood entrusts us to a holy angel, who also, because of his purity, beholds the face of God.”<sup>533</sup> **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “And justly indeed; for if there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7), what should there not be over the abolition of sin, and the resurrection of the dead? Oh what a feast and how great the gladness in heaven! How must all its hosts rejoice and exult, as they rejoice and watch in our assemblies, those that are held continually, and especially those at Easter?”<sup>534</sup>

<sup>532</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.33 (ANF 4:625).

<sup>533</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 13.28 (ANF 10:491) amended.

<sup>534</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Festal Letters* 6.10 (NPNF II/4:522) amended.

### **283. Why does God guarantee that we play our role as humans even though we rely on divine providence?**

God requires humanity to play its role for two reasons: it is a precious gift from God; and it affirms God's friendship with humanity. God cooperates with His beloved human beings, even though they are incapable of any good work by themselves, without His grace and care.

The scholar **Origen** says that man “is capable of considering and admiring all things (as co-operating with Providence).”<sup>535</sup> **Abba Paphnutius** says, “But it is well for us to be sure that although we practise every virtue with unceasing efforts, yet with all our exertions and zeal we can never arrive at perfection, nor is mere human diligence and toil of itself sufficient to deserve to reach the splendid reward of bliss, unless we have secured it by means of the co-operation of the Lord, and His directing our heart to what is right.”<sup>536</sup>

### **284. What do we benefit from divine providence?**

**First:** the Alexandrian Fathers believe that the greatest benefit that results from divine providence is **our enjoyment of God who dwells in us**. **St. Macarius the Great** says, “As a wealthy maiden, betrothed to a husband, may receive ever so many presents before the marriage, ornaments, or dresses, or costly vessels, but is not satisfied until the time of the wedding comes and she is made one with him, so the soul, when it is engaged as a bride to the heavenly Bridegroom receives as a promise from the Spirit gifts of healings, it may be, or of knowledge, or of revelation, but it is not satisfied with these, until it attains the complete union, namely, charity (love), which can never change nor fail, which sets those who have longed for it free from passion and from agitation. Or as a babe that is adorned with pearls and costly clothes, when it is hungry, thinks nothing of the things that it wears, but despises them, and cares only for its nurse's breast, how it may get the milk; so reckon it to be, I pray you, even with the spiritual gifts of God. To whom be glory for ever. Amen.”<sup>537</sup>

**Second:** the most profound expression of God's divine providence is manifest in His Fatherhood for humanity. He seeks the hearts of His children and raises them up to His glories, that they may enjoy His eternal love. The Alexandrian Fathers expound this biblical principle thus:

**St. Clement of Alexandria** declares that although we are of an entirely different nature to God, He still loves us and cares for us as a Father toward His natural children. He says, “But the mercy of God is rich toward us, who are **in no respect related to Him**; I say either in our essence or nature, or in the peculiar energy of our essence, but only in our being the work of His will. And him who willingly, with discipline and teaching, accepts the

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<sup>535</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.82 (ANF 4:534).

<sup>536</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 3.12 (NPNF II/11:325–326).

<sup>537</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 45.7: p. 285 amended.



knowledge of the truth, He calls to adoption, which is **the greatest advancement of all**.<sup>538</sup> And **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** also says, “For God not only created them to be men, but called them to be sons ... God is not our Father by nature, but of that Word [Logos] in us, in whom and because of whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4:6). And so in like manner, the Father calls them sons in whomsoever He sees His own Son.”<sup>539</sup>

The Father sent His Only-Begotten Son to invite the believers to abide in Him through the Holy Spirit, and thus to attain adoption by the Father. This gift was previously foretold by Isaiah, saying, “And call His servants by another name” (Isa. 65:15). What is this other name except “The children of God”?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Rightly, then, are those called children who know Him who is God alone as their Father, who are simple, and infants, and guileless ... Thus also the Father of the universe cherishes affection towards those who have fled to Him; and having begotten them again by His Spirit to the adoption as children, knows them as gentle, and loves those alone, and aids and fights for them; and therefore He bestows on them the name of child.”<sup>540</sup> “The gnostic [one who truly knows God], consequently, in virtue of being a lover of the one true God, is the really perfect man and friend of God, and is placed in the rank of son.”<sup>541</sup>

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “We are sons and gods because of the Word in us, so we shall be in the Son and in the Father, and we shall be accounted to have become one in the Son and in the Father, because the Spirit is in us, the Spirit which is in the Word and the Father.”<sup>542</sup>

## 285. Does God care for all humanity generally, or for each individual particularly?

**St. Clement** says, “His providence is in private, in public, and everywhere.”<sup>543</sup> And the scholar **Origen** says, “And God takes care, not, as Celsus supposes, merely of the *whole*, but beyond the whole, in a special degree of every rational being. Nor will Providence ever abandon the whole.”<sup>544</sup>

## 286. Does discipline contradict divine providence?

Floyd says, “But besides the rosy picture of providence which depicts God as the merciful provider, Clement is not blind of its shadows. **Providence is also a disciplinary art** which

<sup>538</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.16 (ANF 2:364).

<sup>539</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.59 (NPNF II/4:380).

<sup>540</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.5 (ANF 2:213, 214).

<sup>541</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.11 (ANF 2:542).

<sup>542</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.25 (NPNF II/4:407) amended.

<sup>543</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.2 (ANF 2:524).

<sup>544</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.99 (ANF 4:541).

chastens man both for his own benefit and as an example to others ... Censure is the mark of goodwill, not ill will ... the Lord is good despite the rod, threatening, and fear.”<sup>545</sup>

John Patrick says, “The controversy raised by Marcion led Clement to deal with the relation of the Divine justice to the Divine goodness.”<sup>546</sup>

Marcion attributed justice to the God of the Old Testament, characterizing Him as a violent punisher of people; while he attributed goodness to the God of the New Testament, characterizing Him as compassionate and sympathetic towards people. **St. Clement** explains that there is just one God in both the Old and the New Testaments; a God who is merciful and good in His justice, and just in His goodness. Divine punishment does not emanate from anger; He is truly both just and good at the same time. When He punishes people, His punishment is never vengeful, but always disciplinary and remedial. He chastises for three reasons:

For the good of the person who is chastised, to elevate him to a higher status, with the aim of saving the person who has become blameworthy.

As an example to others, so that through observing the censure and admonition, they may draw back from falling into sin.

God chastises the one who transgresses so that the sinner should not fall under judgment because of his sin.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “‘Do not any longer,’ he says, ‘my son, despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him’ (Prov. 3:11). O surpassing love for man! Not as a teacher speaking to his pupils, not as a master to his servants, nor as God to men, but as a father, does the Lord gently admonish his children.”<sup>547</sup>

## **287. Why is it dangerous to think that we can understand the providence of God?**

**St. John Chrysostom** answers: “What then, is the cause of such a sickness? It is an inquisitive and curious mind, it is wanting to know all the causes of everything that happens, it is questioning **the incomprehensible and unspeakable providence of God, and it is shamelessly investigating and being inquisitive about that which is limitless and unsearchable.**

“Indeed, who was wiser than Paul? For tell me, was he not a *chosen vessel* (Acts 9:15)? Did he not acquire the abundant and ineffable grace of the Spirit? Did he not have Christ speaking in him? Did he not partake of the unutterable words of God? Did not he alone hear that which it is not lawful for any man to speak? Was he not carried up to the third heaven?

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<sup>545</sup> W. E. G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's treatment of the problem of evil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971): p. 40 (bold emphasis added).

<sup>546</sup> John Patrick, *Clement of Alexandria* (William Blackwell and Sons, 1914): p. 90.

<sup>547</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 9 (ANF 2:195) amended.

Did he not traverse the earth and sea? Did he not persuade uncivilized people to follow Christ? Did he not possess many and various powers of the Spirit? ... But nevertheless, such a great and surpassing man who was so wise, so strong, so spiritual, who had the benefit of so much, when he fell into scrutinizing the providence of God—and not His entire providence but only a portion of it—listen to how he was astounded, how he became dizzy, how he swiftly turned away, yielding before the incomprehensible ... in considering only one portion of God’s providence, regarding the Jews and the Greeks—since Paul gave a whole discourse about this, demonstrating how God called those from among the nations, how He rejected those from among the Jews, and how He mercifully brought about the salvation of each—listen to what Paul says. Beholding a yawning sea and in it this one portion, and wanting to peer into the depth of God’s providence regarding it, as if possessed by a certain dizziness before the ineffability of God’s economy, amazed and astonished at the unspeakableness, the limitlessness, the ineffability, and the incomprehensibility of the wisdom and providence of God, he turned away and with great amazement cried out, uttering these words: *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom. 11:33).

“Then, showing that although he saw the depth, he was not able to measure it, he added: *How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* (Rom. 11:33) ... he ends his discourse with a doxology, which he introduces by saying: *Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Or who has first given unto Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory forever. Amen.* (Rom. 11:34–36). What he means is this: God is the Source, He is the Cause of good things; He needs no partner, He needs no counselor. He acts and works wonders without borrowing intelligence or understanding from anyone. He Himself is the Beginning, the Cause, and the Source of all good things; He Himself is the Creator, He Himself brought into being that which had not existed; and He Himself directs, orders, and maintains that which He brought into being, as He wishes. The words *Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things* declare that God is the Cause and the Creator of that which exists, Who governs and sustains all things.”<sup>548</sup>

## 288. Is the apostles’ knowledge here the like their knowledge in the afterlife?

**St. John Chrysostom** answers: “wanting to show how great the disparity is between this knowledge here and that knowledge there, and that there is a great deal lacking here, he made this clear by certain images, saying: *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face* (1 Cor. 13:11–12). Do you see how great the disparity is? As much as between a young child and a full-grown man, as much as between seeing through a mirror and by riddles and all the other obscure ways of seeing things—and

<sup>548</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015): pp. 35–38, amended.

clear vision (this is the meaning of *face to face*) ... Why do you not pay heed to Paul when he says: *But nay, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me thus* (Rom. 9:20)? ...

“But He Whom you subject to inquisitive scrutiny is indestructible, unchangeable, always existing and existing in the same way, without beginning, everlasting, incomprehensible, exceeding the mind, surpassing reason, inexpressible, ineffable, and inapprehensible—not only to you and to me and to the prophets and the apostles, but also to the powers on high, who are pure, invisible, and bodiless, and who continually abide in heaven.”<sup>549</sup>

### **289. Are the heavenly orders capable of comprehending or apprehending God?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Will you not slink away and sink into the ground and hide, you who with such eagerness wish to pry into the providence of God, Whose power is ineffable, inexpressible, and inapprehensible by the powers above?”<sup>550</sup>

### **290. Who declares to us the provisions (judgments) of God?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “How have we come to know this, O Paul? Who revealed, who made clear these things that are unseen and unheard of and have not entered into the heart of man? Tell and show us who provided us such knowledge. *God*, he says, *has revealed it to us by His Holy spirit* (1 Cor. 2:10). Then, in order that no one should think that the Spirit knows only that which God has revealed to us through Him and that He does not also possess all knowledge, he adds: *For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man that is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.* (1 Cor. 2:10–11).”<sup>551</sup>

### **291. How does God reveal His care for us?**

The Holy Bible communicates God’s divine love and care for us through a variety of analogies from different kinds of human relationships of love:

**Analogy of the love of a mother and father:** the prophet responds to those who say, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me,” saying “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?” (Isa. 49:14–15). It is as if he is saying, *It is impossible for the mother to forget her nursing child; even moreso, the Lord cannot forget humanity.* Our Lord confirms that His love for us exceeds the love of a

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<sup>549</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom*, (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015): pp. 39–41, amended.

<sup>550</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom*, (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015): pp. 42–43.

<sup>551</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom*, (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015): pp. 43–44, amended.

father for his children when he says, “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matt. 7:9–11).

**Analogy of the love between sweethearts:** the Psalmist says, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:11). In the spirit of love, the Lord did not draw back from saying, “So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (Ex. 32:14).

**Analogy of matrimonial love:** “And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa. 62:5). Love is at its pinnacle at the beginning of the relationship between newlyweds. God uses this analogy so that we can experience the intensity of His true love.

**Analogy of the love of a craftsman for his handwork:** when Jonah was angry at the destruction of the gourd, the Lord comforted him, saying, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left?” (Jonah 4:10–11).

## **292. What is the difference between God’s foreknowledge of matters, and fate or destiny?**

God’s foreknowledge of events differs from fate and destiny. God knows in advance what we do; but this foreknowledge is not what impels us to act sinfully or to do evil. Rather, our actions arise from our own free will.



## 8

# Divine Grace <sup>552</sup>

### 293. How do we distinguish between the Almighty God's divine grace, divine providence, and divine economy?<sup>553</sup>

He who clings to God and enters into a personal relationship with Him feels that all that occupies God is His beloved human being, whether at the level of the universal Church which extends from Adam and Eve until His second coming, or at the level of every member therein. When a person is in contact with God, he feels — as **St. Augustine** says — as though God and His beloved Augustine are all that exists.<sup>554</sup> In the life of the faithful, the feeling becomes clear that God works with them, in them, and for their sake. This divine operation consists of:

Divine grace.

Divine providence.

Divine economy of God the Almighty (*Pantocrator*).

It is difficult to separate these three modes of divine operation from one other. However, we can differentiate somewhat between them as follows:

**Divine Grace.** John the Evangelist referred to it saying, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16–17). In literalism that kills (2 Cor. 3:6) and narrow mindedness, some might think that divine grace does nothing more than bestow on us the ability to behave in moral ways. But those who delight in grace realize that it is a gift from the Father, granted to us by Christ our Savior, through the Holy Spirit, who guides us to enjoy continuous renewal and unceasing progress, rising from glory to glory, tasting the promise of heaven.

**Divine Providence.** Through our union with the Only-Begotten Son we become children of God the Father in baptism, in our membership in the body of Christ, and in our awareness that we are the holy temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16). The believer feels that he is carried in the everlasting arms and that the forces of darkness cannot trouble his heart. Thus we understand the words of the Evangelist: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name”

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<sup>552</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Divine Grace* (Sporting, Alexandria: St George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1992).

<sup>553</sup> *Divine economy* (Greek *oikonomia*) is a theological term referring to God's plan from before all ages, hidden from humanity but implemented throughout history for the salvation and sanctification of the world, especially through the incarnation of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>554</sup> Compare St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 3.11.19 (FOTC 21:69).

(John 1:12). Paul the Apostle became aware of this gift — this “being the child of God the Father” — when he was liberated from the letter of the Law and delighted in “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

**Divine Economy of God the Almighty (*Pantocrator*).** The Church cherishes this title “*Pantocrator*” or “Ruler of All” who governs all that occurs in the world, whether big or small, through His love, wisdom, and wondrous management that surpasses human thought.

#### 294. What is divine grace?<sup>555</sup>

Throughout the whole of his Gospel, our teacher John presents to us the person of the divine Word incarnate as the **Source from which infinite divine grace flows**; particularly the grace of creation, the grace of being God’s children, and an abundance of other blessings. The Evangelist says, “**And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (John 1:16–17). John the Evangelist declares that Jesus Christ is the mystery of fullness for the whole Church; the Spring of graces unceasing; the overflowing love endlessly erupting. Out of His perfect infinite fullness He overflows over His Church so that each of its members may enjoy partaking of the divine nature; for He is the source of all graces who fills our treasuries (Prov. 8:21). Grace flows into us from Him as water flows into a stream from the spring which is its source. The divine gifts are graces, and hence, are free (Rom. 12:6). And as the Father is pleased with His Beloved, the Only-Begotten Son, He is pleased with us in Him (Eph. 1:6).

The early Eastern Church Fathers were not much concerned with *defining* theological terms like “grace.” Instead, they devoted their attention to exploring the *work* of grace and its role in the life of the believer, from his creation to the day of his meeting the Lord in the clouds. The mind of the Alexandrian Church was occupied with experiencing the life of union with God as a promise of the delight of the eternal life. Thus, it is not surprising that the scholar **Origen** used the name “**Christ**” to denote His gifts or His grace.

Benjamin Drewery attempts to present a definition of divine grace as it is found in the many writings of **Origen**. He says, “we may suggest that if Origen had been required to offer a formal definition of grace, he would have responded somewhat as follows: grace is the power of God freely but not unconditionally placed at man’s disposal, whereby he appropriates through the Holy Spirit the offer of salvation to a new and ultimately eternal life

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<sup>555</sup> See the interpretations and reflections of the Church Fathers in the Addendum to Chapter One on Divine Grace in Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Gospel of John: A Patristic Commentary*, Part 1, Chapters 1–8, trans., Mary Rose Halim and Mary Barsoum (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2003).



revealed and enacted in scripture by the incarnate Jesus Christ and now made available by Him to the world.”<sup>556</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “What, then, is ‘grace for grace’? By faith we render God favorable to us; and inasmuch as we were not worthy to have our sins forgiven, and because we, who were unworthy, received so great a benefit, it is called grace. What is grace? That which is freely given ... And having obtained favor from God by living by faith, you shall receive immortality as a reward, and life eternal. And that is grace.”<sup>557</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “David laments and says: ‘I was conceived in iniquity and in sins did my mother conceive me’ (Ps. 51:5). The Apostle also declares: ‘For all have sinned and do need the glory of God, being **justified freely by his grace**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood’ (Rom. 3:23–25). Wherefore, the pardon of sins is also vouchsafed to them that believe, since the Lord Himself said: ‘This is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins’ (Matt. 26:28).”<sup>558</sup>

## 295. What is the first work of divine grace?

The first grace bestowed upon humanity is **creation**. God brought humans into being out of nothing, so we feel that we owe Him all our lives. He also bestowed upon us **the grace of His image**, by which we became able to experience the life of paradise, and to be aware of the mysteries of the knowledge of God; communicating with the Creator and becoming His likeness, seeing Him and living with Him immortally, forever.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** explains that it is the Word (Logos), the Creator, who grants us the grace of enjoying the image of God, and also restores that image in us by renewing our nature after it is corrupted. So, we focus our inner vision on God, and are thereby granted a familiarity with Him without shame; comprehending His mysteries and filled with joy. He also says, “[the man] having the grace of Him that gave it, having also God’s own power from the Word of the Father, he might rejoice and have fellowship with the Deity, living the life of immortality [without death] unharmed and truly blessed. For having nothing to hinder his knowledge of the Deity, he ever beholds, by his purity<sup>559</sup> ... and seeing the Word, it sees in Him also the Father of the Word, taking pleasure in contemplating Him, and gaining renewal by its desire toward Him; exactly as the first of men created, the one who was named Adam in Hebrew, is described in the Holy Scriptures as having at the beginning had his mind to God-ward in a freedom unembarrassed by shame ... in that contemplation of things perceived by the mind which he enjoyed in the place where he was—the place which the holy Moses called in figure a Garden [Paradise]. So purity of soul is

<sup>556</sup> Benjamin Drewery, *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace* (University of Michigan, 1960): p. 48.

<sup>557</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 3.9 (NPNF I/7:21) .

<sup>558</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Concerning Baptism* 1.2 (FOTC 9:357–358) amended.

<sup>559</sup> He means the purity of the first creation within which He formed the human being.

sufficient of itself to reflect God, as the Lord also says, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (see Matt. 5:8).”<sup>560</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Why did God create if He did not need (the creation); if not out of the grace whose operations surpass the (minds) of rational beings?”<sup>561</sup> He also says, “It was grace that established the world, and carries and preserves it, as if [the world] were suspended from something larger. It was written that He suspended the earth from nothing (Job 26:7). Consider it obvious that it is His grace that holds it.”<sup>562</sup>

## **296. Is the grace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit one?**

Bestowing divine grace is a single divine act, the work of the Holy Trinity who loves humanity. The Father bestows His grace abundantly through the divine Word who is the power and wisdom of God, and He bestows it upon us by His Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of power and wisdom. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “therefore it is impossible, if the Father bestows grace, that He should not give it in the Son, for the Son is in the Father as the radiance is in the light. For, not as if in need, but as a Father in His own Wisdom has God founded the earth, and made all things in the Word which is from Him, and in the Son confirms the Holy Font [baptism]. For where the Father is, there is the Son, and where the light is, there is the radiance ... **And the grace given is one, given from the Father in the Son**, as Paul writes in every Epistle, ‘Grace unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 1:7 etc.)”<sup>563</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “If, then, the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, the grace one, the love one, and the communion one, the working is certainly one, and where the working is one, certainly the power cannot be divided nor the substance separated.”<sup>564</sup>

## **297. Are there limits to the growth of the work of grace?**

For our sake, it was said of the Lord Jesus Christ: “And the Child **grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom**, and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40), and, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). And as the scholar **Origen** says, “He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) ... And by the same power by which He emptied Himself, He also bestowed growth [on others].” Thus, He accompanies us on the path of continual growth in unending grace. For grace is God’s work within us; continuous, dynamic, unceasing.

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<sup>560</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 2.2–4 (NPNF II/4:5).

<sup>561</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 114.

<sup>562</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 115.

<sup>563</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.18.41–42 (NPNF II/4:370–371) amended.

<sup>564</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.12.131 (NPNF II/10:110).

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “Of the body then is the advance; for, it advancing, in it advanced also the manifestation of the Godhead to those who saw it. And, as the Godhead was more and more revealed, by so much more did His grace as man increase before all men. For as a child He was carried to the Temple; and when He became a boy, He remained there, and questioned the priests about the Law.”<sup>565</sup>

St. Gregory of Nyssa says, “for to those who await it with eager patience there comes **the trustworthy and unambiguous enjoyment of the grace** that is hoped for.”<sup>566</sup> And also: “**Neither, moreover, does the one who is mounting up ever cease to promote one starting point into another, nor does the starting point of ever-greater things find fulfillment simply in itself.** For the desire of the soul that is ascending never rests content with what has been known. In turn mounting upwards by way of one greater desire toward another that surpasses it, that soul is always journeying toward the infinite by way of higher things.”<sup>567</sup>

### **298. Is grace limited to a specific group?**

The scholar **Origen** says, “But thanks be unto God, that, even if the grace of prophecy was taken from the people, a grace greater than all that was poured forth among the Gentiles by our Saviour Jesus Christ”<sup>568</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria**, says, “For ‘I became all things to all men, that I might gain all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22). Since also ‘the rain’ of the divine grace is sent down ‘on the just and the unjust’ (Matt. 5:45).”<sup>569</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “the Apostle aptly explained that God, ‘who wishes all men to be saved’ (1 Tim. 2:4), is good to all men. **And the special favor of God’s goodness is reserved most of all for the faithful**, who receive the assistance of His good will and of His grace.”<sup>570</sup>

### **299. Why did Lord not entrust grace to one of His creations?**

**St Athanasius the Apostle** says, “inasmuch as the Lord has received, and the grant is lodged with Him, the grace may remain sure. For while mere man receives, he is liable to lose again (as was shewn in the case of Adam, for he received and he lost, but that the grace

<sup>565</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.28.52 (NPNF II/4:422).

<sup>566</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 3: p. 107.

<sup>567</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 8: p. 261.

<sup>568</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 10.22 (ANF 10:429).

<sup>569</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 5.3 (ANF 2:448).

<sup>570</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Prayer of Job and David* 3 (FOTC 65:372).

may be irrevocable, and may be kept sure by men, therefore He Himself appropriates the gift; and He says that He has received power, as man, which He ever had as God.”<sup>571</sup>

### **300. Does everyone receive the same portion of Divine grace?**

**St. Jerome** says, “not that Christ’s measure varies, but only that so much of His grace is poured out as we can receive.”<sup>572</sup>

### **301. Do we still need divine grace after repentance and baptism?**

In his book on “**Grace and Free Will**,”<sup>573</sup> **St. Augustine** urges us to cling to divine grace, saying, “Thus, it is necessary for a man that he should be not only justified when unrighteous [i.e., before his repentance or baptism] by the grace of God,—that is, be changed from unholiness to righteousness,—when he is requited with good for his evil; but that, even after he has become justified by faith, grace should accompany him on his way, and he should lean upon it, lest he fall.”<sup>574</sup>

### **302. Is grace necessary for those who strive?**

**Abba Paphnutius** says, “But it is well for us to be sure that although we practise every virtue with unceasing efforts, yet with all our exertions and zeal we can never arrive at perfection, nor is mere human diligence and toil of itself sufficient to deserve to reach the splendid reward of bliss, unless we have secured it by means of the co-operation of the Lord, and His directing our heart to what is right.”<sup>575</sup> He also says, “that we may know that we cannot strive without the help of God, nor can our efforts be of any use in securing the great reward of purity, unless it has been granted to us by the assistance and mercy of the Lord: for ‘a horse is prepared for the day of battle: but help comes from the Lord’ (Prov. 21:31), ‘for no man can prevail by strength’ (1 Sam. 2:9).”<sup>576</sup>

**St. Augustine** says of St. Paul: “So it seems he did not labor in order to receive grace, but he received grace in order that he might labour.”<sup>577</sup> He also says, “How, then, is God’s commandment accomplished, even with difficulty, without His help, since, if the Lord does not build, the builder is said to have labored in vain (cf. Ps. 127:1).”<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.27.38 (NPNF II/4:415).

<sup>572</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.23 (NPNF II/6:406).

<sup>573</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 12–13 (NPNF I/5:448–449).

<sup>574</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 13 (NPNF I/5:449).

<sup>575</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 3.12 (NPNF II/11:325–326).

<sup>576</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 3.15 (NPNF II/11:327).

<sup>577</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Work on the Proceedings of Pelagius* 36 (NPNF I/5:200).

<sup>578</sup> Letter from Alypius and Augustine to Paulinus, in *St. Augustine of Hippo, Letters*, Volume IV (165–203) 186 (FOTC 12:217).

### 303. Is labor necessary?

The apostle Paul says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

The scholar **Origen** says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it have labored in vain, and unless the Lord guards the city, the guard has kept watch in vain” (Ps. 127:1), in which he shows not that one who builds a house should do nothing and be idle and that this is how the Lord builds it, but he must indeed invest as much attentive care and effort as lies within man; but it depends on God, once all obstacles have been removed, for the work to reach completion. Since, therefore, through this it is being taught that man must indeed expend effort and attentive care, but that God grants the success and completion to the work, it is assuredly pious and religious, while God and man do what is in themselves, to attribute the chief part of the work to God rather than to man. And so, although Paul was planting and Apollos was watering, God is said to give the increase. It is also added, ‘Consequently, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but he who gives the increase, God’ (1 Cor. 3:6–7). So then, we too say likewise in the present passage: Consequently, neither the one who strives nor the one who wills is anything, but he who grants the completion, God.”<sup>579</sup>

He also says, “Paul wants to remind us that we are not saved simply by receiving God’s free grace, but that we must prove that we want to receive this free grace. The children of Israel received it, but they proved their unworthiness of it, and thus, they were not saved.”<sup>580</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “After saying: ‘of His fullness we have all received,’ he added: ‘and grace for grace’ (John 1:16). ‘Not on account of your increase in numbers,’ Scripture says, ‘have I chosen you, but because of your fathers’ (Deut. 7:7). If, then, it was not because of their own good deeds that they were chosen by God, it is evident that they obtained this honor by grace. And we, too, have all been saved by grace, but not in the same way as they. It was not for the same reasons, but for much greater ones, and more sublime. Therefore, [the working of] grace in us is not the same as in them. Not only was pardon for our sins granted to us, since we shared in this with them—since all have sinned—but also justice, and holiness, and adoption of sons, and grace of the Spirit, much more splendid gifts and richer by far.”<sup>581</sup>

**St. Ambrose** emphasizes the need for constant struggle without negligence, saying, “The loss even of one hour is no slight one, one hour is a portion of our whole life.”<sup>582</sup> He also says, “Paul danced spiritually, when for us he stretched forward, and forgetting the things

<sup>579</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6–10 7:16(5) (FOTC 104:115–116).

<sup>580</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 4:45, 2–5 (Greek text in Claude Jenkins. “Origen on I Corinthians. IV” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 10, no. 37 (1908): 29–51: p. 29).

<sup>581</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 14.2 (FOTC 33:135).

<sup>582</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* 63.97 (NPNF II/10:471).

which were behind, and aiming at those which were before, he pressed on to the prize of Christ ... This dancing accompanies faith, and is the companion of grace.”<sup>583</sup>

Also, when **St. Ephrem the Syrian** speaks of levels in Paradise, his purpose is to affirm that the believer does not cease to strive in prayer and worship and the fulfilment of the commandments. He recites: “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). He also says:

“When the just ascend its various levels to receive their inheritance, with justice He raises up each one to the degree that accords with his labors; each is stopped at the level whereof he is worthy, there being sufficient levels in Paradise for everyone: the lowest parts for the repentant, the middle for the righteous, the heights for those victorious, while the summit is reserved for God’s Presence.”<sup>584</sup>

### **304. What is the work of divine grace in a person’s life?**

God, who by His grace created us in His image and likeness, granted us free will to support us in harmonizing our own wills with the will of God; in knowing goodness and enacting it; and in considering others as our brothers and sisters. But we corrupted this holy freedom. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “To the rational nature, however, he gave the **grace of self-determination** and added a capacity to detect what fits one’s purposes. In this way space might be made for our responsibility, and the good should not be compelled and involuntary but come about as the product of choice. Since the impulse of self-determination unavoidably leads us toward the apparent good, there was found in the order of Being one agent who used this power wrongly and, according to the word of the apostle, became the ‘inventor of mischief’ (Rom. 1:30).”<sup>585</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “both I and the prophets before me have received the more divine and greater prophetic grace from his fullness for the grace we received from him in relation to our free choice.”<sup>586</sup>

### **305. What is the role of grace after the fall of humanity?**

When humanity lost the image of God, our life became an unbearable hell, Paradise became a prison, and the land brought forth thorns and thistles for us. But the hands of divine grace were not tied, no matter the cost; even if the price was the incarnation of the Word and

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<sup>583</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 2.43 (NPNF II/10:351).

<sup>584</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990) 2:11: pp. 88–89.

<sup>585</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 61.

<sup>586</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 1–10) 6.35 (FOTC 80:178).

the proclamation of His love by His acceptance of death by crucifixion; by which He granted humanity the joy of resurrection, delight in the righteousness of Christ, and the restoration of the image of God in us by His Holy Spirit.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “Or who was needed for such grace and recalling except God the Word who in the beginning made the universe out of nothing? For his it was once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruptibility and to save the superlative consistency of the Father. Being the Word of the Father, and above all, he alone consequently was both able to recreate the universe and was worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to intercede for all before the Father.”<sup>587</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “In the Incarnation, the grace of God alone is to be praised, for the sake of His mercies ... we attribute justification to the Lord of justification, for He poured His grace upon His creatures without measure.”<sup>588</sup>

### 306. What are the roles of the law and of grace?

**St. Augustine** says, “He gave the law who gave likewise grace; but the law He sent by a servant, with grace He Himself came down. And in what manner were men made under the law? By not fulfilling the law. For he who fulfills the law is not under the law, but with the law; but he who is under the law is not raised up, but pressed down by the law. All men, therefore, being placed under the law, are by the law made guilty; and for this purpose it is over their head, that it may show sins, not take them away ... **Now the sick confess that they are sick; let the physician come to heal the sick. Who is the Physician? Our Lord Jesus Christ.**”<sup>589</sup>

**Abba Theonas** says, “Whoever then strives to reach the perfection of evangelical teaching, this man living under grace is not oppressed by the dominion of sin, for to be under grace is to do those things which grace commands. But whoever will not submit himself to the complete requirements of evangelical perfection, must not remain ignorant that, although he seems to be baptized and to be a monk, yet he is not under grace, but is still shackled by the chains of the law, and weighed down by the burden of sin. For it is the aim of Him, who by the grace of adoption accepts all those by whom He has been received, not to destroy but to build upon, not to abolish but to fulfil the Mosaic requirements.

“But some knowing nothing about this, and disregarding the splendid counsels and exhortations of Christ, are so emancipated by the carelessness of a freedom too hastily assumed, that they not only fail to carry out the commands of Christ as if they were too hard, but actually scorn as antiquated, the commands given to them as beginners and children by

<sup>587</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 7: p. 65, amended.

<sup>588</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 115.

<sup>589</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 3.2–3 (NPNF I/7:19).

the law of Moses,<sup>590</sup> saying in this dangerous freedom of theirs that which the Apostle execrates: ‘We have sinned, because we are not under the law but under grace’ (Rom. 6:15). He then who is neither under grace, because he has never climbed the heights of the Lord’s teaching, nor under the law, because he has not accepted even those small commands of the law, this man, ground down beneath a twofold rule of sin, fancies that he has received the grace of Christ ... and falls into that state, which the Apostle Peter warns us to avoid, saying: ‘Act as free, and not having your liberty as a cloak of wickedness’ (1 Pet. 2:16). The blessed Apostle Paul also says: ‘For you, brethren, were called to liberty,’ i.e., that you might be free from the dominion of sin, ‘only do not use your liberty for an occasion of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:13), i.e., believe that the doing away with the commands of the law is a license to sin. But this liberty, the Apostle Paul teaches us is nowhere but where the Lord is dwelling, for he says: ‘The Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty’ (2 Cor. 3:17).”<sup>591</sup>

### **307. What do we receive from grace after the fall of humanity?**

**First: divine grace grants us an understanding of the word of God.** God created humanity so that we could converse with the divine Word face to face. The first humans delighted in the voice of God walking in Paradise (Gen. 3:8). But when humanity turned its back on the source of grace, God did not forsake us but gave us the **law** to elevate us towards the richness of His grace. The **Holy Bible** is not just for reading but a living encounter with the divine Word behind the letters. He who receives the grace of knowing the mysteries of the Holy Bible enjoys communion with the divine Word, and his soul enters the fulfilling spiritual paradise.

The scholar **Origen** says, “It is impossible to partake of any good thing apart from God; and above all, to understand the inspired Holy Scriptures.”<sup>592</sup> He also says, “Many strive to interpret the Holy Bible ... but not all succeed. **It is rare to find someone who has this grace from God.**”<sup>593</sup> “But that the spiritual meaning which the law conveys is not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the word of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>594</sup>

**Second: the grace of resurrection and victory over death.** Humanity was thoroughly corrupted by death resulting from sin. Then the incarnate Word of God came and said, “I am the resurrection” (John 11:25), giving Himself to us that we may enjoy being in communion with Him; and freeing us from the power of death and the corruption that befalls us. In the spirit of power and victory we sing with Paul the Apostle, “O Death, where is your sting? O

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<sup>590</sup> He means the commandments and not the symbolic Jewish sacrifices. It is not permissible to return to the sacrifices which were a type once the Anti-Type, the Lord Christ, has come.

<sup>591</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 21.34 (NPNF II/11:517–518).

<sup>592</sup> Origen, *Sel. Ps.* 1.2.

<sup>593</sup> Origen, *Sel. Ps.* 119:85.

<sup>594</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* Preface 8 (ANF 4:241).



Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55–57). This is the grace of the resurrection.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes into our realm ... that as human beings had turned towards corruption he might turn them again to incorruptibility and give them life from death, by making the body his own and by the **grace of the resurrection** banishing death from them as straw from the fire.”<sup>595</sup> He also says, “death ... is itself truly dead ... but all believers in Christ tread on it as nothing, and would rather choose to die than deny their faith in Christ. For they really know that when they die they are not destroyed, but both live and become incorruptible through the resurrection.”<sup>596</sup>

**Third: the grace of adoption by God the Father.** The divine Word is the Son by nature, begotten of the Father, Light out of Light. In Him we receive adoption by God the Father through divine grace. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Come for the mystical Seal, that you may be easily recognized by the Master; be numbered among the holy and spiritual flock of Christ, to be set apart on His right hand, and inherit the life prepared for you. For they to whom the rough garment of their sins still clings are found on the left hand, because they did not come to the **grace of God which is given through Christ at the new birth of Baptism.**”<sup>597</sup>

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says that God bids us to “be baptized, not into the name of Unoriginate and originate, nor into the name of Creator and creature, but into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [Matt. 28:19]. For with such an initiation we too, being numbered among works, **are made sons.**”<sup>598</sup>

**Fourth: the grace of partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).** The Word of God emptied Himself in order to bear our form (Phil. 2:8) and thus granted us the potential to bear boundless inner glory. It is a matter of joy for God that He sees His kingdom established within us; and a matter of joy for the inhabitants of heaven too; who glorify God for the richness of this boundless grace. This glory will be manifest in its most beautiful image on the day we meet our heavenly Bridegroom on the clouds, as we bear His image, and be wed as a heavenly bride, a queen sitting at the right hand of the King of Kings. This is the grace of partaking of the divine nature working in our depths.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “O mystic wonder! The Lord was laid low, and man rose up ... ‘Do you not know,’ says the apostle, ‘that you are the temple of God?’ (1 Cor. 3:16).

<sup>595</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 8: pp. 65–67.

<sup>596</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 27: pp. 107–109.

<sup>597</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 1.2 (NPNF II/7:6).

<sup>598</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.9.34 (NPNF II/4:326).

The Gnostic [the believer who has attained true spiritual knowledge] is consequently divine, and already holy, God-bearing, and God-borne.”<sup>599</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “One who changes from the darkness of sin into the light of virtue and into grace is properly renewed. Thus, one who earlier was stained with foul defilement may shine with a brightness that is whiter than snow.”<sup>600</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** also says, “If, then, the divinely inspired text declares that in some inexpressible way wings are associated with the divine Nature, and if the first account of the creation of humanity attests that our nature came into existence as the creature made ‘after the image and likeness of God’ (Gen. 1:26), it is at any rate determined and settled that the creature that came to be ‘after the image’ was characterized by likeness to its original in every respect. But according to Holy Scripture, the original did indeed have wings. It follows that the human race was constituted with wings, so as to possess likeness to the divine in this regard also.

“It is obvious, to be sure, that the word “wings” must, by some figural understanding, be transposed into a notion that can suitably be applied to the divine, one according to which the word “wings” refers to power and blessedness and incorruption and the like. Since, then, these qualities belonged to humanity also as long as it was in every way like God, but afterwards the downward impulse toward evil robbed us of such wings as these (for once we are removed from the cover of God’s wings, we are stripped of our own wings too), for this reason, I say, the grace of God was manifested and illumined us, so that as we put away ungodliness and worldly desires we shall again, by holiness and justice, grow our wings again.”<sup>601</sup>

**Fifth: the grace of having the life of Christ, His fragrance and attributes.** The most precious thing that God grants us as a divine grace is that He gave us His life. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Generous, therefore, is He who gives for us the greatest of all gifts, His own life.”<sup>602</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “So it was with the Bride Paul. He imitated the Bridegroom by his virtues and inscribed within himself the unapproachable Beauty by means of their sweetness, and out of the fruits of the Spirit—love and joy and peace and the like—he blended this *spikenard*. Hence he said that he was ‘the aroma of Christ’ (2 Cor. 2:15), capturing within himself the scent of that transcendent and unapproachable Grace and providing himself for others to have a part in according to their ability, as though he were an incense: others to whom, in accordance with the present disposition of each, the sweet smell became either life-giving or death-dealing. For the same unguent, if it be touched to a

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<sup>599</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:203); *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.13 (ANF 2:547) amended.

<sup>600</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Prayer of Job and David* 4.9.35 (FOTC 65:419).

<sup>601</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 15: p. 475.

<sup>602</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.9 (ANF 2:231).

beetle and to a dove, does not have the same effect in each case, but the dove becomes stronger on account of the unguent's scent, while the beetle perishes. Similarly, if anyone were a dove on the model of Titus or Silvanus or Timothy, the great Paul, that divine incense, shared with him the sweet scent of his perfume by the examples he provided as he advanced in every good thing."<sup>603</sup>

**Abba Dorotheus of Gaza** says, "May God who is so good, grant us **the grace of humility** which Delivers man from so many evils and delivers him from the greatest temptations."<sup>604</sup>

**Abba Pambo** says, "**By the grace of God**, since I left the world, I have not said one word of which I repented afterwards."<sup>605</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, "I can hardly convince myself that there could be any work which would demand from God repayment as something due. For even the fact that we are able to do anything at all, to think and to speak, we do through his gift and generosity."<sup>606</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says on grace, "Behold the might of the new song! It has made men out of stones, men out of beasts. Those, moreover, that were as dead, not being partakers of the true life, have come to life again, simply by becoming listeners to this song."<sup>607</sup>

**Sixth: the grace of the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven.** God our Father created us for the express purpose of enjoying immortal life with Him, that we might have a place in His divine bosom. For this purpose, our Lord Jesus Christ bore the shame of the Cross in our place, that we might be granted the gift of His kingdom forever. And even now, our Messiah in heaven is still concerned with our eternal inheritance.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, "Therefore also in the Judgment, when every one shall receive according to his conduct, He says, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matt. 25:34). How then, or in whom, was it prepared before we came to be, save in the Lord who 'before the world' was founded for this purpose; that we, as built upon Him, might partake, as well-compacted stones, the life and grace which is from Him?"<sup>608</sup>

<sup>603</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 101–103.

<sup>604</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, trans., Eric P. Wheeler, Cistercian Studies Series: Number 33 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977) Discourse 2 On Humility: p. 102.

<sup>605</sup> Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Desert Christian: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans., Benedicta Ward (MacMillan, 1975) Pambo 5: p. 197.

<sup>606</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1–5 4.1.14 (FOTC 103:243). See also 4.5.2: p. 259.

<sup>607</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 1 (ANF 2:172).

<sup>608</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.22.76 (NPNF II/4:389) amended.

**St. Mark the Monk** says, “The Lord, wishing to show that every commandment is obligatory but that sonship is a gift is a gift bestowed on human beings by means of his own blood, says, ‘When you have done everything that you were ordered to do, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done only what we ought to have done”’ (Luke 17:10). Thus, the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for works but is rather **a master’s gift** prepared for his faithful servants.”<sup>609</sup> He also says: “Every good work that we do through our own nature causes us to abstain from its opposing evil, **but without grace it cannot increase our holiness.**”<sup>610</sup>

**St. Ephrem** contemplates on how grace grants joy to those who strive as they soar towards paradise. The paradisaical life appears as a towering mountain above all other peaks, yet the labor of the ascent to paradise is joyous, filling us with splendor, and granting the believer the delicious fragrance of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15). This ascension is in truth **a continual movement of the soul, day and night, by divine grace.** It may seem to some that ascending is difficult, because His commandments seem to be impossible; but they hear His voice: “My yoke is easy [sweet], and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30) and the soul is set free, borne upon eternal arms. Our Christ pours out His glory upon them, perfumes His bride with His delicious fragrance, and the inhabitants of heaven rejoice over her, for she is the icon of the holy Christ. **St. Ephrem** also says:

“Not that the ascent to Paradise  
is arduous because of its height,  
for those who inherit it experience no toil there.  
With its beauty it joyfully urges on those who ascend.  
Amidst glorious rays it lies resplendent,  
all fragrant with its scents; magnificent clouds  
fashion the abodes  
of those who are worthy of it.”<sup>611</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Do not be troubled when you remember the greatness of your former sins: but rather know, that still greater is the grace that justifies the sinner, and absolves the wicked. Faith then in Christ is found to be the pledge to us of these great blessings: for it is the way that leads to life: that bids us go to the mansions that are above:

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<sup>609</sup> St. Mark the Monk, “Concerning Those Who Imagine That They are Justified by Works,” in Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life: Volumes One and Two*, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) pp. 113–140; 2: p. 113.

<sup>610</sup> St. Mark the Monk, “Concerning Those Who Imagine That They are Justified by Works,” in Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life: Volumes One and Two*, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) pp. 113–140; 23: p. 116.

<sup>611</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990) 1.5: p. 79.

that raises us to the inheritance of the saints: that **makes us members of the kingdom of Christ.**<sup>612</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom's** discourse on the Sermon on the Mount indicates the purpose of the divine commandment. The Lord Christ begins His sermon with the Beatitudes (Matt. 5) so that the faithful can delight in the kingdom of heaven, manifesting His fatherhood for humanity, and proclaiming the kingdom of God which is prepared for the faithful. When He refers to Hades, He says that it is "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). But for the faithful, the commandment instills Paradise, by divine grace, in the depths the heart of the human being.

**Seventh: the grace of delighting in the knowledge of divine truth.** God created in human beings a yearning to know the truth; so the Lord Christ offers Himself, who is "the Truth." Whoever obtains Him delights in the knowledge of the truth as a free divine gift.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, "we are made sons through Him by adoption and grace, as partaking of His Spirit (for 'as many as received Him,' he says, 'to them gave He power to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name' (John 1:12)), and therefore also He is the Truth (saying, 'I am the Truth,' and in His address to His Father, He said, 'Sanctify them through Your Truth, Your Word is Truth' (John 14:6; 17:17)); but we by imitation become virtuous and sons."<sup>613</sup>

He also says, "For He did not, when He became man, cease to be God; nor, whereas He is God does He shrink from what is man's; perish the thought ... For as He asked questions in it [i.e., in the flesh], so also in it did He raise the dead; and He showed to all that He who gives life to the dead and recalls the soul, much more discerns the secret of all. And He knew where Lazarus lay, and yet He asked; for the All-holy Word of God, who endured all things for our sakes, did this, that so **carrying our ignorance, He might grant to us the knowledge** of His own only and true Father, and of Himself, sent because of us for the salvation of all, than which no grace could be greater."<sup>614</sup>

**Eighth: the grace of being steadfast in the Father and the Son. St. Athanasius the Apostle** says, "John then thus writes; 'By this we know that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit' (1 John 4:13). Therefore because of the grace of the Spirit which has been given to us, we come to be in Him, and He in us ... And the Son is in the Father, as His own Word and Radiance; but we, without the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us, while by the

<sup>612</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans. R. Payne Smith, (Oxford University Press, 1859) Homily 40: p. 161, amended.

<sup>613</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.25.19 (NPNF II/4:404) amended.

<sup>614</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.27.38 (NPNF II/4:414) amended.

true confession we preserve it in us, as John again says, ‘Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God’ (1 John 4:15).”<sup>615</sup>

**Ninth: the Grace of contentment and joy.** **St. Ambrose** says, “And so there are tears which are bread and which strengthen the heart of man (cf. Ps. 104:15). The maxim of Ecclesiastes is also appropriate to this discussion, ‘Cast your bread on the face of the water’ (Eccles. 11:1 LXX). **For the bread of heaven is there, where the water of grace is;** it is right that those from whose belly rivers of living water flow (cf. John 7:38; 4:10) should receive the support of the Word and a nurture of a mystical [internal] kind.”<sup>616</sup>

**Tenth: the grace of light.** **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “when the soul has been transposed from error to truth, the dark form of her life is transformed into radiant beauty.”<sup>617</sup> He also says, “But **when the grace of God was revealed** and Wisdom shone forth and the true light transmitted its radiance to ‘those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death’ (cf. Luke 1:79), then, while Israel closed its eyes to the light and banished itself from sharing in the good things, the Ethiopians come. Those of the Gentiles who approach by way of faith [cf. 1 Kings 10:1–13] and who once were far off draw near, having washed off their darkness in the mystical water. Thus Ethiopia extends her hand to God and offers gifts to the King: the spices of piety and the gold of the knowledge of God and the precious gems of the commandments and of the work of the virtues.”<sup>618</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “May your grace come, O Lord the Living Spirit, and may the striking of the strings of the harp bring forth a melody for your teaching.”<sup>619</sup>

**Eleventh: grace and the enjoyment of richness of virtue.** **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Emmanuel condescended to dwell among us. Our God came and took a body from us; and from Him, He **made us spiritual by grace**, and gave us His life, because He came and became one of us.”<sup>620</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Great is the difference between the spirit of the world and the spirit of grace. The former begins at birth and ends with death, but the latter is not bounded by time or by passing of years; neither does death extinguish its flame ... whoever acquires the spirit of grace never needs anything, and whoever partakes of the Holy Spirit attains to the pinnacle of virtue.” He also says, “He gave them all things, but there is no power of man exercised in these things, in which the grace of the divine gift operates.”<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.25.24 (NPNF II/4:406–407) amended.

<sup>616</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Prayer of Job and David* 4.2.7 (FOTC 65:395).

<sup>617</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 53.

<sup>618</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 7: p. 217.

<sup>619</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 116.

<sup>620</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 116.

<sup>621</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 1.8.35 (NPNF II/10:335).



As **St. John Cassian** says, “in the case of every virtue in which we feel that we make progress, we say these words of the Apostle: ‘Not I, but the grace of God with me,’ and ‘by the grace of God I am what I am’ (1 Cor. 15:10); and ‘it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:13). As the author of our salvation Himself also says: ‘If a man abide in me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5). And ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wake but in vain’ (Ps. 127:1–2).”<sup>622</sup>

**Abba Moses** says, “For it is no ordinary virtue nor one which can be freely gained by merely human efforts, unless they are aided by the Divine blessing, for we read that this is also reckoned among the noblest gifts of the Spirit by the Apostle: ‘To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit ... to another the discerning of spirits’ (1 Cor. 12:8–11) ... You see then that the gift of discretion is no earthly thing and no slight matter, but the greatest prize of divine grace. And unless a monk has pursued it with all zeal ... he is sure to go wrong, as if in the darkness of night and dense blackness, and not merely to fall down dangerous pits and precipices, but also to make frequent mistakes in matters that are plain and straightforward ... they could not obtain judgment and discretion, which passing by excess on either side, teaches a monk always to walk along the royal road, and does not suffer him to be puffed up on the right hand of virtue, i.e., from excess of zeal to transgress the bounds of due moderation in foolish presumption, nor allows him to be enamoured of slackness ... For no one can doubt that when the judgment of our heart goes wrong, and is overwhelmed by the night of ignorance, our thoughts and deeds, which are the result of deliberation and discretion, must be involved in the darkness of still greater sins.”<sup>623</sup>

**St. John Cassian** says, “the Apostle Paul, knowing that all the treasures of heavenly riches are found in Christ, rightly writes to the Churches: ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.’”<sup>624</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Some think that the house in which they live is their kingdom, although they know that death is inescapable and that there will come a day when they are forced to abandon it. Yet in their hearts, they feel as though they will reside there forever ... But we do the opposite. We know that we are but sojourners who live temporarily upon the earth. We are aware that the homes we possess are more like an inn upon the road to eternity. We do not seek peace or security from the material walls around us or from the roof above our heads. Rather, we are content to surround our souls with walls of divine grace and we look to heaven above for our roof. And the foundation of our lives is good works, performed through the spirit of love.”

<sup>622</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 12.9 (NPNF II/11:282) amended.

<sup>623</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 1.1–2 (NPNF II/11:308–309).

<sup>624</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Seven Books of John Cassian on the Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius* 2.5 (NPNF II/11:561).

**Twelfth: enjoyment of the motherhood of grace. St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The grace that builds up the world is a merciful mother. She cares for it like a mother with her child, who cannot abandon him. The woman cannot abandon her new-born, and the child in turn thinks that there is no other woman in the world except her who is feeding him.”<sup>625</sup> He also says, “Grace has become the mother of the earth ... So, she pleaded to the Lord saying: Enough madness on the earth! Come down and save it from straying. Grace’s request came before the divine power, which sent the compassionate Physician to those who are sick.”<sup>626</sup> And also, “Grace — the mother of mercies — built the world and still carries it; but if she abandons it, it will fall. A chicken spreads out its wings over its youngsters, to gather them, preserve their lives, and protect them. She is a symbol of the Divinity who spreads our His mercies over His creatures like wings.”<sup>627</sup>

**Thirteenth: grace is the medicine of sinners. St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “God chose King Solomon and bestowed upon him the crown and glory and granted him wisdom ... yet, by his own will, he fell under the influence of the people and his heart strayed. The Lord did not prevent him from straying; but when he strayed, the grace that dwelt in him departed from him. Yet, grace preserved his crown when he strayed and fell, and his crown was prevented from falling. He offered sacrifices to the (pagan) gods as he desired, and the Lord did not prevent him from offering them, for he was free. Had He prevented him, his freedom would have been suppressed. If He forced him coercively, he would have been unworthy. God preserves humanity’s glory and takes great care of them according to His mercy, so that they can continue to exist. Had King Solomon been prevented from falling, what benefit would that have been to him, given that prevention was by force? When he fell, he was not deprived of his dominion, his greatness, his wealth, or his leadership. This is how (God) acted on His part; but as for straying or not straying, that was for (Solomon) to choose ... The character of Solomon, overawed the wise; and that of Judas frightened the disciples ... and the fall of Samson the Nazirite frightened the mighty ... for these reasons the elect became capable. And he who fears falling must despise these reasons.”<sup>628</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “And so a miserable man am I, unless I seek the remedy ... We have a physician, let us use the remedy. **Our remedy is the grace of Christ**, and the body of death is our body ... Though we are in the body, let us not follow the things which are of the body ... but desire before all the gifts of grace: ‘For to be dissolved and to be with Christ is far better; yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sakes’ (Phil. 1:23-24).”<sup>629</sup>

**St. Athanasius the Apostle** says, “This is the grace of the Lord, and these are the Lord’s means of restoration for the children of men. For He suffered to prepare freedom from

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<sup>625</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, see *Letter 40*.

<sup>626</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 119–120.

<sup>627</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): p. 120.

<sup>628</sup> See Behnam Sony, *Man in the Teaching of St Jacob of Sarug* (1995): pp. 135–137.

<sup>629</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Two Books of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.40–41 (NPNF II/10:180).



suffering for those who suffer in Him, He descended that He might raise us up, He took on Him the trial of being born, that we might love Him Who is unbegotten [in the normal human manner], He went down to corruption [death], that corruption might put on immortality, He became weak for us, that we might rise with power ... Finally, He became man, that we who die as men might live again, and that death should no more reign over us; for the Apostolic word proclaims, ‘Death shall not have the dominion over us’ (Rom. 6:9, 14).”<sup>630</sup>

**Fourteenth: by grace we challenge evil angels. St. Augustine** says, “From this power of evil angels nothing can deliver man but the grace of God, whereof the Apostle says, “Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love’ (Col. 1:13), of which things that people bore the figure, when they were delivered from the power of the Egyptians, and translated into the kingdom of the land of promise flowing with milk and honey, which signifies the sweetness of grace.”<sup>631</sup>

**Fifteenth: grace and enjoyment of the gift of the Holy Spirit.** The scene of the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ captivated the heart of **St. Cyril the Great**. He spoke of the Church as being in Christ, as His body, of which He is the Head. The Holy Spirit is His Spirit and inseparable from Him, being One with Him in essence; yet the Spirit descended upon Christ in baptism so that the Church might delight in Him. He granted us the grace of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin, condemns the enemy of goodness who desires our destruction, and grants us the righteousness of Christ. He offers us the truth; and thus does Christ the Lord renew our nature, lead us in the Way that is Jesus Christ (John 14:6), unite us with the Father in the worthy blood of Christ, and grant us communion with the Lord Christ and with the inhabitants of heaven and with one another.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “we would not have been redeemed and highly exalted, if He who exists in form of God had not taken a servant’s form, so David also shows [in Ps. 44:7–8], that otherwise, we would not have partaken of the Spirit and been sanctified, unless the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, had spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us ... and He being said, as man, to have received for [our flesh’s] sake, we have the consequence of the Spirit which is grace, receiving ‘out of His fulness’ (John 1:16).”<sup>632</sup>

As **St. Ambrose** says, “He shed forth then what He deemed to be sufficient for us, and what was shed forth is not separated nor divided; but He has a unity of fulness wherewith He may enlighten the sight of our hearts according to what our strength is capable of. Lastly, we receive so much as the advancing of our mind acquires, for the fulness of the grace of the Spirit is indivisible, but is shared in by us according to the capacity of our own nature.”<sup>633</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “When, therefore, you hear it said, ‘Sin shall not reign over you’ (Rom. 6:14); do not have confidence in yourself, that sin cannot reign over you, but in Him,

<sup>630</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Festal Letters* 10.8 (NPNF II/4:530–531).

<sup>631</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 78.28 (NPNF I/8:377) amended.

<sup>632</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.12.50 (NPNF II/4:336) amended.

<sup>633</sup> St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.8.93 (NPNF II/10:106).

unto Whom a certain Saint says in prayer, ‘Direct my paths after Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me’ (Ps. 119:133) ... immediately, the Apostle saw this, and added, ‘For you are not under the Law, but under Grace’ (Rom 6:14). Therefore, it is Grace that prevents sin from reigning over you ... And, when we hear it said, ‘If by the Spirit you shall mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live’ (Rom. 8:13) let us not attribute this great good to our own spirit, as though of itself it can do this. For, in order that we should not entertain that carnal sense, the spirit being dead rather than that which puts others to death, straightway he added, ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14).”<sup>634</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “Blessed is he who sows beside all waters, and upon every soul, tomorrow to be ploughed and watered, which today the ox and the ass tread, while it is dry and without water (Isa. 32:20) and oppressed with unreason ... And for the sake of this we must be very careful not to miss the Grace.”<sup>635</sup>

**Sixteenth: grace and enjoying peace.** **St. Jerome** says, “As long as we are in the state of grace, our soul is at peace; but once we begin to play with sin, then our soul is in trouble and is like a boat tossed about by the waves.”<sup>636</sup>

And **St. Mark the Hermit** says, “One person is righteous through works and words and thoughts, but many are righteous through faith and grace and repentance.”<sup>637</sup>

**Seventeenth: paradise and the waters of grace.** **St. Ephrem** gazes upon the waters of divine grace which are more knowable in Paradise, where we delight in heavenly thoughts. He is the Almighty, the Loving, who of His own will gathers the waters on earth as seas, rivers, and canals; and gathers water as clouds by His power. How much more does He grant us abundant life. And yet, when we confine ourselves to earthly matters, we limit the wonderful work of grace. He also says:

“Indeed, that Will for whom everything is easy constrains these abundant fountains of Paradise, confining them with land, like water channels; He summoned them to issue forth in our direction, just as He bound up the waters (Prov. 30:4) in the bosom of His clouds, ready to be sent forth into the atmosphere at the bidding of His Will.”<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 12 (NPNF I/3:384) amended.

<sup>635</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 40: On the Holy Baptism* 27 (NPNF II/7:370) amended.

<sup>636</sup> St. Jerome, *Homily* 20 On Psalm 90 (91) (FOTC 48:157).

<sup>637</sup> St. Mark the Monk, “Concerning Those Who Imagine That They are Justified by Works,” in Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life: Volumes One and Two*, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) pp. 113–140; 101: p. 124.

<sup>638</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian P. Brock (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990) Hymn 2.9: p. 88.

## 9

**The Fall of Humanity** <sup>639</sup>**308. Why did God not reject Satan?**

God is love, and in His love, He did not withhold anything from Adam but gave him everything he needed to be happy, so he could live in the fullness of peace and be completely immersed in divine love. But many ask: why then did God allow Satan, the deceitful enemy, to tempt Eve and Adam and to test them? And why does He still allow Satan the tempter — a world of temptations and pain — and the human body with its desires and lusts, to all wage war upon the human soul till today? We can say that allowing Satan to tempt Eve and Adam is an indication of God’s love. The very existence of this spiritual warfare is a declaration of human authority and human value in God’s eyes, for God gave humanity the gift of free will. If God had showered us with His love, granted us everything we need, and left us to delight in the paradise without any trials, we would have been like chess pieces moved by a player. Life would have been tasteless, and paradise would have been without beauty, because we would have been incapable of freely partaking of a relationship of mutual love with God.

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “For [God] afforded room for a conflict, wherein man might crush his enemy [Satan] with the same freedom of his will as had made him succumb to him ... and so worthily recover his salvation by a victory [by the Lord’s grace]; wherein also the devil might receive a more bitter punishment, through being vanquished by him whom he had previously injured; and wherein God might be discovered to be so much the more good, as waiting for man to return from his present life to a more glorious paradise, with a right to pluck of the tree of life.”<sup>640</sup>

**309. Is Satan able to harm you?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What then? some one will say, did he not inflict injury on Adam, and upset him, and cast him out of paradise? No: he did it not, but the cause was the listlessness of him who was injured, and his want of temperance and vigilance. For he who applied such powerful and manifold devices and yet was not able to subdue Job, how could he by inferior means have mastered Adam, had not Adam betrayed himself through his own listlessness? What then? Has not he been injured who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of his property, having been deprived of all his goods, and is thrown out of his patrimony, and struggles with extreme poverty? No! he has not been injured, but has even profited, if he be sober. For, tell me, what harm did this do the apostles? Were they not continually struggling with hunger, and thirst and nakedness? And this was the very

<sup>639</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic) Books 1–8, second edition, revised and updated (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2010), Book 1: pp. 267–304.

<sup>640</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.10 (ANF 3:306).

reason why they were so illustrious, and distinguished, and won for themselves much help from God.”<sup>641</sup>

“We are alarmed by nothing. If we wish to overpower the devil, we must know that our own skill will not benefit us at all, and that all things are from the grace of God.”<sup>642</sup>

“We have said lately, that he [the Devil] does not overcome by force, nor by tyranny, nor through compulsion, nor through violence; since if this were so, he would have destroyed all men. And in testimony of this we brought forward the swine, against which the Demons were unable to venture anything, before the permission of the Master (Matt. 8:31).”<sup>643</sup>

### **310. How can we avoid fearing Satan?**

**The honor of the victorious is greater than the shame of the conquered. St. John Chrysostom** says, “those who overcame are more valuable by far than those who are defeated, even if the latter be more, and the former less. ‘For better is one,’ he says “who does the will of God than ten thousand transgressors’ (Ecclus. 16:3).”<sup>644</sup>

**The conquered suffer harm because of their own laziness, not because of Satan. St. John Chrysostom** says, “if the antagonist were taken away he who overcomes is thereby injured. For if you let the adversary remain, the more lazy are injured, not on account of the more diligent, but by their own laziness; whereas if you take away the antagonist, the more diligent are betrayed on account of the lazy, and neither exhibit their own power, nor win crowns.”<sup>645</sup>

**Humanity’s negligence endowed Satan with the name “deceiver.” St. John Chrysostom** says, “I will state another solution of this question, in order that you may learn, that the Devil does not injure, but their own laziness everywhere overthrows those who do not take heed.”<sup>646</sup>

**Should we reject the beautiful creation also? St. John Chrysostom** says, “What shall we say about this beautiful and wondrous creation? Pray, is the creation too, wicked? and who is so corrupt, who so dull, and demented as to accuse the creation? what then shall we say about this? For it is not wicked, but is both beautiful and a token of the wisdom and power

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<sup>641</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 4 (NPNF I/9:273).

<sup>642</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Ad. Pop.* (PG 49:66, 67).

<sup>643</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.1 (NPNF I/9:187) amended.

<sup>644</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.1 (NPNF I/9:187) amended.

<sup>645</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.1 (NPNF I/9:187) amended.

<sup>646</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.2 (NPNF I/9:187) amended.

and lovingkindness of God. Hear at least how the prophet marvels at it, saying, ‘How magnified are Your works O Lord! in wisdom You have made them all’ (Ps. 104:24) ... Hear too Paul saying, ‘For the invisible things of Him, since the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made’ (Rom. 1:20). For each of these of which he spoke declared that the creation leads us to the knowledge of God, because it causes us to know the Master fully. What then? If we see this beautiful and wondrous creation itself becoming a cause of impiety to many, shall we blame it? Not at all, but [we blame] those who were unable to use the medicine rightly. How then is this which leads us to the knowledge of God, a cause of impiety? ‘The wise’ he says ‘were darkened in their understandings, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator’ (Rom. 1:21, 25) ... What then? Shall we take away even the creation? tell me.”<sup>647</sup>

**Should we reject our own bodies also? St. John Chrysostom** says, “And why do I speak about the creation? Let us come to our own members. For even these we shall find to be a cause of destruction if we do not take heed, not because of their own nature, but because of our laziness. And look; an eye was given, in order that you may behold the creation and glorify the Master. But if you do not use the eye well, it becomes to you the minister of adultery. A tongue has been given, in order that you may speak well, in order that you may praise the Creator. But if you are not very careful, it becomes a cause of blasphemy to you. And hands were given you that you may stretch them forth unto prayer. But if you are not wary, you stretch them out unto covetousness. Feet were given in order that you may run unto good works, but if you are careless you will cause wicked works by means of them.”<sup>648</sup>

**Even the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. St. John Chrysostom** says, “assuredly what could be more conducive to salvation than the Cross? But this Cross has become an offence to the weak. ‘For the word of the Cross is to them that are perishing, foolishness: but to those which are being saved, it is the power of God’ (1 Cor. 1:18). And again, ‘we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block and unto Gentiles foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1:23).”<sup>649</sup>

**The apostles have become an aroma of death for many. St. John Chrysostom** says, “But the Apostles became an aroma of death to many. He says at least ‘to one an aroma from death unto death: to the other an aroma from life unto life’ (2 Cor. 2:16). Do you see that the weak is hurt even by Paul, but the strong is not injured even by the Devil?”<sup>650</sup>

**In Christ, many stumbled. St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do you wish that we should exercise the argument in the case of Jesus Christ? What is equal to that salvation? what more

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<sup>647</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.3 (NPNF I/9:188) amended.

<sup>648</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.3 (NPNF I/9:188) amended.

<sup>649</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.3 (NPNF I/9:188–189).

<sup>650</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.3 (NPNF I/9:189) amended.

profitable than that presence? But this very saving presence, so profitable, became an additional means of chastening to many. ‘For, for judgment’ he says ‘I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind’ (John 9:39). What do you say? The light became a cause of blindness? The light did not become a cause of blindness, but the weakness of the eyes of the soul was not able to see the light.”<sup>651</sup>

**We can benefit from the devil. St. John Chrysostom** says, “And it is possible also to learn this from Paul: for writing about the fornicator he speaks thus “Deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved’ (1 Cor. 5:5). Behold even the Devil has become a cause of salvation, but not because of his own disposition, but because of the skill of the Apostle. For as the physicians taking serpents and cutting off their destructive members, prepare medicines for antidotes; so also did Paul ... Fear not therefore the Devil, even if he be bodiless: for he has come in contact with him. And nothing is weaker than he who has come into such contact even though he be not invested with a body, as then nothing is stronger than he who has boldness even though he bear about a mortal body.”<sup>652</sup>

### **311. Should we, then, hold the devil blameless?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “All these things have been now said by me, not in order that I may discharge the Devil from blame, but that I may free you from laziness ... But let us know ourselves. Let us know our wounds. For thus shall we be able to apply the medicines. For he who does not know his disease, will give no care to his weakness. We have sinned much: I know this well. For we are all liable for penalties. But we are not deprived of pardon; nor shall we fall away from repentance for we still stand in the arena, and are in the struggles of repentance.”<sup>653</sup>

### **312. Why is it not the devil who deceives you?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “The day before yesterday we set on foot our sermon concerning the Devil ... But others, the day before yesterday while these matters were being set on foot here, took their places in the theatre, and were looking on at the Devil’s show. They were taking part in lascivious songs; you were having a share in spiritual music. They were eating of the Devil’s garbage: you were feeding on spiritual unguents. Who decoyed them? Who separated them from the sacred flock? ... The Devil is wicked; I grant this indeed,

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<sup>651</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.4 (NPNF I/9:189) amended.

<sup>652</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.4 (NPNF I/9:189) amended.

<sup>653</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 2.5 (NPNF I/9:189) amended.

but he is wicked for himself not towards us if we are wary. For the nature of wickedness is of this kind. It is destructive only to those who hold on to it.”<sup>654</sup>

### 313. Isn't it deviation from the goal that harms the human being?

You are a divine creation to whom God granted authority over your own soul and freedom of will. So, no devil, no creation, no sword, no poverty, no power can harm you unless you harm yourself.

**The difference between the sheep and the goats.** St. John Chrysostom says, “For what reason then are those indeed sheep but these goats? Not that you may learn a difference in their nature, but the **difference in their purpose** ... And yet both these and those were alike men, both these and those received the same promises, the same rewards were assigned to both on doing right ... All things were alike to those and to these. How then was the end not the same? Because **the purpose did not permit it.**”<sup>655</sup>

**The difference between the wise and foolish virgins.** St. John Chrysostom says, “There were ten virgins he says (Matt. 25). Here again there are purposes which are upright, and purposes which are sinful, in order thou mayest see side by side, both the sins of the one and the good works of the others ... Do you see again that the purpose determined the nature of the end, not the Devil?”<sup>656</sup>

**The difference between the Queen of Sheba and the denying Jews.** St. John Chrysostom says, “For if they themselves were not to be liable to be held to account, he would not have said that they shall judge this generation. Nor would he have said that the Queen of the South would condemn the Jews. For then indeed not only will one people condemn another people, but one man will often judge a whole people, when they who, it is allowed, might readily have been deceived, are found to remain undeceived, and they who ought in every way to have the advantage, turn out to be rejected.”<sup>657</sup>

### 314. Can injustice harm us?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What then? Has not he been injured who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of his property, having been deprived of all his goods, and is thrown out of his patrimony, and struggles with extreme poverty? No! he has not been injured, but has even profited, if he be sober. For, tell me, what harm did this do the apostles? Were they not continually struggling with hunger, and thirst and nakedness?

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<sup>654</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 3.1 (NPNF I/9:191) amended.

<sup>655</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 3.3 (NPNF I/9:193) amended.

<sup>656</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 3.3 (NPNF I/9:193) amended.

<sup>657</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 3.3 (NPNF I/9:193–194) amended.

And this was the very reason why they were so illustrious, and distinguished, and won for themselves much help from God.”<sup>658</sup>

### 315. Does the harm befall the oppressor or the oppressed?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “what is more pitiable than [the condition] of Phillip’s wife [Matt. 3:14] who beheaded John? or the brethren of Joseph who sold him away, and transported him into the land of exile? or the devil who tortured Job with such great calamities? For not only on account of his other iniquities, but at the same time also for this assault he will pay no trifling penalty ... And what shall I say of Paul? Did he not suffer so many distresses that even to make a list of them is no easy matter? ... and why need I mention the greater part of them? he was dying every day: but yet, although subjected to so many and such grievous sufferings, he not only uttered no blasphemous word, but rejoiced over these things and gloried in them: and one time he says ‘I rejoice in my sufferings’ (Col. 1:24), and then again ‘not only this but we also glory in afflictions’ (Rom. 5:3). If then he rejoiced and gloried when suffering such great troubles what excuse will you have, and what defence will you make if you blaspheme when you do not undergo the smallest fraction of them.”<sup>659</sup>

### 316. Can poverty harm us?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “But poverty, some one will say, disposes men to be discontented and often also to utter profane words, and condescend to mean actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul: for Lazarus also was poor, aye! very poor [Luke 16]: and besides poverty he suffered from infirmity, a bitterer trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty more severely felt; and in addition to infirmity there was a total absence of protectors, and difficulty in finding any to supply his wants, which increased the bitterness of poverty and infirmity ... and yet none of these things injured him, he did not give vent to a bitter word, he did not utter a profane speech; but **like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by excessive heat**, even so he, although oppressed by these sufferings, was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which in many cases is produced by them.”<sup>660</sup>

### 317. Can death harm us?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And why do I speak of removal into a foreign land, and poverty, and evil report, and bondage? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel,

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<sup>658</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 4 (NPNF I/9:273).

<sup>659</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 5 (NPNF I/9:274–275) amended.

<sup>660</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 10 (NPNF I/9:278).



although it was a violent and untimely death, and perpetrated by a brother's hand? Is not this the reason why his praise is sounded throughout the whole world?"<sup>661</sup>

### 318. What was the state of the three youths?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, "Again, I ask, was the virtue of the "three children" corrupted by the troubles which beset them? ... did they not have to make a long journey from home, and when they had arrived in the foreign country were they not cut off from fatherland and home and temple, and altar and sacrifices, and offerings, and drink offerings, and even the singing of psalms? ... Were they not given up into the hands of barbarians, wolves rather than men? ... They did not consider that this difficulty or the absolute power of him who possessed the state sufficed to justify their compliance; but they employed every device and expedient to enable them to avoid the sin, although they were abandoned on every side ... For Nebuchadnezzar bound them and cast them into the furnace, yet he burnt them not, but rather benefited them, and rendered them more illustrious ... For if captivity, and bondage, and loneliness and loss of country and all kindred and death, and burning, and a great army and a savage tyrant could not do any damage to the innate virtue of the three children captives, slaves, strangers though they were in a foreign land, but the enemy's assault became to them rather the occasion of greater confidence: what shall be able to harm the temperate man? There is nothing, even should he have the whole world in arms against him. But, some one may say, in their case **God stood beside them, and plucked them out of the flame. Certainly He did; and if you will play your part to the best of your power, the help which God supplies will assuredly follow.**"<sup>662</sup>

### 319. What did Job endure? (according to St. John Chrysostom).<sup>663</sup>

His poverty was worse than a beggar's.

He endured physical pain.

He endured the death of his children.

He endured ridicule from men.

He endured the horrors of the night.

<sup>661</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 4 (NPNF I/9:273).

<sup>662</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 15–16 (NPNF I/9:281–283) amended.

<sup>663</sup> See St. John Chrysostom, *A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself* 3 (NPNF I/9:273).

**320. How did Adam and Eve’s eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil bring death upon us?**

When human beings rebelled against God, they were separated from God, deprived of His grace, and estranged from the divine life and the holiness of the Holy One.

**321. Why was the tree called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?**

It was so called because if a person obeys God, it becomes to him the Tree of the Knowledge of Good; and if he disobeys God, it becomes to him the Tree of the Knowledge of Evil.

**322. What is that death that came upon Adam and Eve because of their disobedience to God?**

Many kinds of death came upon them. The body dies by being separated from the soul, which is the source of life for the body, and without it the body loses sensation and decays. And the soul dies through sin, because it loses its spiritual light, inner joy, and divine peace and happiness. It does not decay like the body, but remains in darkness, pain, and bitterness. Also, corruption came upon their offspring, and they became subject to death. The apostle Paul says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and this death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

**323. Why did God not permit Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Life?**

When they fell into disobedience, human beings came to know evil, fell under its authority, were afflicted with corruption, became susceptible to death, and were exiled from the Garden. God would not permit them to eat of the Tree of Life while they were in this state, lest they remain in a state of death and corruption for eternity. Therefore, the Lord said, “**And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever ...**” (Gen. 3:22). The word “**now**” here refers to the time after the fall, when human nature became corrupt and mortal. From another perspective, with the fall, humanity fell under the judgment of death, since they were deprived of life. Human nature became incapable of eating of the Tree of Life. So, God appointed the cherubim to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

Now, after the incarnation of the Word, we say with St. John the Apostle about our Lord Jesus: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life. The life was manifested, and we have seen, bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:1–2). Thus, humans had their ability to eat of the true Tree of Life restored once more through the sacrament of the

Eucharist, in which we eat the body of our Lord Jesus and drink His blood which was shed for us and are given salvation and the remission of sin and **eternal life**.

The Son, the incarnate Word, came so that you could **hear Him** along with John and the rest of the disciples, calling sinners and tax collectors by name; having compassion upon them without blame or reproach. You can hear Him with pure ears, forgiving your sins, reconciling you with His Father, and paying the price of reconciliation with His precious blood. You **see Him** searching for you, as the Good Shepherd and true father. By His own will He comes to the cross and opens His side in which you find refuge and security; you see that He burns within with love for you. You see Him risen from the dead, ascending to heaven, and your heart ascends with Him and by Him, to rest in Him, that where He is seated, you may be also. And **with His mother the Virgin Mary you touch Him** and yearn for Him, offering yourself to Him as a bride, a pure and chaste virgin. You also touch Him with Thomas confessing His divinity and lordship. You touch His feet with the adulterous woman and wash them with your tears. He never looks down on you but blesses you and makes you happy. He does not draw back from the touch of your hand nor belittle your tears but cherishes them as precious jewels. He has become for us the Tree of Life.

It says in the book of Revelation: “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Also: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev. 22:14–15). Thus, the book of Revelation affirms that none shall eat of the Tree of Life but those who are victorious, who held fast to God’s commandments in their lives on earth, who partake of eternal life in the heavenly kingdom. But the heart that is lukewarm in its love hungers, and needs to be fed from the Lord, the **Tree of Life**.

### **324. Did Adam and Eve lose their hope of salvation after hearing the judgment that resulted from their disobedience?**

Although the wages of sin is death, God declared His mercy on them and their descendants through the descent of His only begotten Son, the Incarnate, and the gift of salvation through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. They heard God’s words to the serpent: “and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15).

### **325. Do you know who you are?**

We humans often feel small in our own eyes and are aware that we are tiny creatures in the midst of a huge universe in all its grandeur. We appear for a little while and walk the earth like shadows until we vanish. We stumble because of a small stone; we die, or are beset

by some tiny microbe that leaves us languishing in our beds for long years, longing for death but unable to find it. Human beings are weak creatures: for the sake of some small despicable lust we can forget our dignity, squander our prosperity, destroy our families, and perhaps lose everything — even though we know it is nothing more than a temporary fleeting pleasure.

Do you wish to know who you really are? You are the subject of God’s love, the recipient of His care and concern, so much so that it might appear He has forgotten the whole world for your sake. When He created you, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). He looks upon you and sees in you His image and likeness. In you is a mind; you have free will; He has given you the gift of being capable of love, and being drawn towards the Creator who satisfies you, and who imprints His own nature upon you. He rejoices in you. He created heaven and earth to pass away some day (Matt. 24:35), but you He created immortal to live forever. Behold then, your soul, which God values above the whole world, as He said: “what will it profit a man if he gains the **whole world**, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

### **326. What did sin do to me?**

By my own will, I chose separation from God that I might have my own autonomous existence far away from the deep ocean of God’s love. This is Adam’s first sin, and indeed our every sin. I separated my soul from its source of happiness, satisfaction, and life, only to fall under the yoke of sin, only to come under the sway of sin’s oppression. By my own will I chose sin, and it gave me all that it has, against my will — what does sin have except deprivation, oppression, death, etc.?

**Deprivation.** It took away satisfaction and deprived me of Paradise, it expelled me from peace, joy, and true knowledge.

**Injustice.** The law of sin is nothing more than confusion and oppression.

**Death.** Sin is the soul being deprived of God, the giver of life; this is what became of the human soul, by its own free will. The image deviated from its origin; its beauty was destroyed, its nature corrupted, its authority ended, and its ability to commune with God the source of its life was lost.

Humans became perturbed and terrified. In vain they tried to submit themselves to their God in their own way. Adam tried correct his error by himself, but in so doing, he only affirmed his desire to be independent of God and for his own autonomy. Thus, he compounded the consequence of his error with more consequences. He fashioned for himself a garment made of fig leaves, but the leaves shriveled and served only to emphasize his nakedness. It became necessary for God to intervene to erase the consequences that had come upon the humans by their own will. Should God forgive, even at the expense of justice? How then would infinite justice be upheld? But how could God’s love abandon humanity to eternal destruction? Thus, a process of reconciliation between God and humanity was necessary in

which God would pay the price of sin without surrendering His justice, and justice would be fulfilled by the depths of His love.

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “The things of grace are attended by joy, peace, love, and truth ... But the forms of sin are disordered, and have nothing of love or joy towards God.”<sup>664</sup> He also says, “For the soul in itself is neither of the nature of the Godhead, nor of the nature of the darkness of wickedness, but is a creature intellectual, beauteous, great, and wonderful, a fair likeness and image of God. It was through the transgression that the wickedness of the passions of darkness entered into it.”<sup>665</sup>

Also, **St. Augustine** says, “As for the human being, whose nature inclines both to the nature of angels and to that of animals, God created him so. If he submits to his Creator as his true master and reverently keeps His commandments, he attains fellowship with the angels and partakes of blessed everlasting immortality, impervious to death. But if he defies the Lord his God by exercising his free will in arrogance and disobedience, he will submit to death, live as a slave to desire, and be condemned to eternal death.” He also says:

“Oh, my misery! ... Darkness has prevailed over me; and although You are the Light, I veil my face from You!

“Oh, my misery! ... I am afflicted by many wounds; and although You are the Comforter, the giver of peace, I flee away from You!

“Oh, my misery! ... I am overwhelmed by a host of follies; and although You are the Truth, I do not seek Your counsel!

“Oh, my misery! ... My ways of going astray multiply; and although You are the Way, I turn away from You!

“Oh, my misery! ... With many blows, death defeats me; and although You are the Life, I stay far from You!

“Oh, my misery! ... I fall into evil and banality many times; and although You are the Word through which all things were made, I separated myself from You, the One without whom I would not exist! O my King the Word; O my God the Word; O Light, the Creator; the Way, the Truth, and the Life ... O You who dispel darkness, evil, straying, and death ...

“O Light: without You, all would find themselves in dark night. O Way: without You, there would be nothing but going astray. O Truth: without You, there would nothing but falsehood. O Life: without You, all would be encompassed by death.”

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<sup>664</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 7.3: p. 62.

<sup>665</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 1.7: p. 7.

Now that sin devastated all of human nature, what was God to do? It is unthinkable that He should stand by passively watching His beloved. He had already planned our salvation and a means for us to attain forgiveness of sin, return to divine righteousness, and flee to rest in His divine embrace. What, then, is this thing, sin? How does the Holy Trinity impact upon it? How did He equip humanity to understand it and deal with it? How was this achieved? And how can we ourselves receive this grace? All this leads us to talk about our need for salvation, and for the divine Savior.

### **327. How should God react to humanity’s disobedience of the divine commandment?**

Humans desired the world, and so their being in the presence of God became a matter of mere words and expressions. Sin became habitual in people’s lives. Although we feel its bitter weight as a burden at times, at other times we return and submit to it with all our essence, inclination, will, and energy. As the apostle Paul says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom. 7:18–20). How, then, should God respond to this human state? Does He still love us? And what must we do in order to renew our nature, which we corrupted by our own will? Is God occupied with His heavenly glories, or will He condescend to deal with us? Will He free us from the dominion of sin to which we willingly gave ourselves over?

I ask God, my God: *“O Love, do You still love humans, and long to return them to Your bosom? We humans are unable to ascend to You, for we are drowning in our sins and weaknesses. Will You descend to us, O Holy One?”*

*“O eternal and immortal Love, behold, heaven yearns to learn the mystery of Your wisdom that is full of love. Will You proclaim to us and to heaven the mysteries of Your love?”*

*“Now my God, behold, our lives are corrupted, and we need the One who will renew our nature and liberate us from our eternal death. What will You do for us, O absolute unlimited love?”*

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “God in his love to man provided for us a way of salvation and of life. For believing in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and making this confession before many witnesses, we wash away all the filth of sin, and are enriched by the communication of the Holy Spirit, and made partakers of the divine nature,<sup>666</sup> and gain the grace of adoption.”<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> This expression and those like it in the Holy Bible and the Church Fathers certainly do not mean that the human being participates in the divine *essence*. Rather, through divine grace, the image in God that was lost through sin is renewed in him, and he partakes of everlasting immortality and incorruption, and enjoys the life of righteousness and holiness and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>667</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 11: pp. 46–47, amended.

For faith in the Holy Trinity is a divine revelation by which the believer experiences the ultimate divine love, and enters into a personal experience of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The true believer finds in the Trinity the fulfilment of every inner need. Our faith in the Trinity touches our lives and being, for we have no life within us without experiencing the love of the Holy Trinity for us, and the works that result from this ultimate love. **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “To the churches I shall bestow my tears. Through all the vicissitudes of my life God has led me to this point. Tell me, Logos of God, whither now? Towards the unshaken seat, I pray, where is my Trinity, and that united brightness by the faint reflections of which we are now upraised.”<sup>668</sup>

### 328. Why was it not enough for God that humans repent of sin? <sup>669</sup>

It was not worthy of God to have warned Adam of the judgment that would result from his eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and then simply take back that judgment when Adam transgressed. **St. Athanasius** says, “For as I said earlier, by the law death thereafter prevailed against us [because of transgression], and it was impossible to escape the law, since this had been established by God on account of the transgression. And what happened was both truly absurd and improper. It was absurd, on the one hand, that having spoken, God should prove to be lying: that is, having legislated that the human being would die by death if he were to transgress the commandment, yet after the transgression he were not to die but rather this sentence dissolved. For God would not be true if, after saying that we would die, the human being did not die.”<sup>670</sup>

**St. Athanasius** adds, “But repentance would neither have preserved the consistency of God, for he again would not have remained true if human beings were not held fast by death, nor does repentance recall humans from what is natural, but merely halts sins. If then there were only offence and not the consequence of corruption, repentance would have been fine.”<sup>671</sup> Repentance alone could never restore humanity to that state of purity it had enjoyed from the beginning, nor could it heal human nature of the nature of incorruption that afflicted it as a result of sin.

This can be likened to someone who goes out into icy weather without sufficient clothing and then comes down with a terrible cold. When he visits his doctor, would it be appropriate treatment for the doctor merely to advise him not to go out in the cold weather again without

<sup>668</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Concerning His Own Life* 1945–1949 (FOTC 75:130; PG 37:1165–66).

<sup>669</sup> See Fr. Marcos Daoud and Mourad Magdy. *The Service of Salvation* (Arabic: *Khedmet Al-Khalas*) (2007): pp. 52–54.

<sup>670</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 6: p. 63.

<sup>671</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans., John Behr (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 7: p. 65.

warm clothing? Clearly not. First, she must treat his infection, and only after that should she resort to advising him not to repeat his error.

If God cannot take back the sentence of death upon humanity, and if our repentance is not enough because it cannot by itself heal the corruption of our nature, then His mercy demands that He take up our human nature through the incarnation in order to renew us and take away from us the sentence of death with which we had been justly condemned.

### **329. What is the divine economy<sup>672</sup> for our salvation?**

After humanity fell into sin God revealed to Adam and Eve His divine economy for the salvation of His beloved humanity: the Holy Trinity’s plan and work for our salvation; one divine work wherein each Hypostasis has His distinct role in attaining our salvation. The Lord Christ proclaimed the love of God the Father saying, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The apostle Paul reveals the love of the Son saying, “Who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). And the Lord Christ reveals the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation saying, “He will take what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

### **330. How does the Holy Trinity cooperate to work in us?**

In one divine essence of the Holy Trinity and three distinct Hypostases, all of God’s work expresses His boundless love for humanity; yet it is the cooperative work of the Holy Trinity. As **Pope Athanasius** says, “**The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy Triad is preserved.**”<sup>673</sup> All divine works are divine gifts granted by the Father, through His Only Begotten Son, by His Holy Spirit.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “For the Son does not say that God the Father works separately and by Himself regarding things that are, and that He Himself again likewise works apart from the Father ... for so the Creator would be two and not One, if Either work apart and separately ... if it were possible that Either should work apart and separately with regard to things that are, as we said before, ... the Son will not be speaking the truth, when He says, *I am in the Father and the Father in Me* (John 14:10).”<sup>674</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Because you have been baptized in the name of the Trinity, in all that we have done the mystery of the Trinity has been preserved. Everywhere the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one operation, one sanctification ... How? God [the Father], who

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<sup>672</sup> On the specific meaning of “economy” here, see the footnote to the title of section 293.

<sup>673</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (Epworth Press, 1951) 1.28: p. 135 (PG 26:596A).

<sup>674</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 1.5 (LFHCC 43:53) amended.



anointed you, and the Lord sealed you, and placed the Holy Spirit in your heart. Therefore, you have received the Holy Spirit in your heart.”<sup>675</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do you see this love surpassing all expression, all conception? Who was the aggrieved one? Himself. Who first sought the reconciliation? Himself. ‘And yet,’ says one, ‘He sent the Son, He did not come Himself.’ The Son indeed it was He sent; still not He alone entreated, but both with Him and by Him the Father; therefore he said, that, ‘God was reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:19): that is, by Christ.”<sup>676</sup>

We can say with **St. Basil the Great**, that the divine work or God’s love for humanity is manifested in three types of creation that complement each other, performed by the Holy Trinity: “We find three creations mentioned in the Scripture; the first, the transition from non-existence into existence; the second, the change from worse to better; and the third, the resurrection of the dead. In these you will find the Holy Spirit co-operating with the Father and the Son ... Now, man is created a second time through baptism, ‘for if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature’ (2 Cor. 5:17).”<sup>677</sup>

### **331. What is the role of each Hypostasis in my life?**

#### **The love of God the Father for me:**

He created me as the greatest creation on earth.

His divine providence embraces me.

He makes all things work for my good.

His Fatherhood is always kind, even when I am being chastened.

With love and wisdom, He grants me the gifts I need.

He grants me the free gift of salvation.

His divine embrace welcomes me.

#### **The grace of the only Son saves me:**

His names and titles declare His love for me.

He was incarnate for my sake.

He suffered for my sake.

<sup>675</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 6.2(5–6) (FOTC 44:320).

<sup>676</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 11.5 (NPNF I/12:333) amended.

<sup>677</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 8 (FOTC 13:36) amended.

He was crucified for my sake.

He resurrects me with Him.

He raises me to His heavens.

He grants me new life.

**The communion of the Holy Spirit:**

He grants me the revelation of the Holy Scriptures.

He offers me fellowship with God.

He grants me the spirit of adoption by the Father (the new birth of baptism).

He restores the divine image in my nature.

He grants me the forgiveness of sins.

He enlightens my mind.

He grants me membership in the Church, the Body of Christ.

He gives me the power of victory over sin, death, and Satan, and raises my heart up to heaven.

**332. Why was humanity sentenced: “you shall surely die”?**

Death is the natural consequence of sin that humanity reaps from willingly committing sin. In foolishness, humanity implanted itself into the cycle of death, and the loving God would not compel humanity to refrain from sin nor stop sin from taking its natural course.

In ancient times, the Gnostics were so offended by scripture passages that spoke of God being angry or repenting that they rejected the Old Testament altogether. But the real cause of their being offended was that they interpreted these passages literally rather than spiritually. **Origen** says that references to God that employ human analogies of God (anthropomorphisms) such as the wrath of God cannot be interpreted literally. **“If you hear of the anger of God and his wrath, do not suppose that anger and wrath are passions of God.** The purposes of using this way of speaking are for converting and bettering the infant, since we also use a fearful expression with children, not from an actual state of mind but because of a purpose to cause fear. If we maintain what is kindly for the soul in our expression toward the babe, and we show the affection which we have for it, since we have not altered ourselves nor changed for the conversion of that one, we lose him and make him worse. So then it states that God is also said to be angry and wrathful in order that you can convert and become better. And he is truly neither angry nor wrathful, but you experience the effects of

anger and wrath when you are in unbearable pains because of evil, whenever he disciplines by what is called the *anger* of God.”<sup>678</sup>

### 333. How did sin corrupt humanity’s vision of God?

By falling into disobedience, human understanding was corrupted and became closed to seeing God in His love. Instead, humanity saw God as harsh. Job the Righteous, in his moments of weakness under the heavy burden of his trials and the counsel of his friends, saw God as harsh and said to Him, “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; yet You would destroy me ... And will You turn me into dust again? ... If my head is exalted, You hunt me like a fierce lion, and again You show Yourself awesome against me. And increase Your **indignation** toward me; You renew your witnesses against me. Why then have You brought me out of the womb? ... Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort” (Job 10:8–20).

The heart that is corrupted by sin **sees God in his judgment as an unjust judge**, reaping what He has not sown, and gathering where He has not scattered seed (Matt. 25:24). He has no sympathy for human weakness nor consideration for our shortcomings. He prepares eternal life for a rare few chosen saints and concocts untold suffering for the multitude of sinners. Do not many modern philosophies attempt to reject this kind of God? In response to these kinds of rejections, some clergy concede this harshness of God, but argue that this God bears no relation to the reality of human affairs, thinking that in so doing, they are resisting the wave of atheism.

My brothers and sisters, no one truly denies the existence of God, not even atheists, for deep down in their souls they feel Him. But in their mindset, they see Him as a harsh and unjust God, and so they fight Him and try to be rid of Him. **That is why what we need today is not so much to prove the existence of God as to testify about God’s love for humanity in our practical lives.**

### 334. What does the story of the tunics of skin signify?

After the fall, God clothed Adam and Eve in tunics of skin (Gen. 3:21). These leather tunics indicate that a blood sacrifice was offered as a ransom for human sin, standing in place of Adam and Eve in receiving the sentence of death, and covering their nakedness. Subsequently, each generation learnt from the generation before it to offer blood sacrifices, so that it is rare to find a religion whose rites do not include the shedding of blood. Through the generations, this idea sometimes became corrupted — some even came to sacrifice their own children.

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<sup>678</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6(7) (FOTC 97:200–201).

In the fullness of time, humanity received the written law from Moses’s hands, which law required blood sacrifices because “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Blood sanctifies all; and without it, nothing and no one — even if he be high priest — can be sanctified to the Lord: “For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.’ Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:19–22).

### **335. How did the blood sacrifices prepare us for the sacrifice of the New Testament?**

The blood sacrifices that God showed to Adam and whose details were clarified in the Book of Leviticus are incapable, by themselves, of manifesting God’s love for sinful humanity. Humanity needs to return to the life of holiness, without which no one can see God or come into contact with Him. Humanity needs a conciliator capable of mediating between God and His children.

We needed the incarnation of the Son, the Word, the second Hypostasis. In His profound love for us, this incarnate God came forth, carrying our death in His body. But who can accept such a thing? The mind is incapable of comprehending the depths of God’s love for it. How could God the Word become flesh when his divinity fills all things? The Lord says, “[Am I not] the Lord, and there is no other God besides me? A just God and a **Savior**; there is none besides Me” (Isa. 45:21), and “you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me” (Hos. 13:4).

My Savior loves me; my Intercessor with the Father. He took flesh for my sake and died as an atoning sacrifice for my sins (1 John 2:1–2). This is the salvation offered by the Son, by the cooperation of the Holy Trinity, each Hypostasis completing the others, each Hypostasis proclaiming God’s love for us.

### **336. What is the promise of divine salvation and the prophesy of the coming of the Savior after many generations?**

The divine promise was repeated, for example, to Abraham, when God said to him: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 22:18); and to David the prophet and king: “I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:12–13); and to Ahaz: “the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

**337. What does reconciliation with God mean?**

**St. Cyril** says that the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ did not reconcile us only to the Father, but also to the Son. He Himself is the Hypostasis who reconciles us, for we have sinned against Him.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> See St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de Sancta et Consubstantiali Trinitate 15, de adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate 1* (PG 75).



## 10

# Our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World <sup>680</sup>

### 338. Why does the Christian Church consider the Old Testament to be an integral part of the Holy Bible?

The Church ties readings from the Old Testament to those from the New Testament in all its liturgical prayers. The Church also firmly resisted the various heretics<sup>681</sup> who attempted to exclude the books of the Old Testament from canon of the Holy Bible.

St. Paul writes, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes, for Moses writes this about the righteousness which is of the law: ‘The man that does those things shall live by them.’” (Rom. 10:4–5). The apostle Paul is quoting Moses here: “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments which if a man does he shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5). **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>682</sup> tells us that man can neither live nor be righteous unless he fulfills all the statutes of the law—a feat that we must admit is beyond human ability. If the Jews base their righteousness on adherence to the law, the law itself declares the utter inability of humans to achieve righteousness and life. This leads us to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who alone among humanity has not broken the law, but is able to make those who believe in Him righteous. This why the apostle Paul does not allow the Jews any excuse, for the law itself declares Christ as the only One who is righteous in the sense of righteousness intended by the law. To reject Him is to reject righteousness, even if one thinks that he is made righteous by the law. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “‘For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness’ (Rom. 10:4), who was prophesied by the law to every one who believes.”<sup>683</sup>

The Jews are proud of the fact that they are the people of God who received the divine law by Moses through angels (Heb. 2:2). But now the incarnate Word Himself has come to us, giving Himself to us, and granted us to be the children of the Father in the waters of baptism through the Holy Spirit. **St. Augustine** says, “He who gave the law likewise gave grace; but the law He sent by a servant, with grace He Himself came down.”<sup>684</sup>

<sup>680</sup> See St. Didymus Study Group: Salvation Service, 2007, Topic VI, *Law and Prophecies*.

<sup>681</sup> Among the most famous of these is Marcion from the second century, whose rejection of the books of the Old Testament was connected to his denial of the divinity of the Lord Christ.

<sup>682</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 17 (NPNF I/11:471–477).

<sup>683</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.9 (ANF 2:357) amended.

<sup>684</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 3.2 (NPNF I/7:19) amended.

### **339. How was the Old Testament law inadequate without the Lord Christ?**

The righteousness of the law was difficult if not impossible to fulfill. Then Christ came, not to offer easy commandments or to make those who believe in Him less diligent; but to bring Himself closer to His believers and to dwell in them; not that they may fulfill the works of the law, but that through His work in them their righteousness might exceed that of the scribes and pharisees, as He said: “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”(Matt. 5:20).

### **340. Why does St. Paul rebuke his own Jewish race?**

St. Paul rebukes the Jews because they neglected the central role they were meant to play, **which is to preach the Messiah to which the Old Testament’s symbols and prophecies testify**. In other words, their proper task was not to haughtily and vainly engage in foolish disputes against the gentiles, but to preach the faith to them. This is what the apostle Paul meant by saying, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.’” (Rom. 10:14–15).

### **341. What is the chief concern of the Old Testament prophets?**

In the passage, “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21) **St. John the Chrysostom** finds a description of the Old Testament in general where the Lord has stretched out His arms through the cries of the prophets, declaring His love for them despite their stubbornness and resistance. God is a Father extending His arms to His people, who reject Him as a little child who rejects the embrace of his Father’s love. In these prophetic words (Isa. 65:2), **St. Justin Martyr** finds a reference to the cross upon which the Lord stretched out His arms and died to embrace all.<sup>685</sup> In the Liturgy of St. Gregory we pray:

“You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment to salvation.

As a good Shepherd you have sought after that which had gone astray.

As a true Father, You have labored with me, I, who had fallen.

You have bound me with all the remedies that lead to life.

You are He who sent unto me the prophets for my sake, I, the sick.

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<sup>685</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 97 (ANF 1:247).



You have given me the law as a help.

You are He who ministered salvation to me, when I disobeyed Your law.

As a True Light, You have shone upon the lost, and the ignorant.”

Therefore, the law and the prophets are a means granted by God to humanity as part of our preparation for redemption; for the coming of the Redeemer, the Savior, who grants righteousness, and opens the path to heaven.

**St. Augustine** says, “‘Thus they thought, and erred; for their wickedness blinded them’ (Wisd. Of Sol. 2:18–21). These words apply also to those who, in spite of all these evidences, in spite of such a series of prophecies, and of their fulfilment, still deny that Christ is foretold in the Scriptures. As often as they repeat this denial, we can produce fresh proofs, with the help of Him who has made such provision against human perversity.”<sup>686</sup> The events of the life of Christ were not unforetold. Christ Himself asked us to believe in these prophecies and was constantly affirming, even after His resurrection, that all these things were all written about Him in the books.

### **First, prophecies about the life of the Lord Christ:**

#### **342. What are the most important prophecies concerning the incarnation of the Word from the seed of King David of the Tribe of Judah?**

**First:** in speaking to the serpent after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God announced that the Savior would be born from a woman, saying, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). The Savior was born from a woman and crushed the head of the serpent. Although Satan hounded Christ all the way to the Cross, the Lord Christ crushed his head by rising from the dead and liberating the righteous souls from Hades.

**Second:** when Jacob blessed his twelve sons, to Judah — the tribe from which Jesus came — he said, “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen. 49:10). “**Scepter**” here refers to the King’s scepter; and “**lawgiver**” refers to the one who makes the laws and enforces them such that truth may be established. “**Shiloh**” is a Hebrew word that more or less means “one who has a scepter” or “the one to whom belongs the kingship,” and this is the meaning employed in the Septuagint’s Greek translation of the word. Thus, this verse is a prophecy about the Lord Christ that refers to Him as “Shiloh,” the King of Kings (Rev. 19:16). Consequently, we can read this verse as follows: “Sovereignty will not be taken away from the tribe of Judah, nor shall the right to judge be taken away from his descendants, until

<sup>686</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 44 (NPNF I/4:198).

the coming of Christ the King, the Overseer, the true and eternal Judge, to whom all peoples submit.”

**Third:** “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist” (Isa. 11:1–5). So, the Lord Christ **will come from the house of David son of Jesse.**

**Fourth:** “I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations” (Ps. 89:3–4).

“His seed [David’s descendants] also I will make to endure forever, and his throne [David’s throne] as the days of heaven” (Ps. 89:29).

“Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky, amen” (Ps. 89:35–37).

These words about **the continuation of David’s reign “forever,” “to all generations”;** and about his throne being established **“like the days of heaven,” “as the sun before Me,”** were not fulfilled except in the person of the Lord Christ who is descended from David.

### **343. What are the most important prophecies concerning the birth of the Lord Christ?**

**First: His birth from a Virgin** and that He will be called “Emmanuel.” “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel” (Isa. 7:14). God does not only give us a sign or a miracle, but He Himself becomes the sign or the miracle through His birth from a virgin, and His name is “**Emmanuel**” which means “God with us.”

**Second: His birth in Bethlehem.** “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). This Ruler is eternal; the everlasting One who is born in time is our Savior who was born in Bethlehem.

**Third: His flight to Egypt.** “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” (Hos. 11:1).

“The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst” (Isa. 19:1).

**Fourth: The anointment of Christ with the Holy Spirit.** “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn” (Isa. 61:1–2). The Lord Christ was anointed through His incarnation, or was consecrated by the Father for the work of salvation, through which He gives hope to the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the prisoners, and those who mourn because of sin, death, and Satan’s reign.

#### **344. What are the most important prophecies about the Lord Christ’s last week on earth?**

**First: The Lord Christ’s entry into Jerusalem.** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9). The Lord Christ entered Jerusalem humbly, riding on a donkey, and a colt, the foal of a donkey.

**Second: The conspiracy to give Him up to the Jewish leaders.** “Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.’ So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter” (Zech. 1:12–13). This is a prophecy of Judas’ conspiracy to betray the Lord Christ to the leaders of the Jews in return for thirty pieces of silver; and after that, his regret and attempt to return this small amount to the Jewish leaders. But the Jews refused to take the money, so Judas cast it into the sanctuary and went and hung himself. The Jews used this money to buy a potter’s field in which they could bury strangers, and named this field, “the field of blood” (Matt. 27:3–8).

**Third: The suffering of the Lord Christ.** “I gave My back to those who struck Me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Isa. 50:6).

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’” (Ps. 22:6–8).

“For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Ps. 22:16–18).

“They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Ps. 69:21).

Isaiah described Christ’s sufferings as though he were one of the eyewitnesses of His crucifixion, even though he preceded Christ by more than seven hundred years. For this reason some have called him “The Evangelist Prophet” ...

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

“Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:1–12).

In the first section of this passage, the prophet Isaiah describes the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, “despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” He then explains that all this was for our sakes, we the sinners: “He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes (wounds) we are healed.” The prophet also refers to the crucifixion of Christ between two thieves deserving of death, and how “He was numbered with the transgressors” and died on a cross in order to make us righteous: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” His

burial in the new tomb of a wealthy man, that of Joseph of Arimathea, is prophesied thus: “But with the rich at His death.” Thus, did the prophet describe the sufferings of Christ and the details of the crucifixion as though he had seen them firsthand. He offers us profound insights into the meaning of the salvation to be found in the cross.

### **345. What are the most important prophecies concerning the resurrection of the Lord Christ?**

The authors of the gospels say that Christ’s tomb in the garden was a new one. This detail tells us that the death of Christ heralds and leads us into Paradise, “where the forerunner has entered for us” (Heb. 6:20). In fact, the newness of the tomb means taking a path that no one has ever taken before, by which we return from death to life; the renewal of our souls. It also means that Christ created this way for us, and by it, abolished corruption. Therefore, by the death of Christ, death for us was transformed into nothing more than a kind of sleep, similar in its characteristics to merely resting. Yet we remain “alive to God” (Rom. 6:11), and we live forever as scripture says. Further, St. Paul in many places describes death as sleep for those who die in Christ. In ancient times, the dread of death cause people to live in terror. But now:

“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10).

“Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (Hos. 6:1–2).

Both these verses are prophecies about the resurrection of Christ, the Lord of Glory; while the second of them adds the detail that the resurrection occurs on the third day.

### **346. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven?**

“You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there” (Ps. 68:18). This is a prophecy about the ascension of Christ after He had completed His work of salvation; defeated the enemy, the devil; and freed all the souls of the righteous who had been in the clutches of Satan in Hades.

## **Second, prophecies about the acts of the Lord Christ:**

**347. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Lord Christ as a prophet?**

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deut. 18:15). The Lord Christ came, descended from Abraham, like His brethren in flesh, in order to prophecy and teach us about the Holy Trinity.

**348. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Lord Christ as a priest?**

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps. 110:1–4). Through the death of the Lord Christ on the cross, His resurrection and ascension to the heavens, He offered Himself as a sacrifice to God the Father and became Himself a priest forever who gives those who believe in Him bread and wine just as Melchizedek offered in the past, but which are His holy Body and Blood.

**Third, prophecies about the divinity of the Lord Christ:**

**349. What are the most important prophecies about the divinity of the Lord Christ?**

In the book of Isaiah the prophet, we read, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government **and peace. there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom**, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:6–7). Of His reign it was said, “**the government will be upon His shoulder**,” for all the kings of this world are crowned with regal crowns on their heads; but Christ’s reign was upon the wood of the cross which He carried on His shoulder.

Another prophecy is found in the book of Proverbs: “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?” Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?” (Prov. 30:4). These are clear and candid words about God who has authority over wind, water, and earth; but then comes the question, “**What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?**” The question here is not merely a question about the name of God the Father or the name of His Son, but is meant to show the impossibility of humans comprehending the nature of God, His transcendence and His limitlessness. What concerns us here is the proclamation of the Son of God who is necessarily God, of one nature with

God the Father. The Jews were puzzled by these questions, bereft of any answer, awareness, or understanding. But we who live at the end of the ages know well and understand by the Holy Spirit that He is God the Father, and that His Son is our Lord Jesus Christ who was incarnate for our salvation.

From this brief sample of the many aspects of the life of the Lord Christ prophesied in the Old Testament we appreciate the importance of prophecies that, hundreds of years before His coming, come close to drawing a full picture of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who took flesh in the fullness of time, so that the Jews who rejected Him have no excuse. Therefore, the Old Testament and the prophecies it contains are an essential part of our Holy Bible in which we see Christ by the light of the New Testament, in which we find the accurate fulfillment of these prophecies.

*Important Conclusions:*<sup>687</sup>

God gave the law to the children of Israel in order to curb evil.

The law contains ethical commandments; and the punishment for disobeying these commandments was death.

The law is holy for it is the word of God and His judgments. But it does not make sinners righteous; rather, it condemns them (since all have sinned); it does not forgive sins nor does it heal human weakness.

The Old Testament contains the Torah which represents the legislative aspect, as well as prophecies which represent divine revelations that obscurely point to the Savior in order to prepare humanity to receive Him.

The prophecies cover all aspects of Savior's life, so that His appearance as a Savior may be a fulfillment of the prophecies.

**350. What are the signs that confirm that the one born of St. Mary is the Messiah, the promised Savior?**

The words of the prophet Isaiah that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14).

The prophecy of Micah the prophet that He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), as the Jews already knew (Matt. 2:4–6).

Malachi prophesied about John the Baptist, who comes in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way to the Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5).

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<sup>687</sup> Refer to the Studies group at St. George Church, Sporting: Salvation Service, 2007, Topic 6, *The Law and Prophecies*: p. 129.

Zechariah the prophet prophesied that He would enter Jerusalem as a king riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9).

Isaiah the prophet described the suffering of the Savior in some detail (Isa. 53).

David the prophet spoke of the piercing of His hands and feet (Ps. 22:16).

Daniel prophesied the time of His coming (Dan. 9:24–27).

### **351. Did anyone know that the one born of the Virgin was the Messiah, the Savior?**

The angels testified of Him when they appeared to the shepherds and urged them to worship Him (Luke 2:8–15).

A great star guided the Magi (St. John Chrysostom says that this was an angel in the form of a star) to come and find Him, preaching as they travelled that they were going to worship the King of the Jews. They offered Him gold as to a King; frankincense as to a heavenly High Priest; and myrrh as to the Crucified One who suffers for the salvation of humanity (Matt. 2:1–12).

The Holy Spirit declared the identity of the child Jesus to Simeon the elder and Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:25–38).

St. John the Baptist testified of Him, saying, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:36).

The Father testified of Him when He was baptized in the River Jordan, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). He also testified of Him during His transfiguration before three of His disciples (Mark 9).

### **352. What are the principal teachings of Christ?**

That we comprehend the truth of our life in Christ: that we are the children of God the Father; members of the body of Christ; the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells.

That we comprehend the purpose of our lives: which is to experience the promise of heaven; to be elevated by divine grace from glory to glory, awaiting the day of the coming of the Lord with joy.

That we strive with the aid of divine grace that we may walk in the Lord (Col. 2:6) and become an icon of the Lord Christ.

That we be aware of our weaknesses, endure the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters, and pray for their repentance and ours, saying “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”



That we strive to work for the Kingdom of God, so that those who seek the salvation of their souls may be joined to the Church.

That we bear the image of Christ, as Pontius Pilate said that He always smiled but was never seen sniggering; and in certain situations, He was saddened, such as when He wept over Jerusalem which killed the prophets and rejected the Messiah, the Savior.

It befits us to accept the words of the Lord of Glory given that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); and to receive the seeds of eternal life that He plants in our hearts so we may enjoy the holy life, joy of the spirit, and eternity. As the apostle says, “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:23).

### **353. What are the signs that Jesus Christ performed?**

John the evangelist says, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Thus, His unseen signs and miracles are innumerable, but here are some of which we know:

He cast out the demons that possessed some people. By so doing, He proclaimed that He sets us free from the devil and all his evil powers.

On many occasions He healed all the sick who came to Him. He healed them with a word from His mouth or a touch from His hands (possibly, with His hands positioned to form a cross). And some were healed merely by touching the hem of His garment, as in the case of the woman who had a flow of blood (Mark 5:25–34). By so doing, He identified Himself as the physician who heals souls and bodies.

He fed a multitude one time with five loaves and two fish (Matt. 14:13–22) and another time with a few little fish (Matt. 15:34). By so doing, He declared that He alone is able to satisfy our souls by His presence in us by His grace.

He walked on water (Matt. 14:25), and by His word, the waves and storms were calmed (Matt. 8:23–27).

He raised the son of the widow of Nain from death (Luke 7:11–17), the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:18), and Lazarus who was buried in the tomb for four days (John 11).

### **354. How does the Lord Christ save us?**

Out of His love for us, He was incarnate and became man that He might dwell among us as one of us, and that He might forge a precious friendship with us. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “Our nature became acceptable in Christ, for we had been expelled because of the

rebelliousness of Adam; but now, Christ restores us to the Father.”<sup>688</sup> He also says, “He is the Lamb who offered Himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of humanity from sin and purifies it to be without sin; He guides us to the Father.”<sup>689</sup>

When we broke the commandment of God, He gave us commandments and granted us incomparable capabilities to enable us to keep His commandments. Therefore, He called Himself “the way” (John 14:6). He gave us His life as a model that we long to follow (John 12:26) and granted us His Holy Spirit who guides us in Christ who is the way (John 14:6). **St. Cyril the Great** says, “It was necessary therefore that the Word of the Father, when He humbled Himself unto emptiness, and deigned to assume our likeness, should become for our sakes the pattern and way of every good work.”<sup>690</sup> He also says, “Why therefore did He make His abode in the wilderness, and fast, and endure, being tempted? The type has regard to us, my beloved: He sets before us His acts as our example, and establishes a model of the better and more admirable mode of life practised among us.”<sup>691</sup>

He suffered, was crucified, and died so that we might consider our suffering as being in fellowship with Him, and so that we might say, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

Because He rose from the dead and ascended to the heavens, we can say with the apostle Paul: “[He] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). By His resurrection, He proclaimed His victory over the devil, sin, and death. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “by the Only-begotten Word of God having become man, without ceasing to be that which He was, He glorified the nature of man, in that He did not disdain to take upon Him its meanness, in order that He might bestow upon it His own riches.”<sup>692</sup>

### **355. How does the death of the Lord Christ on the cross save us from sin, the curse, and death?**

The apostle Paul highlights the role of the Lord Christ in the salvation of humanity by comparing Him to Adam, who is considered the head of all humanity according to the flesh. On the other hand, Jesus Christ came from the seed of Adam by His incarnation but became the head of humanity because He is the Almighty, the Giver of divine grace. He unites us with Him as our Head, through our faith.

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<sup>688</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *In Psalm 15:8*.

<sup>689</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de Sancta et Consubstantiali Trinitate* 29 (PG 75:429–438).

<sup>690</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans., R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 11: p. 47.

<sup>691</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans., R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 12: p. 52.

<sup>692</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans., R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 81: p. 371.

In Adam, we inherited corruption through **sin, condemnation** came upon us, and we fell under the judgement of **death**. But the Lord Christ, because of His love for us, accepted the suffering and death of the cross and came to be subject to the curse; not because of any sin He committed, but in order to unite us with Him, abolish sin, grant us His righteousness to work in us, free us from the curse, and grant us the resurrected life in place of death. In this way, the mercies of God upon us have come to us through His justice. By Him, we live the life of victory and are worthy of the blessed eternal life.

The Holy Bible describes this mystery as “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:26–27).

“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1–4).

### **356. Is this salvation available to all people?**

The Lord Christ, the Savior, offered Himself as a sacrifice for everyone. For His part, He offers His grace and His free salvation to all. But our part is to exercise the complete free will he has given us and choose to share in His sufferings with Him, be conformed to His death, and say with the apostle Paul: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). The Body and Blood of the Lord, given for our sake, support us in attaining this when we commune of them, as the apostle Paul says: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (1 Cor. 11:26). He also says, “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24).

### **357. Why did St. Jacob of Sarug call the cross of the Lord Christ “The Divine Chariot”?**

After His death on the cross, the body of Christ was buried in the tomb. The cross became a kind of divine chariot bearing the soul of Christ down into Hades, that He may destroy its gates and liberate all those who were held captive and take them to paradise, rejoicing in their victory over the devil and over death. As for the Lord’s divinity, it parted neither from His

body nor from His soul. St. Peter says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18–19).

**358. How did the Lord Christ come to be crucified when His life, teachings, and miracles testified to His Holiness?**

The high priests, scribes, and pharisees hated the Lord Christ because He rebuked them for their false teachings and wicked lives. On their part, they envied Him and therefore wrongly accused Him and condemned Him to death. But the multitudes loved Him, sought Him, listened to Him, and beheld the miracles He performed.

**359. Why does the Orthodox Creed mention that He suffered, was crucified, and was buried?**

To affirm that He took real flesh, and not, as some heretics believed, that He did not take a real body, but that He only appeared to people to have done so.

**360. How could He, being God, suffer, be crucified, and be buried?**

Because it is God’s good pleasure to redeem humanity. His divinity did not suffer — only His humanity, as He said: “Because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” (John 10:17–18).

**361. What does it mean that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sake?**

By His death on the cross, we are saved from sin, the curse, and death. The apostle Paul says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Eph. 1:7–8). Of the curse he says, “Christ has redeemed us from **the curse of the law** having become a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). As for death it was said: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14–15).

**362. Why did the Lord Christ make known His resurrection only to His own followers?**

The Lord Christ was crucified openly in public, in front of the Jewish leaders and people as well as in front of the Roman military commanders and soldiers so as to proclaim His love and His sacrifice to all, Jews and Gentiles. But His resurrection was revealed only to those

who were ready to believe in Him and prepared to live the resurrected life and to preach His resurrection as a sign of the Father's acceptance of His sacrifice on behalf of humanity. The apostle Paul says, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

**St. Augustine** says, "Let us see the Son indeed, and not the Father, rising again, but both the Father and the Son working the resurrection of the Son. The resurrection of the Son is the work of the Father; for it is written, 'Therefore He exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name' (Phil. 2:9). The Father therefore raised the Son to life again, in exalting, and awakening Him from the dead. And did the Son also raise Himself? Assuredly He did. For He said of the temple, as the figure of His own body, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again' (John 2:19). Lastly, as the laying down of life has reference to the Passion, so the taking it again has reference to the resurrection ... For that the Father restored it is plain. For so says the Psalm, 'Raise Me up, and I will requite them' (Ps. 41:10). But why do you wait for a proof from me that the Son also restored life to Himself? Let Him speak Himself; 'I have power to lay down My life.' I have not yet said what I promised. I have said, 'to lay it down'; and you are crying out already, for you are flying past me. For well-instructed as you are in the school of your heavenly teacher, as attentively listening to, and in pious affection rehearsing, what is read, you are not ignorant of what comes next. 'I have power,' says He, 'to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and take it again.'"<sup>693</sup>

### **363. Where was His resurrection on the third day mentioned?**

The apostle Paul says, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

### **364. Why did the Lord Himself appear to His disciples during the forty days after His resurrection?**

**First:** during this time, He taught them about the kingdom of God, whether by His appearances or His teachings (Acts 1:3).

**Second:** had He ascended to the heavens within a few hours or days of His resurrection, they might have thought that they had just been hallucinating.

**Third:** during this period, He appeared to others, as the apostle Paul says: "After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time" (1 Cor. 15:6).

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<sup>693</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume I*, trans., R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) 2.13: pp. 39–40, amended.

**365. Does the Holy Bible testify to His ascension?**

Luke the evangelist records the story of His ascension in detail (Acts 1:9–11; see also Eph. 4:10; Heb. 8:1).

**366. How did Jesus Christ sit on the right hand of the Father?**

This is to be understood spiritually; that is, that He is one with His Father in glory and honor.

**367. What does the Holy Bible say about the second coming of Christ?**

The angel said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

**368. What is the meaning of hope?**

The apostles Peter and Paul maintain that our Lord Jesus Christ is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:13). Our hope is the peace of our hearts in the Lord, confident that He cares for our salvation and shepherds us in all things, large and small.

**369. What does St. Cyril the Great say about our Advocate and Savior?**

He says, “God loves His creation, but has a special love for humanity, more than any other creation. He manifested His own special love towards humanity by sending His Son to the world to save humanity.”<sup>694</sup> “Christ, who is without sin, Himself carried all the sins of humanity that He may destroy the power of sin.”<sup>695</sup> “Because of the greatness of God’s love, Christ came to save the sinful human being.”<sup>696</sup> “... if anyone says that he offered himself as the sacrifice for his own sake also, and not rather for us only, (for he who has not known sin would have no need of a sacrifice), let him be anathema.”<sup>697</sup> “Christ carried every punishment that fell upon us, and by this, sin lost its power.”<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra in Genesis* 2.

<sup>695</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 53.10.

<sup>696</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 6.9.

<sup>697</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters*, 17.19 Anathema 10 (FOTC 76:92).

<sup>698</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 53.7.

## 11

## Titles and Names of the Savior that Witness to the Works of His Love<sup>699</sup>

### 370. Why is He given the name “Wonderful” (Isa. 9:6)?

“**And His name will be called Wonderful**” because He is beyond our understanding. “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (Phil. 2:9–10).

Both Testaments of the Holy Bible contain various titles and names of the Lord Christ, some of which are symbolic, and whose purpose is to communicate something of His inexpressible work of love for humanity. With each title the human soul delves into new depths, delighting in His overflowing love; aiding her throughout her journey on earth until she passes over to paradise, where she will meet Him in the clouds, on the great day of the Lord. The scholar **Origen** says, “Jesus is all things, every name is appropriate to Him. For all things proclaim Him.”<sup>700</sup> **St. Gregory of Nyssa** also says, “for so shall I name you, since your name is above every name (Phil. 2:9) and cannot be spoken or grasped by any rational nature. Therefore your name, which declares your goodness, is my soul’s attitude toward you.”<sup>701</sup>

With a spirit of prophecy, the son of Sirach says, “Come to me, you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits. For the remembrance of me is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance is sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more” (Sir. 24:19–21).

**St Augustine** says, “Your name is preferred, not only for greatness but also for pleasantness ... what does the psalm that invites you say? ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good.’ (Ps. 34:8).”<sup>702</sup> He also says, “But you will not cease to love, because He whom you see is such a One as does not offend you by any weariness: He both satisfies you, and satisfies you not. What I say is wonderful. If I say that He satisfies you, I am afraid lest as though satisfied you should wish to depart, as from a dinner or from a supper. What then do I say? Does He not satisfy you? I am afraid again, that if I say, He does not satisfy you, you should seem to be in want: and should be as it were empty, and there should be in you some void which ought to be filled. What then shall I say, except what can be said, but can hardly be

<sup>699</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic) Books 1–8, second edition, revised and updated (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2010), Book 2: pp. 508–582.

<sup>700</sup> Origen, *Commentarium in Joannem* 1 (PG 14:50).

<sup>701</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 69.

<sup>702</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 52.13 (NPNF I/8:202) amended.

thought? He both satisfies you, and satisfies you not: for I find both in Scripture. For while He said, ‘Blessed are the hungry, for they shall be filled’ (Matt. 5:6) it is again said of Wisdom, ‘Those who eat You shall hunger again, and those who drink shall thirst again’ (Sir. 24:21).”<sup>703</sup>

### **371. Why is Jesus called “Savior”?**

Jesus is the one who saved us from sin and death through His power; we therefore proclaim His name to the world as its Savior and praise and glorify this name of salvation accordingly.

The name of Jesus bears a mysterious power from above, as the seventy apostles discovered when they returned to Him, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us **in Your name**” (Luke 10:17). In His last conversation with the eleven before His ascension, He says, “And these signs will follow those who believe: **in My name** they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17). The apostles performed many signs, wonders, and healings in the name of Jesus; for example, the healing of the lame (Acts 3:6–8). Even those who are rejected on the great day of the Lord will say to Him, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied **in Your name**, cast out demons **in Your name**, and done many wonders **in Your name**?” (Matt. 7:22).

The name of Jesus **is the object of evangelism**. In Samaria “they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

The **praises in the New Testament proclaim the glory of Jesus’ name** (Heb. 1:4; Phil. 2:9–10). Christ gave Himself as a ransom on our behalf, to bestow upon us eternity and redeem us from death.<sup>704</sup> The scholar **Origen** says, “The word ‘Jesus’ is glorious, and worthy of all adoration and worship.”<sup>705</sup>

### **372. Why is Jesus called “the Messiah, the crucified King”?**

The word “Messiah” is the spine that supports Jewish tradition. It is no exaggeration to say that it occupied the minds of the godly before the coming of the Lord Christ and continues to occupy the minds of many who are spiritual till our present day. It was the chief preoccupation of the Jewish leaders; whenever they saw someone stand out in his service, they would inquire, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another?” A Jewish scholar wrote the following regarding the Jewish idea of the Messiah: “But the definition of belief in the Messiah is: *The prophetic hope for the end of this age, in which a strong redeemer, by his power and his spirit, will bring complete redemption, political and spiritual,*

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<sup>703</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 86.23 (NPNF I/8:419) amended.

<sup>704</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* (FOTC 58:103).

<sup>705</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 14.2 (FOTC 94:57).



*to the people Israel, and along with this, earthly bliss and moral perfection to the entire human race ... to redeem Israel from its servitude and from all its tribulations and to bring salvation to all humanity through the salvation of Israel, which should precede and make straight the highway before it.”*<sup>706</sup>

The Lord Christ wanted to raise the level of thinking of His disciples above the merely material, so He asked them, “‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:15–16; Mark 7:29; Luke 9:20). In another conversation with the Pharisees about their idea of the Messiah, their answer to His question was “the Son of David.” Again, He tried to elevate their thoughts to comprehend the truth about the Messiah and said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?’” If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” (Matt. 22:41–44).

The psalmist says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore **God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.** All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia” (Ps. 45:6–8). The psalmist here refers to the Messiah, the King who is victorious through the cross; who offers His precious blood as a ransom for the sins of the world and as a dowry for His bride, the heavenly queen. The psalmist praises, saying, “**Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.**” In the Coptic rite, these words became the well-known hymn commonly known as *Pek-thronos* (i.e., “Your Throne”) with a duration of about twenty minutes, during which the believer is elevated to contemplate the throne of the crucified King. It is chanted it on the Tuesday of the Holy Passion week and on Good Friday before the burial. Thus, in the eyes of the believer, the crucifixion and burial become a proclamation of the throne of the everlasting King.

In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with holy oil as a sign of the descent of the Spirit upon them and of the consecration of their lives to God’s work. It was not possible in the Old Testament for one person to be anointed both as king and priest at the same time, for the priests were of the tribe of Levi while the kings were of the tribe of Judah. But the Word of God, incarnate and crucified, came to sanctify all humanity. His anointing is unique, for He is the Lord of the priests, prophets, and kings, and He is the creator of sacrifices. Of His own will and pleasure, He accepted to be **the Priest, the Prophet, the King, and the Sacrifice.**

The Lord Christ was anointed as being the stone the builders rejected, and which became the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22). As the apostle Peter says, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones,

<sup>706</sup> Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea In Israel From Its Beginning To The Completion Of The Mishnah* (New York: MacMillan, 1955): p. 9, 12. Cf. Michael O’Carroll, *Verbum Caro: An Encyclopedia on Jesus, the Christ* (The Liturgical Press, 1992): pp. 112–114.

are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:4–5).

**Justin Martyr** says, “For indeed all kings and anointed persons obtained from Him their share in the names of kings and anointed: just as He Himself received from the Father the titles of King, and Christ, and Priest, and Angel, and such like other titles which He bears or did bear.”<sup>707</sup>

**St Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For when the Lord, as man, was baptized in the Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him. And when He received the Spirit, it was we who by Him were made recipients of It. And moreover for this reason, He not was anointed with oil as Aaron or David or the rest, but in another way above all His fellows, ‘with the oil of gladness,’ which He Himself interprets to be the Spirit, saying by the Prophet, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me’ (Isa. 61:1); as also the Apostle has said, ‘How God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 10:38).”<sup>708</sup>

### 373. Why is Jesus called “the Lord, Yahweh”?

The term *Yahweh* (*Jehovah*) means “the Being (or One who exists) who is present among His people.” In the Septuagint it is translated into the Greek *Kyrios* which means “Lord,” generally used to denote one who rules with power and authority over people or things, and exercises sovereignty over them. Christ is called “Lord” in Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; etc. St. Peter summed up the resurrection and glorification of Christ in these words: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). And in the writings of St. Paul, we find a many works of Christ that indicate His Lordship (Rom. 14:8–9; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:19; 14:37; 16:7; 2 Cor. 4:5; 8:5; 10:8; 10:18).

When Jesus says “I AM” (John 8:58) He takes us back to His title before His incarnation. When Moses the prophet saw the burning bush, he realized that the One to whom he spoke is God. Moses asked for His name, “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ... ‘The LORD [Yahweh] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’.” (Ex. 3:14–15). God’s answer to Moses reveals two important things:

**First:** “I AM WHO, I AM” — the ineffable God is above being named at all.

**Second:** “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” — God cleaves to humanity; He associates Himself with his those whom He loves.

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<sup>707</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 86 (ANF 1:242).

<sup>708</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.12.47 (NPNF II/4:333–334) amended.

**St. Augustine** says that the first expression means that in comparison to God, all the fleeting things of this world are “vanity” and “vanishing.”<sup>709</sup> It reveals God as Existence itself, the sublime Origin, and unchangeable.<sup>710</sup>

### 374. Why is Jesus called “the Word of God”?<sup>711</sup>

The word *Logos* was well known to both Jews and the gentiles. For Heraclitus (around 500 B.C.) it refers to the universal reason that governs the world and transcends it. It was later employed by the Stoic philosophers and came into more general usage. In Hellenic Judaism, the *Logos* is an independent Hypostasis, the idea of which evolved over time and came to be connected to the idea of wisdom (*Sophia*) (Wisd. Of Sol. 9:1–2; 18:15).

The opening words of the Gospel of John are “**In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God**” (John 1:1). In the Greek language, the three sections of this passage musically counterbalance each other: the noun “**Word**” is repeated in each section, as is the verb “**was.**” Here, this verb indicates continual, eternal existence that is not subject to time.

The purpose of this prologue is to introduce the reader to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the subject of the book; the eternal Word who works with the Father in creation. Being Himself God, he reveals the Father, and gives the Father to us as He gives Himself to us. He is the Word of God who speaks to us, and who offers Himself as the Word of God that we may possess the mystery of eternal life, He is the life of all, the light of every person. He who is eternal became flesh and dwelt as a human being. His own rejected Him — the Jews — despite the witness of St. John the Baptist to Him. But there were others who were faithful and who accepted Him, and so became children of God, and members of the divine family.

When we hear “the Word of God,” we ought not confuse it with human words, which emerge from the mouth, and are not connected to human nature or essence. **St. Ignatius** says, “there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word [Logos], not proceeding forth from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.”<sup>712</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “He is called the Word, the Son, the Power of God, the Wisdom of God. **The Word**, because He is without blemish; **the Power**, because He is perfect; **the Son**, because He is begotten of the Father; **the Wisdom**, because He is one with the Father, one in eternity, one in Divinity. Not that the Father is one Person with the Son; between Father

<sup>709</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 144.5 (NPNF I/8:655).

<sup>710</sup> St. Augustine: *City of God, Books VIII–XVI* 12.2 (FOTC 14:248–249); *On Christian Doctrine* 1.32(35) (NPNF I/2:531).

<sup>711</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *From the Commentaries and Reflections of the Early Fathers, Volume 3: Commentary on Exodus* (Arabic) (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1981).

<sup>712</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 8.1 (ANF 1:62).

and Son is the plain distinction that comes of generation; so that Christ is God of God, Everlasting of Everlasting, Fulness of Fulness.”<sup>713</sup>

**St Augustine** says, “Lo, the word which I am speaking to you, I have had previously in my heart: it came forth to you, yet it has not departed from me; it began to be in you, which was not in you before; and it continued with me after it went forth to you. As then my word was brought forth to your sense, yet did not depart from my heart; so That Word came forth to our senses, yet did not depart from His Father. My word was with me, and it came forth into a voice: the Word of God was with the Father, and came forth into Flesh. But can I do with my voice that which He could do with His Flesh? For I am not master of my voice as it flies; He is not only master of His Flesh, that It should be born, live, act; but even when dead He raised It up, and exalted unto the Father the Vehicle as it were in which He came forth to us.”<sup>714</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “The word *comes to be*, however, with men who could not previously receive the sojourn of the Son of God who is the Word. On the other hand, he does not *come to be* ‘with God’ (John 1:1) as though previously he were not with him, but because he is always with the Father, it is said, ‘And the Word *was* with God,’ for he did not ‘*come to be* with God.’”<sup>715</sup> He also says, “Who will support us? Jesus Christ, **the power of God and the wisdom of God** (1 Cor. 1:24). Moreover, He supports us, not for a day or two but till eternity.”<sup>716</sup>

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For the Word of God was not made for us, but rather we for Him, and ‘in Him all things were created’ (Col. 1:16). Nor was He made strong because we were weak, He alone being made by the Father, that He might frame us by means of Him as an instrument; perish the thought! It is not so. For even if it had seemed good to God not to make things that have a beginning, still the Word would have been with God, and the Father in Him. At the same time, things that have a beginning could not be brought into existence without the Word, hence they were made through Him — and reasonably. For since the Word is the Son of God by nature proper to His essence, and is from Him, and in Him, as He said Himself, the creatures could not have come to be, except through Him. For as the light enlightens all things by its radiance, and without its radiance nothing would be illuminated, so also the Father, as by a hand, in the Word wrought all things, and without Him makes nothing ... For, even if no works had been created, still ‘the Word’ of God ‘was,’ and ‘the Word was God.’ And His becoming man would not have taken place, had not the need of men become a cause. The Son then is not a creature.”<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> St. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 1.2.16 (NPNF II/10:203–204).

<sup>714</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans., R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 69.7: pp. 507–508, amended.

<sup>715</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John (Books 1–10)* 2.8 (FOTC 80:96–97).

<sup>716</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Cor.* 1.2.52–54.

<sup>717</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 18.31, 22.56 (NPNF II/4:364, 379) amended.

### 375. Why is Jesus called “the Power of God and Wisdom of God”?<sup>718</sup>

Those who accepted the divine call, whether Jews or gentiles, share a single perception of the crucified Christ. They perceive Him as **the power of God** and they find the power of salvation working in their lives. They perceive Him as **the wisdom of God**, His divine plan for the forgiveness, sanctification, and glorification of humanity eternally in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:24). They perceive in the cross the mystery of the inner self’s delight in **the true beauty**, the elevation of their thought, and the fulfilment of salvation. They see Him shining forth upon the whole world to gather all in Himself. All are invited to truly become the one chaste bride of Christ, carrying **the power of God and the wisdom of God**. If the Jews request a sign, Jesus Himself is the greatest of signs; His cross which was for the Jews a stumbling block is **the power of God unto salvation to those who believe in Him**. If the Greeks seek after wisdom, Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The Savior’s teaching is sufficient without additional help, for it is ‘the power and wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:24)”<sup>719</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “For he who truly believes in the One sees in the One Him Who is completely united with Him in truth, and deity, and essence, and life, and wisdom, and in all attributes whatsoever or, if he does not see in the One Him Who is all these it is in nothing that he believes. For without the Son, you have neither existence nor name, any more than the Powerful without Power, or the Wise without Wisdom. For Christ is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) so that he who imagines he sees the One God apart from power, truth, wisdom, life, or the true light, either sees nothing at all or else assuredly that which is evil. For the withdrawal of the good attributes becomes a positing and origination of evil.”<sup>720</sup>

He further says, “For God, when creating all things that have their origin by creation, neither stood in need of any matter on which to operate, nor of instruments to aid Him in His construction: for the power and wisdom of God has no need of any external assistance. But Christ is ‘the Power of God and the Wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:24)”<sup>721</sup>

### 376. Why is Jesus called “the Counsellor”?

Isaiah the prophet says, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called wonderful, **Counsellor**, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:6–7). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘Messenger’ of

<sup>718</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Corinthians I: A Patristic Commentary* (undated): pp. 37–39.

<sup>719</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis, Books 1–3* 1.100.1 (FOTC 85:98).

<sup>720</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2:4 (NPNF II/5:104–105).

<sup>721</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2:7 (NPNF II/5:111).

great counsel (Isa. 9:6 LXX), the Son of God is called, because of the other things which He taught, and principally because He announced the Father to men, as also now He says, I have manifested Your Name unto the men ... But He ‘manifested His Name’ both by words and actions.”<sup>722</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** also says, “Now neither is knowledge without faith, nor faith without knowledge ... And the Son is the true teacher respecting the Father; and that we may believe in the Son, we must know the Father, with whom also is the Son. Again, in order that we may know the Father, we must believe in the Son, that it is the Son of God who teaches; for from faith to knowledge by the Son is the Father. And the knowledge of the Son and Father, which is according to the gnostic rule—that which in reality is gnostic—is the attainment and comprehension of the truth by the truth.”<sup>723</sup>

And the scholar **Origen** says, “God the Word was sent, indeed, as a physician to sinners, but as a teacher of divine mysteries to those who are already pure and who sin no more.”<sup>724</sup>

### 377. Why is Jesus called “the King of Kings”?

Some have associated the title “Messiah” with the title “King.” In the Old Testament, the Messiah was the eternal and righteous King, anointed to restore the lost tabernacle of David. His kingdom shall extend to the ends of the earth and its law is divine truth and justice. Here are some prophecies about this wonderous Person, the Heavenly King, whose Kingdom is above all:

“I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; **A king will reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness** in the earth” (Jer. 23:5).

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; **a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.** You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than You companions ... At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir ...” (Ps. 45:6–9).

“Give the king Your judgment, O God, and Your righteousness to the king’s Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice ... **He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,** and from river to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:1–2, 8).

“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nation, and

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<sup>722</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 81.1 (NPNF I/14:297).

<sup>723</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 5.1 (ANF 2:444).

<sup>724</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.62 (ANF 4:488).

languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, **and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed**” (Dan. 7:13–14).

The Magi realized that He who was born is the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). The annunciation of His birth was clear to St. Mary, that He who will be born will be enthroned as a King, and His kingdom shall have no end: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

In his gospel, Matthew the evangelist speaks of the Lord Christ as King, and this gospel deals with those matters concerning the King and His kingdom. The New Testament reveals the Church as the kingdom of God. When the Jews led Jesus to Pilate, their accusation against Him was that He said of Himself that He is the Christ, the King (Luke 23:1–3): “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’” (John 18:37).

The kingdom of the Lord Christ is unique in terms of its practical revelation of divine love:

As the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, **He raises from among His people a queen sitting at His right hand** (Ps. 45:13).

As a King, who loves us, He hides our life in Himself (Col. 3:3) so that we might not be left exposed in the war against the devil.

As the heavenly King, He grants us the **ability to raise our hearts above all that is earthly** (Rom. 8:21).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And what is, ‘anointed,’ and ‘sealed?’ He gave the Spirit by Whom He did both these things, making at once prophets and priests and kings, for in old times these three sorts were anointed. But we have now not one of these dignities, but all three preeminently. For we are both to enjoy a kingdom and are made priests by offering our bodies for a sacrifice, (for, he says, ‘present your members as a living sacrifice to God’ (Rom. 12:1); and we are also made prophets too: for what things ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard’ (1 Cor. 2:9), these have been revealed to us.”<sup>725</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “And again we learn that he who drinks the chalice that Jesus drank will sit, reign, and judge beside the King of Kings. Such, then, is the chalice of salvation: he who takes it will *call upon the name of the Lord*, and whoever *shall call upon*

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<sup>725</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 3.4 (NPNF I/12:290) amended.

*the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Joel 2:32).<sup>726</sup> In the liturgy according to St. James we find this hymn:

“Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and with fear and trembling stand.

Ponder nothing earthly-minded, for the King of kings, Christ our God,

advances to be slain and given as food to the faithful.”<sup>727</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “How can the King of Kings and Lord of All Lords dwell in a soul filled with rotten sludge? Expel all the evil of evil inclinations from your soul; then the King will come to dwell in you with His great army,”<sup>728</sup>

### **378. Why is Jesus called “the Son of God” and “the Son of Man”?**

The Lord Christ often used the title “the Son of Man” to emphasize His incarnation out of His love for humanity, as a fully human being. Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I, **Son of Man**, am?” (Matt. 16:13). The Jewish leaders were well aware of the background of the expression “Son of Man” in the book of Daniel: “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13–14).

And when they asked Jesus, “If you are the Christ, tell us” (Luke 22:67), He answered that He is indeed the Son of Man. “Then they all said, ‘Are You then the Son of God?’ So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am.’ And they said, ‘What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth’” (Luke 22:70–71). The Lord Christ connected these two titles, as we see in His response to Nathanael when he said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the **Son of God**” (John 1:49) and He responded, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the **Son of Man**” (John 1:51). **St. Hippolytus of Rome** says, “He showed all power given by the Father to the Son, who is ordained Lord of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and Judge of all: of things in heaven, because He was born, the Word of God, before all (ages); and of things on earth, because He became man in the midst of men, to re-create our Adam through Himself; and of things under the earth,

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<sup>726</sup> Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 5.28 (ACW 19:168–169).

<sup>727</sup> From the Offering, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. *The Divine Liturgy of St. James*.

<sup>728</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 65 About Pride* (Text by Paul Began & Behnam Sony). For Wednesday of the second week of the Holy Lent, Coptic.



because He was also reckoned among the dead, preaching the Gospel to the souls of the saints (1 Pet. 3:19), (and) by death overcoming death.”<sup>729</sup>

**In Him we became children of God:** in the beloved only Son of God we obtained adoption, and became children, with a right to partake in the inheritance. But there is a huge difference between the beloved Son, the only-begotten; and the adopted children. **St. Augustine** says, “The Father has made us co-heirs with His Only Son; not begotten them like Him of His Own Substance, but adopted by Him out of His Own family.”<sup>730</sup> **St. Gregory of Nyssa** urges us to yearn to be like angels through Christ’s work of salvation within us. He says, “And the consequence of being crucified with Christ is that we shall live with Him, and be glorified with Him, and reign with Him; and the consequence of presenting ourselves to God is that we shall be changed from the rank of human nature and human dignity to that of Angels; for so speaks Daniel, that a “thousand thousands stood before him (Dan. 7:10).”<sup>731</sup>

**He called the Father, “Abba”:** in all the conversations of the Lord Christ with the Father, He used the term “Abba,” except for His words on the cross where He wanted to direct our attention to Psalm 22 so that we would understand that His crucifixion did not come about by chance, but rather to fulfil the prophecies. He cried out, using the opening words of that psalm that refer to the crucifixion: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

J. A. Fitzmeyer says that the word “Abba” at that time was not the equivalent of today’s “Daddy,” for it was not the language of a young child with his father, but the language of a mature son who speaks with a spirit of dignity and commitment to His Father.<sup>732</sup> If the Son is the delight of the Father, and One with Him in essence, who calls Him “Abba”; then, when we become one with Him as members of His body, He grants us — through baptism — to be children of the Father, and the words of the apostle rightfully apply to us: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we **cry out, ‘Abba, Father’**” (Rom. 8:15). That is how the incarnate only Son brought us into the bosom of the Father, to converse with Him in the language of mature children, committed to fulfilling the will of their Father with joy and delight, led by the Holy Spirit of God. **St. Augustine** reflects that the apostle’s use of the two words, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15) indicate that he is addressing first the people of the circumcision in their own language (“Abba,” Aramaic), and then the gentiles in their own language (“Father,” *pater* in the Greek New Testament). The Lord Christ has united the Jews with the gentiles so that even if they

<sup>729</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 26 (ANF 5:209).

<sup>730</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans., R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 76.9: p. 547, amended.

<sup>731</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 24 (NPNF II/5:371).

<sup>732</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, “Abba and Jesus’ relation to God,” in *A cause de l’Evangile: études sur les Synoptiques et les Actes: offertes au P. Jacques Dupont, O.S.B. à l’occasion de son 70e anniversaire. Lectio divina*; no. 123 (Paris: Publications de Saint-André, 1985) pp. 57–81.

use their own native languages, all may speak together with their Father in the one language of children and find favor with Him.<sup>733</sup>

### 379. Why is Jesus called “the New or Second Adam”?

The apostle Paul speaks to us about the person of the Lord Christ as the new Adam, who takes the place of the first Adam and offers humanity that which our first father failed to offer, and remedies the corruption that we inherited from him (1 Cor. 15:21–22; 44–49). “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come)” (Rom. 5:12–14).

The first Adam, as the ancestor of humanity according to the flesh, bequeathed sin to us; and through sin, death. As for the Lord Christ, the ancestor of humanity according to the Spirit, through His divine grace through the cross, resurrection, and ascension, He bequeathed to us **reconciliation with the Father**, granted us His divine righteousness, and brought us into eternal life. We need not wonder when the apostle Paul on many occasions asserts the reality of the humanity of Christ. He became indeed the second Adam who submitted completely to the Father in perfect obedience, even unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Through this obedience, we renounced our lineage from the first Adam — through whose disobedience the corruption of sin entered our world — and received our lineage from the new Adam — through whose obedience we enjoy salvation. If our Christ had not taken a true body and a human soul, He could not have obeyed unto death, nor would His works have been true, nor would our salvation have been completed through Him.

**St. Ambrose** says, “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died; how shall the Lord call me back, except He find me in Adam; guilty as I was in him, so now justified in Christ.”<sup>734</sup> **St. Irenaeus** says, “having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One.”<sup>735</sup> **St. Augustine** says, “all men, for all of whom Christ died, died in the sin of the first man; and ... all whosoever are baptized into Christ die to sin.”<sup>736</sup> **St. Jerome** says, “in the transgression of Adam, we have all, through sin, been cast out of Paradise (Gen. 3:23–24). The apostle teaches that, even in us who were to come later, Adam had fallen. In Christ, therefore, in the heavenly Adam, we believe that we who, through the sin of the first Adam, have fallen from Paradise, now through the justice of the second Adam, are to return to Paradise.”<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 32.56.

<sup>734</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.6 (NPNF II/10:175).

<sup>735</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.22.3 (ANF 1:455).

<sup>736</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian* 7.7(21) (FOTC 35:331).

<sup>737</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 2 (60–96)* On the Psalms 66 (FOTC 57:68).

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “He has the name of the **last Adam**, since he was made out of Adam according to the flesh and has become a **second beginning** of those on earth, the nature of man being transformed in Him unto newness of life, life in holiness and **incorruption** through the resurrection from the dead: for thus was death brought to naught, in that the Life by Nature does not endure to submit its own body to decay, because it was not possible that Christ should be held by death, according to the voice of the most wise Peter [Acts 2:24], and thus the good from this achievement passed through unto us too.”<sup>738</sup>

**The new Adam grants us the new life: St. John Chrysostom** observes that the Lord Christ — being Life itself and the source of life — must necessarily be eternal; otherwise how could He be the one who bestows life if He himself ceases to exist at some point? He says, “He is “Life” ... Life both is always, and is without beginning and without end, if It be indeed Life, as indeed It is. For if there be [a time] when It is not, how can It be the life of others, when It even Itself is not?”<sup>739</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “We become truly free when God manages our lives. Hence, He forms and creates us not just as human beings — for that work He has done already — but rather, He makes us good people through His grace — the work which He is performing now — that we might become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we offer the prayer, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God’ (Ps. 51:10).”

### 380. Why is Jesus called “the Lamb of God”?

The faithful in this world, together with those in heaven, cherish this particular title. John the Baptist and forerunner calls Him “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36), as does St. Peter (1 Pet. 1:19), and the title is found twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation. The Apostolic Churches frequently use this title in their liturgies and worship. This title reminds us that the Passover Lamb was a type of Christ, who fulfilled our passing over from slavery to the freedom of the glory of the children of God. The apostle Paul says, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

The scholar **Origen** says, “what must we understand, and of what magnitude, about the Lamb of God who was sacrificed that he might take away the sin, not of a few, but of the whole world (cf. John 1:29), for which also he has suffered? For if ‘anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world’ (1 John 2:1–2) since ‘he is the Savior of all men, especially of the faithful’ (cf. 1 Tim. 4:10). It is he who ‘blotted out the handwriting against us’ with his own blood and removed it from our midst, that no traces even of the sins which have been expunged might be found, and ‘having fastened it to the cross,’ who ‘after he had despoiled the principalities and powers, exposed them boldly after he had triumphed over

<sup>738</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *That Christ is One* (LFHCC 47:312) amended.

<sup>739</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 4.3 (NPNF I/14:18).

them ‘in the cross’ (cf. Col. 2:14–15). We are taught, therefore, to be of good cheer when we are afflicted in the world. We learn that the reason for being of good cheer is this: the world has been conquered (cf. John 16:33) and, of course, subjected to him who conquered it. For this reason, all the nations, set free from those who formerly controlled them, serve him, because ‘he delivered the poor from the mighty’ through his own passion, ‘and the needy who had no helper’ (Cf. Ps. 71:12).”<sup>740</sup>

He also says, “For the death of Christ has made the powers which war against the human race ineffectual, and, by an ineffable power, has brought the life in sin in each believer to an end.”<sup>741</sup>

### **381. Why is Jesus called a “sin offering”?**<sup>742</sup>

The apostle Paul says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). He who did not know sin became a sin offering for us. The Greek word for “sin” in this verse is *hamartia*, which we also find in the Septuagint books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where it is translated into English as “sin offering.” When our Messiah accepted to be a sin offering, all humanity laid their hands upon Him so that He would carry the whole burden of our sins. Thus, Christ stood in our place as though He were the greatest among sinners and granted us that we stand in His place and be counted as righteous in the eyes of the Father, for we carry the righteousness of Christ.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**, says, “He became obedient, even He Who ‘took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses’ (cf. Matt. 8:17), healing the disobedience of men by His own obedience, that by His stripes He might heal our wound, and by His own death do away with the common death of all men,—then it was that for our sakes He was made obedient, even as He became ‘sin’ (2 Cor. 5:21) and ‘a curse’ (Gal. 3:13) by reason of the dispensation on our behalf, not being so by nature, but becoming so in His love for man.”<sup>743</sup>

And **St. Cyril the Great** says, “For we do not say that Christ became a sinner, far from it, but being just, or rather in actuality justice, for he did not know sin, the Father made him a victim for the sins of the world. ‘He was counted among the wicked’ (Isa. 53:12), having endured a condemnation most suitable for the wicked.”<sup>744</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Calling the Cross, “glory” ... it was therefore necessary that the Sacrifice should first be offered for us, that the enmity (against God) which was in our

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<sup>740</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 1–10) 6.284–286 (FOTC 80:245–246).

<sup>741</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 1–10) 1.233 (FOTC 80:80–81).

<sup>742</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Corinthians 2: A Patristic Commentary* (undated): pp.169–183.

<sup>743</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2:11 (NPNF II/5:121).

<sup>744</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters, Volume 1* 41.10 (FOTC 76:174).

flesh should be done away, that we should become friends of God, and so receive the Gift.”  
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### 382. Why is Jesus called “the Heavenly High Priest”?

In his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul paints for us a vivid image of the Lord Christ as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who brings us into the Holy of Holies, advocates for us by His blood, and offers His life as a sacrifice for us. In the fifth chapter, he begins his discussion of the core subject of his epistle, the priesthood of Christ, which is not according to the order of Aaron but according to the eternal order of Melchizedek. He begins his discourse about Aaron as the first high priest, called directly by God to this office, and superior to all the high priests who came after him. But because of his weakness, he still needed to offer sacrifices for himself before offering them on behalf of the people. Paul then shows us the High Priest who is immeasurably superior to Aaron, our Lord Jesus, with whom we enter into the heavenly holy places, and who advocates for us on a new and incomparable level.

St. Paul goes over the characteristics and role of the high priest in order to show the exceeding superiority of the Lord Christ in comparison to Aaron, and to elucidate the priestly role of Christ towards us within the context of the New Testament. We enjoy communion with Him, having been granted universal priesthood, raising our hands in prayer that is an acceptable sacrifice of thanksgiving and a praise to the Father through His Son the High Priest. We offer worship as priests praying for the whole world and pray the Lord’s Prayer in the name of the whole Church, saying: “Our Father who art in Heaven.”

**The first requirement** of the high priest is that he be “**taken from among men**” (Heb. 5:1), for the high priest intercedes for his kin, which is all **humanity**, feels their weaknesses, and acts in their name. All this was fulfilled in Christ who became one of us and not a stranger, to fulfil His priestly role for the people.

**The second requirement** is that he be “**appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin**” (Heb. 5:1). The only begotten Son, the Son of Man, offers His life as an offering and sacrifice of love that purifies us from sins, sanctifying our consciences and renewing our inner souls, that we may belong to God His Father. He brings us into being the children of the Father by sanctifying us, unifying us with Him, and making us steadfast in Him; something that no creation, whether in heaven or earth, could achieve.

**The third requirement** is that he is called by God. **Thus, Christ also did not glorify Himself to become a high priest, but He was called with these words: “‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’ As He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever**

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<sup>745</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 51.2 (NPNF I/14:182).

**according to the order of Melchizedek”** (Heb. 5:4–6). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Great is the distance. He is Himself then both victim and Priest and sacrifice. For if it had not been so, and it had been necessary to offer many sacrifices, He must have been many times crucified.”<sup>746</sup>

### **383. Why is Jesus called “the one Mediator”?**

The terms *mediator*, *paraclete*, and *advocate* all mean the same thing: one who speaks on behalf of another. The scholar **Origen** says, “our Saviour also is called the Paraclete in the Epistle of John, when he says, ‘If any of us sin, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 2:1) ... For in Greek, Paraclete has both significations—that of intercessor and comforter. On account, then, of the phrase which follows, when he says, “And He is the propitiation for our sins,” the name Paraclete seems to be understood in the case of our Savior as meaning intercessor; for He is said to intercede with the Father because of our sins. In the case of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete must be understood in the sense of comforter, inasmuch as He bestows consolation upon the souls to whom He openly reveals the apprehension of spiritual knowledge.”<sup>747</sup> **St. Cyril the Great** describes the prayer of Christ in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John as the prayer of the High Priest, the heavenly Advocate for all humanity.

The apostle Paul says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5–6).

Here, some might ask: Why does he emphasize “*the Man* Christ Jesus”? We answer as follows:

In the same passage he calls Him “**one God**,” so the apostle Paul is not denying His divinity.

He wrote this to refute certain heresies that mixed some Gnostic teachings of the far East with Christian teachings. These heresies included the existence of mediators (“*aeons*”) between the Supreme Being and humanity. One aeon mediates with a higher aeon, who turn mediates with another aeon higher still, all the way up to the Supreme Being at the top. Here, the apostle Paul dismisses the idea of aeons, for the Lord Christ is the one God; and at the same time, the one Mediator between the Father and humanity.

Certain groups with Gnostic tendencies had arisen who believed that matter is evil and that the Supreme Being did not create the material world or the body. Accordingly, these groups prohibited marriage, among other things. Therefore, they thought that Christ had no real body and was not really crucified, but that His body was illusory or descended from

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<sup>746</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 17.3 (NPNF I/14:447).

<sup>747</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.7.4 (ANF 4:286).

heaven, etc. This is why the apostle Paul needed to assert the incarnation of the Word, and that He became fully human; otherwise, He could not have completed the salvation of humanity.

**St. Ambrose** says, “I will not glory because I am profitable or because anyone is profitable to me, but because Christ is an advocate in my behalf with the Father (cf. 1 John 2:1), because the blood of Christ has been poured out in my behalf.”<sup>748</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “If you had a case, to be tried by some judge, and you instructed counsel, you would be defended by the counselor, who would conduct your case as best he could; and if he didn’t complete it, and you heard he was going to come as the judge, just imagine how overjoyed you would be, because the one who a short while before had been your advocate could now himself be your judge.”<sup>749</sup>

### 384. Why is Jesus called “the Head of the body”?

This title comes from the apostle Paul who uses it, not so much to assert Christ’s authority over the Church, as to declare His love for her; for He is the Leader, the firstborn of those who are risen from the dead. He is the Head who animates the body and also grants it the spirit of unity. “He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that He in all things He may have the pre-eminence” (Col. 1:18). As the Head, He incorporates us into the body of His humanity and we take on His righteousness and sanctity: “In the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Col. 1:22). “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15–16).

**St. Augustine** says, “If He is the Head, he takes us as members: His whole Church that is diffused everywhere is the body itself, of which He is the Head; not only the faithful who are now alive, but also those who were before us, and those who will come after us, even to the end of the world — all belong to His body; of which body He is the very head, who ascended into heaven ... We can say that His voice is ours, and our voice is His. So, let us acknowledge that Christ speaks through us.”<sup>750</sup>

From the Head, His blood flows through His body, this which He sacrificed for the sake of His own body rather than for that which is alien to Him; for the body that He cherishes as His own. Given this wondrous concept of our union with Christ, we should not be surprised

<sup>748</sup> St. Ambrose, On Jacob and the Happy Life 6.21 (FOTC 65:133).

<sup>749</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VI: Sermons 184-229Z*, trans., Edmund Hill; ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) Sermon 213.6: p. 143.

<sup>750</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 62:2 (PL 36:748).

when the apostle Paul says, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

### **385. Why is Jesus called “the beloved Friend”?**

Christ’s parting words with His disciples reveal the purpose of His incarnation and the salvation He offers to humanity by becoming to us a powerful friend, unique in His love. He says this outright: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:12–15). He grants His friends various talents and diverse gifts, which He carefully nurtures by His Holy Spirit. He does not cast us from one mold; each of us has his own personality, capabilities, and role. In all this, He deals with each person as a personal friend, and appreciates their potential.

To help us appreciate the exaltedness of Christ’s friendship, here are a few examples that illustrate how He raises the faithful to become His friends:

**St. Mary.** He responded to her request at the wedding at Cana of Galilee and turned the water into wine; and on the Cross in the midst of His sufferings for all humanity, He focused His personal attention on her and entrusted her to St. John the Beloved (John 19:26–27).

**St. John the Beloved.** He allowed him to lean on His chest during the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist and granted him the greatest of gifts when He gave him His own mother to be a mother to him.

**Mary and Martha.** When he met them four days after the death of their brother Lazarus, He could not bear their tears, and it was said of Him, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35); even though He had come to raise him from the dead. He could not bear the tears of His loved ones.

**Judas.** When His own disciple gave Him up to His enemies in a horrible betrayal, He rebuked him tenderly: “Judas are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48).

He often **called a person by name** as a sign of His desire to be friends with that person, for example: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down” (Luke 19:5); “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” (John 21:15); “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4); and “Mary do not cling to me” (John 20:17).

The sign of the friendship He extends to **all humanity** is that “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God with the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10). He died for all humanity, that He might make, if possible, all people His friends eternally.



**St. Maximus, Bishop of Turin**, says, “For one who knows that Christ is his companion is ashamed to do evil. In good things, however, Christ is our helper, and in the face of evil things He is our defender.”<sup>751</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “But let us, beloved, in order that we may be the friends of the Lord, know what our Lord does. For it is He who makes us not only men, but also righteous, and not we ourselves. And who but He is the doer, in leading us to such a knowledge?”<sup>752</sup>

**He loved sinners and tax collectors.** In all His encounters with others, whether in groups or individually, Christ yearned for the return of sinners to the holy life. In His incarnation and works of salvation, He stretches out His hands to pour out His mercy upon all humanity. **St. John Chrysostom** and many of the fathers believed that the greatest of all His miracles was the creation of saints out of sinners; of the likeness of angels in human beings; and of heaven on earth; for all of which, the heavenly hosts rejoice. **St. Ambrose** says, “Is it not a further incentive to be good, when you consider that your conversion gives joy to troops of angels? Indeed, we should — each one of us — try to obtain their patronage, and we should dread giving them offence. Friend, be a joy to angels, and then they will surely rejoice when you come Home.”<sup>753</sup>

**He has given us the gift of encountering Him and talking to Him.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘**He dwelt among us**’ so that we are able to approach Him, speak to Him, and deal with Him quite directly.”

### 386. Why is Jesus called “the Good Teacher”?

Our beneficent Messiah transforms what seems to us to be evil into what is for our good and our benefit. In possessing Him, we possess goodness itself. **St. Ambrose** says, “in adding ‘Good Master’, the ruler is making out our Lord to be only partially good, and not totally good. For only God is totally good, while humankind is but partially good. This explains why the Lord says: ‘why do you call me good, you who deny that I am God. Why call me good when only God is good?’ He is not denying that He is good, but He is pointing out that He is God ... And if the Father is good, He who received all from the Father (cf. John 17:10) is most certainly good.”<sup>754</sup>

<sup>751</sup> St. Maximus of Turin, *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin* 73.1 (ACW 50:178).

<sup>752</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 85.3 (NPNF I/7:352) amended.

<sup>753</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 7.210: p. 258.

<sup>754</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 8.65, 66: pp. 293.

### 387. Why is Jesus called “the Good Shepherd”?

The human soul cries out, “Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?” (Song 1:7). **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “Where do you pasture your flock, O Good Shepherd, you who carry the whole flock on your shoulders? For the whole human race is one herd, which you have taken on your shoulders. Show me the place where there is new-grown grass, make known to me the water of repose (cf. Ps. 23:2), lead me out to the nourishing pasture, call me by name in order that I, I your sheep, may hear your voice, and by your voice give me eternal life.”<sup>755</sup>

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Feed us, the children, as sheep. Yes, Master, fill us with righteousness, Your own pasture. Yes, O Instructor, feed us on Your holy mountain the Church ... Such is our Instructor, righteously good. ‘I came not,’ He says, ‘to be served, but to serve’ (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Therefore He is introduced in the Gospel as ‘wearied’ (John 4:6), because He is toiling for us, and promising ‘to give His life a ransom for many’ (Matt. 20:28). For him alone who does so He owns to be the good shepherd. Generous, therefore, **is He who gives for us the greatest of all gifts, His own life; and beneficent exceedingly, and loving to men, in that, when He might have been Lord, He wished to be our brother; and so good was He that He died for us.**”<sup>756</sup>

### 388. Why is Jesus called “the Firstborn”?

**St. John Chrysostom** calls the Lord our Firstborn because He gave Himself up as an acceptable sacrifice without blemish, which the Father willingly accepted, and so humanity came to be accepted in Him and sanctified in Him. The Firstborn is distinguished by being the one who precedes all, is superior to all, and is consecrated to God; through Him, the whole harvest is sanctified. Chronologically, the Lord Christ was not the first to rise from the dead. Before Him, there was the man who rose from the dead upon contact with the bones of Elisha the prophet (2 Kings 13:21), and the Lord Christ Himself raised the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:41–42), among others. But all of these rose but later died again. As for the Savior, He rose by His own authority. He is the first spike of grain to mature, which the priest waves before the Lord proclaiming that it is holy to God, and by which all the harvest is sanctified.

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “But if He is also called ‘First-born of the creation,’ still this is not as if He were the same as the creatures, and only first of them in point of time (for how should that be, since He is ‘Only-begotten?’), but it is because of the Word’s condescension to the creatures, according to which He has become the ‘Brother’ of ‘many.’ For the term ‘Only-begotten’ is used where there are no brethren, but ‘First-born’ because of brethren ... if He be really First-born, then He is not Only-begotten. For the same

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<sup>755</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J., and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 69.

<sup>756</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.9 (ANF 2:231) amended.

cannot be both Only-begotten and First-born, except in different relations;—that is, **Only-begotten, because of His generation from the Father, as has been said; and First-born, because of His condescension to the creation and His making the many His brethren** ... the word ‘First-born’ has again the creation as a reason in connection with it, which Paul proceeds to say, ‘for in Him all things were created’ (Col. 1:16). But if all the creatures were created in Him, He is other than the creatures, and is not a creature, but the Creator of the creatures.”<sup>757</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “‘he tasted death on behalf of every man’ (Heb. 2:9), in his flesh which was able to suffer without him ceasing to be life. Accordingly, even though it is stated that he suffered in his flesh, he did not receive the suffering in the nature of his divinity, but, as I said just now, in his own flesh which was receptive of suffering.”<sup>758</sup> He also says, “when the divine Scriptures call Him Firstborn, they immediately also add of whom He is the firstborn, and assign the cause of His bearing this title: for they say, ‘Firstborn among many brethren:’ and ‘Firstborn from the dead:’ the one, because He was made like unto us in all things except sin; and the other, because He first raised up His own flesh unto incorruption.”<sup>759</sup>

And **St. Ambrose** says, “So, then, as the firstfruits of death were in Adam, so also the firstfruits of the resurrection are in Christ.”<sup>760</sup>

### 389. Why is Jesus called “the Gate” and “the Gatekeeper”?

**St. Augustine** addresses the Father, saying, “We say that through Christ we have the gate by which we enter in to You.” In the **Shepherd of Hermas** we read, “‘This rock,’ he answered, ‘and this gate are the Son of God.’ ‘How, sir?’ I said; ‘the rock is old, and the gate is new.’ ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘and understand, O ignorant man. The Son of God is older than all His creatures, so that He was a fellow-councillor with the Father in His work of creation: for this reason is He old.’ ‘And why is the gate new, sir?’ I said. ‘Because,’ he answered, ‘**He became manifest in the last days of the dispensation** (1 Pet. 1:20): for this reason the gate was made new, that they who are to be saved by it might enter into the kingdom of God. You saw,’ he said, ‘that those stones which came in through the gate were used for the building of the tower [i.e., the Church], and that those which did not come, were again thrown back to their own place?’ ‘I saw, sir,’ I replied. ‘In like manner,’ he continued, ‘no one shall enter into the kingdom of God unless he receive His holy name [i.e., Christ]. For if you desire to enter into a city, and that city is surrounded by a wall, and has but one gate, can you enter

<sup>757</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.21.62 (NPNF II/4:381–382) amended.

<sup>758</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters, Volume 2* 55.34 (FOTC 77:31).

<sup>759</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Parts I*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Chapter 2: p. 10.

<sup>760</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.91 (NPNF II/10:189).

into that city save through the gate which it has?’ ... so, in like manner, a man cannot otherwise enter into the kingdom of God than by the name of His beloved Son.”<sup>761</sup>

### 390. Why is Jesus called “the Rock”?

Moses asked for many things from His God. He did not desire only the gifts God can give, but went further, asking boldly, “Please show me Your glory” (Ex. 33:18). The Lord answered him, “You cannot see my face, for no man shall see Me and live” (Ex. 33:20). Finally, the Lord appeased Moses by saying, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So, it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will **put you in the cleft of the rock**, and I will cover you with my hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” (Ex. 33:21–23).

According to **St. Ambrose**, this conversation points to the divine incarnation.<sup>762</sup> When God says, “Here is a place by Me,” He means, “I have fulfilled your request as far as you can endure it, for I have borne you to the mystery of the incarnation; so stand on the Rock — which means, be planted upon the Lord Christ, the true Rock. As for His saying, “you shall see My back,” this points to the fullness of time when God overcame the world, declaring His love, when we saw God through His divine incarnation, like one who is covered by the hands of God (Christ), and saw the glory of His divinity from the cleft of a rock. Now we can say with the **apostle John**, “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14).

**St. Jerome** comments on Jesus’ parable about building on the rock or on the sand (Matt 7:24–27), saying, “This rain that tries to undermine the house is the devil. The rivers are all the antichrists, who think contrary to Christ. The winds are the spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places (cf. Eph. 6:3). *“And it did not fall; for it had been founded on the rock”* (Matt. 7:25). Upon this rock the Lord founded the Church; from this rock also the apostle Peter was allotted his name (cf. Matt. 16:18). The tracks of the serpent are not found upon a rock of this sort (cf. Prov. 30:19). The prophet also speaks confidently about this rock: ‘He has established my feet upon the rock’ (Ps. 40:2), and in another place: ‘The rock is a refuge for’ hares, or ‘badgers’ (Ps. 104:18). For a timid animal finds refuge in the crevices of a rock ... Moses, at the time when he had fled from Egypt and was a little hare of the Lord: ‘Stand in the crevice of the rock, and you will see my back parts.’ (Ex. 33:22–23).”<sup>763</sup>

### 391. Why is Jesus called “Light and Fire”?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “For just as, had the sun not been in existence, night would have brooded over the universe notwithstanding the other luminaries of heaven; so,

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<sup>761</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 3.9.12 (ANF 2:47).

<sup>762</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.5 (NPNF II/10:139–140).

<sup>763</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew Book 1*, 7.25 (FOTC 117:97–98).

had we not known the Word, and been illuminated by Him; we should have been nowise different from fowls that are being fed, fattened in darkness, and nourished for death. Let us then admit the light, that we may admit God; let us admit the light and become disciples to the Lord. This, too, He has been promised to the Father: “I will declare Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the Church, I will praise You” (Ps. 22:22).”<sup>764</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Our Lord is light to those who love Him; but He is fire to those who come near Him to test Him.”

**St. Augustine** says, “Is the Son less because He is said to have been sent? I hear of a sending, not a separation. But yet, says he, among men we see that he who sends is greater than he who is sent. Be it so; but human affairs deceive a man; divine things purge him. Do not regard things human, in which the sender appears greater, the sent less; notwithstanding, things human themselves bear testimony against you ... And there are many cases in which the greater is chosen to be sent by the less ... The sun sends out a ray, but does not separate it ... a lamp sheds light, but does not separate it ... A man that sends remains himself behind, while only the man that is sent goes forward. Does the man who sends go with him whom he sends? Yet the Father who sent the Son, has not departed from the Son ... The Father sending has not departed from the Son sent, because the sent and the sender are one.”<sup>765</sup>

### 392. Why is Jesus called “the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25–37)?

If the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) represents the law and the Levite represents the prophets, then it is not possible for the law or the prophets to bind our hidden wounds and restore us to our original nature according to which God created us. But the Good Samaritan, who can only represent the Lord Christ, came down to us, carried us in His body, blessed our nature in Him, and bestowed on us all true healing that renews our lives.

The scholar **Origen** says, “For the priest saw him—I think this means the Law. And the Levite saw him—that is, in my view, the prophetic word. When they had seen him, they passed by and left him. Providence was saving the half-dead man for him who was stronger than the Law and the prophets, namely for the Samaritan. The name means ‘guardian.’ He is the one who ‘neither grows drowsy nor sleeps as he guards Israel’ (Ps. 121:4). On account of the half-dead man, this Samaritan set out not ‘from Jerusalem into Jericho,’ like the priest and the Levite who went down. Or, if he did go down, he went down to rescue and care for the dying man. The Jews had said to Him, ‘You are a Samaritan and have a demon’ (John

<sup>764</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:203).

<sup>765</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 21.17 (NPNF I/7:144) amended.

8:48). Though he denied having a demon, he was unwilling to deny that he was a Samaritan, for he knew that he was a guardian.”<sup>766</sup>

### 393. Why is Jesus called “the image of the invisible God”?

The apostle Paul says of him, “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). If sin has veiled humanity from seeing the glory of God, the incarnate Word came, not to give us intellectual or theoretical ideas of the divine glory, but rather to abolish sin through His cross, so that the veil was torn (Matt. 27:51) and we acquired the right to see God through the cross. The divine light of Christ shone upon Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and his physical eyes were afflicted by a kind of blindness, an inability to see God, while his inner insight was opened to bask in the True Light. This was also the experience of the apostles Peter, James, and John on Mount Tabor where He was transfigured before them, His face shone, and His clothes became as white as light (Matt. 17:1–5).

The word “**image**” in Greek means the perfect visible revelation of the invisible God, who is of one nature of His essence and the trace of His brightness. This is precisely what the Lord meant when He said of Himself: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

The scholar **Origen** says, “Let us now see how we are to understand the expression ‘invisible **image**,’ that we may in this way perceive how God is rightly called the Father of His Son; and let us, in the first place, draw our conclusions from what are customarily called images among men. The name, image, is sometimes given to that which is painted or sculptured on some material substance, such as wood or stone; and sometimes a child is called the image of his parent, when the features of the child closely resemble the father ... But the image of the Son of God, of whom we are now speaking, may be compared to the second of the above examples, even in respect of this, that He is the invisible image of the invisible God.”<sup>767</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “And the Image is of one substance with Him, and because He is of the Father, and not the Father of Him. For this is of the Nature of an Image, to be the reproduction of its Archetype, and of that whose name it bears; only that there is more here. For in ordinary language an image is a motionless representation of that which has motion; but in this case it is the living reproduction of the Living One, and is more exactly alike than was Seth to Adam (Gen. 5:3), or any son to his father.”<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 34.5 (FOTC 94:139).

<sup>767</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1.2.6 (ANF 4:247) amended.

<sup>768</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 30.20 (Fourth Theological Oration) (NPNF II/7:317) amended.

**St. Ambrose** says, “And because He Himself is the image of the invisible and incorruptible God, let Him shine for you as in the mirror of the Law (cf. Col. 1:15). Confess Him in the Law that you may acknowledge Him in the Gospel.”<sup>769</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “The face of God, what is it like? As His image, certainly, for as the Apostle (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) says, the image of the Father is the Son. With His image; therefore, may He shine upon us, that is, may He shine His image, the Son, upon us in order that He Himself may shine upon us, for the light of the Father is the light of the Son. He who sees the Father, sees also the Son; and he who sees the Son sees also the Father (John 14:9). Where there is no diversity between glory and glory, there glory is one and the same.”<sup>770</sup>

**The brightness of His glory and the express image of His essence:** the expression “**brightness of His glory**” refers to eternal birth, for the eternal light cannot exist without its brightness. The Son is Light of Light, or the eternal Brightness that is inseparable from the Light, that is one with it. **Pope Athanasius** says, “who has so little sense as to doubt of the eternity of the Son? for when did man see light without the brightness of its radiance?”<sup>771</sup> And again, he says that He “is as indivisible from the Father as is the brightness from the light.”<sup>772</sup> **St. John Chrysostom** says, “[He is called] ‘the express image of His Person’ (Heb. 1:3), in order to make evident His proper Personality, and that He belongs to the same Essence.”<sup>773</sup>

### 394. Why is Jesus called “the Pearl of Great Price”?

The Lord Christ says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:45–46). No one can obtain the Lord Christ, the precious pearl, unless he sells all he possesses in his heart so that he can delight in Him alone. **St. Jerome** asked Furia not to read books of little benefit, but rather to sell them all in order to purchase “the pearl of great price” that is found in the Holy Bible and the writings of the Fathers. He tells her, “After the holy scriptures you should read the writings of learned men; of those at any rate whose faith is well known. You need not go into the mire to seek for gold; you have many pearls, buy the one pearl with these.”<sup>774</sup> It is better for the believer to completely give up cheap books, and instead give an opportunity for the word of God to proclaim Christ transfigured in his life!

<sup>769</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters 1–91* 20 (FOTC 26:114).

<sup>770</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* Homily 6 on Psalm 66 (67) (FOTC 48:43).

<sup>771</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.4.12 (NPNF II/4:313).

<sup>772</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Defence of Dionysius* 8 (NPNF II/4:179).

<sup>773</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 6.2 (NPNF I/14:28).

<sup>774</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 54.11 (NPNF II/6:106).

**Origen** says, “For what do you seek? Or what does every one who seeks find? I venture to answer, pearls and the pearl which he possesses, who has given up all things, and counted them as loss; ‘for which,’ says Paul, ‘I have counted all things but loss that I may win Christ’ (Phil. 3:8); by ‘all things’ meaning the goodly pearls, ‘that I may win Christ,’ the one very precious pearl. Precious, then, is a lamp to men in darkness, and there is need of a lamp until the sun rise; and precious also is the glory in the face of Moses, and of the prophets also, I think, and a beautiful sight, by which we are introduced so as to be able to see the glory of Christ, to which the Father bears witness, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased’ (Matt. 3:17). But ‘even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels’ (2 Cor. 3:10); and there is need to us first of the glory which admits of being done away, for the sake of the glory which excels; as there is need of the knowledge which is in part, which will be done away when that which is perfect comes (1 Cor. 13:9, 10). Every soul, therefore, which comes to childhood, and is on the way to full growth, until the fulness of time is at hand, needs a tutor and stewards and guardians, in order that, after all these things, he who formerly differed nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all (cf. Gal. 4:1, 2), may receive, when freed from a tutor and stewards and guardians, the patrimony corresponding to the very costly pearl, and to that which is perfect, which on its coming does away with that which is in part, when one is able to receive ‘the excellency of the knowledge of Christ’ (Phil. 3:8), having been previously exercised, so to speak, in those forms of knowledge which are surpassed by the knowledge of Christ.”<sup>775</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “What are we to understand by the many pearls, the many roads, the many courts, so that we may find the one pearl, the one road, the one court? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, Joshua son of Nun; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the twelve prophets; David, Solomon; all were courts. They are our courts; they are the courts we enter first; and from them we arrive later at the court of the Gospels and there we find Christ.”<sup>776</sup>

### **395. Why is Jesus called “the True Vine” (John 15:1)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He made mention of the root in no other connection than that they might learn that nothing can be done without His power and that they must be united to Him by faith as the branch is to the vine.”<sup>777</sup>

### **396. Why is Jesus called “the Prophet”?**

He was called “*The Prophet*” and not “*a prophet*.” His prophetic work is to grant His people the spirit of prophesy (Rev. 19:10) or the revelation of the future life in heaven. The work of the prophets in the Old Testament was to lead the people to accept the person of the

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<sup>775</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 10.9 (ANF 10:418) amended.

<sup>776</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 23 (FOTC 48:187) amended.

<sup>777</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* Homily 76 (John 14:31–15:10) (FOTC 41:317).



Messiah, who alone is able to carry them within Him, sanctify them, and enlighten their discernment, so they may come to know surpassing divine love.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For they hoped that a certain pre-eminent prophet would come, because Moses had said: ‘A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen’ (Deut. 18:15). But this Prophet was the Christ. For this reason they did not say: ‘Are you a prophet?’—inferring ‘one of many.’ But they used the article, ‘Are you the Prophet?’ [John 1:21]—that one, they meant, who was foretold by Moses. Thus it was that he denied, not that he was a prophet, but that he was that Prophet.”<sup>778</sup>

### 397. Why is Jesus called “the Faithful”?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “And when it is said, ‘God is faithful,’ it is intimated that He is worthy to be believed when declaring anything.”<sup>779</sup>

### 398. Why is Jesus called “the Bridegroom”?

**Bishop Caesarius of Arles** says, “Therefore, the souls, not only of religious, but of all men and women do not doubt that they are spouses of Christ if they are willing to preserve both bodily chastity and virginity of heart in those aforementioned five senses. For Christ is to be understood as the spouse of souls, not of bodies.”<sup>780</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “In the world they are virgins before the marriage, but after the marriage no longer. But here it is not so: but even though they be not virgins before this marriage, after the marriage they become virgins.”<sup>781</sup>

### 399. Why is Jesus called “the Truth”?

**St. Ambrose** says, “Christ is truly the God of truth, true God of true God, for He is the Truth.”<sup>782</sup>

### 400. Why is Jesus called “Peace and Righteousness”?

**St. Ambrose** says, “Make yourselves then to appear worthy that Christ should be in your midst. For where peace is, there is Christ, for Christ is Peace; and where righteousness is, there is Christ, for Christ is Righteousness. Let Him be in the midst of you, that you may see

<sup>778</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* Homily 16 (John 1:19–27) (FOTC 33:154).

<sup>779</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.6 (ANF 2:353).

<sup>780</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II* (81-186) On the Ten Virgins: 155.4 (FOTC 47:347).

<sup>781</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 23.1 (NPNF I/12:XX).

<sup>782</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.17.108.

Him, lest it be said to you also: ‘**There stands One in the midst of you, Whom you do not see**’ (John 1:26) ... Let Him therefore stand in your midst, that the heavens, which declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), may be opened to you, that you may do His will, and work His works. He who sees Jesus, to him are the heavens opened as they were opened to Stephen, when he said: ‘Behold I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:56).”<sup>783</sup>

#### **401. Why is Jesus called “the Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:8, 11)?**

The scholar **Origen** says, “But if there are letters of God, as there are, which the saints read and say they have read what is written in the tablets of heaven, those letters are the thoughts about the Son of God which are broken up into alpha and the letters that follow to omega, that heavenly matters might be read through them.”<sup>784</sup> Without Him, we cannot comprehend anything about heaven and without Him the mouth is unable to utter any heavenly praise.

#### **402. Why is Jesus called “the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev. 1:8, 11)?**

The scholar **Origen** says that the Son, the Word, is the beginning of creation, its source, and the one who manages it. And yet He humbled Himself and became not the second, third, or fourth, but the “**last,**” for He became man and not one of the heavenly hosts. Thus, He embraced the whole creation from its beginning to its end.

He is “**the beginning and the end**” as **St. Augustine** says: “the text, ‘In the **beginning** God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1) means that it was by the Son that the Father created all things [John 1:3], as the Psalmist testifies in the words, ‘How great are thy works, O Lord? You have made all things in wisdom’ (Ps. 104:24).”<sup>785</sup> **St. Ambrose** says, “But neither had the Son of God any beginning, seeing that He already was at the beginning, nor shall He come to an end, Who is the Beginning and the End of the Universe”<sup>786</sup>

#### **403. Why is Jesus called “the Lion” (Rev. 5:5)?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Again, He is called a Lion ... indicating as it were by the title His kingly, and steadfast, and confident nature: a Lion He is also called in opposition to the lion our adversary, who roars and devours those who have been deceived ... [He is] the strong Lion of the tribe of Judah.”<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* 63.4–5 (NPNF II/10:457) amended.

<sup>784</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 1–10) 1.221 (FOTC 80:77).

<sup>785</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God, Books VIII–XVI* 11.32 (FOTC 14:238–239) amended.

<sup>786</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 4.9.108 (NPNF II/10:276).

<sup>787</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 10 (NPNF II/7:57).

#### 404. Why is Jesus called “the Stone”?

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “In Isaiah: ‘Thus says the Lord, Behold, I place on the foundations of Zion a precious stone, elect, chief, a corner stone, honourable; and he who trusts in Him shall not be confounded’ (Isa. 28:16). Also in the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ (Ps. 118:22–26). Also in Zechariah: ‘Behold, I bring forth my servant. The Dayspring is his name, because the stone which I have placed before the face of Joshua; upon that one stone are seven eyes’ (Zech. 3:8–9). Also in Deuteronomy: ‘And you shall write upon the stone all this law, very plainly’ (Deut. 17:8). Also in Joshua the son of Nun: ‘And he took a great stone, and placed it there before the Lord; and Joshua said unto the people, Behold, this stone shall be to you for a testimony, because it has heard all the things which were spoken by the Lord, which He has spoken to you today; and it shall be for a testimony to you in the last of the days, when you shall have departed from your God’ (Josh. 24:26–27) ... This is the stone in Exodus upon which Moses sat on the top of a hill when Joshua the son of Nun fought against Amalek [Ex. 17:12–13]; and by the sacrament of the stone, and the steadfastness of his sitting, Amalek was overcome by Jesus, that is, the devil was overcome by Christ. This is the great stone in the first book of Samuel, upon which was placed the ark of the covenant when the oxen brought it back in the cart, sent back and returned by the strangers [1 Sam. 6:15]. Also, this is the stone in the first book of Samuel, with which David smote the forehead of Goliath and slew him [1 Sam. 17:49–51]; signifying that the devil and his servants are thereby thrown down—that part of the head, namely, being conquered which they have not had sealed. And by this seal we also are always safe and live. This is the stone which, when Israel had conquered the foreigners, Samuel set up and called its name Ebenezer; that is, the stone that helps [1 Sam. 7:12].”<sup>788</sup>

#### 405. Why is Jesus called “the Garment of righteousness”?

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For we need in this to **put on our Lord Jesus** (cf. Rom. 13:14), that we may be able to celebrate the feast with Him. Now we are clothed with Him when we love virtue, and are enemies to wickedness, when we exercise ourselves in temperance and mortify lasciviousness, when we love righteousness before iniquity, when we honour sufficiency, and have strength of mind, when we do not forget the poor, but open our doors to all men, when we assist humble-mindedness, but hate pride.”<sup>789</sup>

<sup>788</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 12: Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* 2.16 (ANF 5:522–523) amended.

<sup>789</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 4.3 (NPNF II/4:516).

#### **406. Why is Jesus called “the Suffering Servant”?**

Isaiah the prophet gave us the praise of the Suffering Servant, who is the crucified Christ (Isa. 53).

#### **407. Why is Jesus called “the Judge”?**

Christ identifies Himself as the Judge (John 5:22) who will judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5); not to terrify them, but to reassure them. He will come to condemn the wicked and to prepare the marriage supper, where the Church will rejoice without any fear of the enemy who opposes her. The wicked will see His eyes as a flame of fire and in His mouth a sharp sword and He will rule them with a rod iron. As for His children, they will see Him as the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” who protects and glorifies them (Rev 19:9–16).

#### **408. What is “the Jesus Prayer”?**

Let us conclude this survey of the names and titles of Christ by mentioning the effectiveness of the “**Jesus Prayer**” in our lives. When the believer experiences the power of the name of Jesus, he cries out with blind Bartimaeus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47, Luke 18:38). This prayer is found in the biography of Abba Philemon (6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century). It is also found in the letters of Saints Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century), Dorotheus of Gaza, and St. John Climacus. The Church employs it as a spiritual practice for her children, with the addition of part of the prayer of the tax collector who beat his chest saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13).

St. Anthony the Great says, “Do not cease from reciting the name of the Lord Jesus, but hold onto to His name with your mind, repeat it with your tongue, and say in your heart: ‘My Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me; My Lord Jesus Christ help me.’ Also say: ‘I praise You, my Lord Jesus Christ.’”

It was also known to St. Macarius the Great and St. Evagrius.<sup>790</sup>

St. Macarius the Great says, “Be attentive to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ with a remorseful heart and let it pour forth from your lips. Let the name reflect back upon you. Do not bury it in your thoughts only for display, but be alert whenever you cry it out, saying, “*O my Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!*” Then, in serenity you shall see His divinity resting in you; He will bring to naught the darkness of pain that is in you; and He shall purify your inner man to be like the purity of Adam dwelling in paradise. This is the blessed name that St. John the Evangelist called, “the light of the world” (John 8:12); the sweetness of which no one can ever have enough and the true “bread of life” (John 6:35).”

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<sup>790</sup> See Michael O’Carroll, *Verbum Caro: An Encyclopedia on Jesus, the Christ* (The Liturgical Press, 1992) “Jesus Prayer, the”: p. 82; and Gordon S. Wakefield ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Westminster Press, 1983) “Jesus, Prayer To”: pp. 223–224.

Abba Evagrius says, “Tormented by the thoughts and passions of the body, I went to find the Abbot Macarius. I said to him: ‘My father, give me a word that I may live by it.’ Then Macarius said to me: ‘Attach the rope of the anchor to the rock and, by God’s grace, the ship will cross the diabolic waves of the deceptive sea and the tempest of the darkness of this vain world.’ I said to him: ‘What is the ship, what is the rope, what is the rock?’ The Abbot Macarius said to me: ‘The boat is your heart: guard it. The rope is your spirit: attach it to our Lord Jesus Christ who is the rock that has power over all the diabolic waves and surges that the saints are contending with; for is it not easy to say with each breath: Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, have mercy on me; I bless You, my Lord Jesus, help me? And as the fish struggling against the current can be caught unawares, we also, if we patiently persist in faithfully reciting the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, He will snare the devil by his nose (“one pierces his nose with a snare” Job 40:24) because of what he has done to us, and we who are weak shall know that help comes to us from the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>791</sup>

And Abba Jacob says, “I once went to Abba Isidore and I found him writing, so I sat by him and noticed that from time to time he raised his eyes to heaven and his lips would move without me hearing any sound; so I said to him, ‘What are you doing, Abba?’ He said to me, ‘Do you not do the same?’ I said to him, ‘No, Abba.’ He then told me, ‘If you do not do that, Abba Jacob, then you have not yet become a monk, not even for a single day.’ And this is what he used to say: *‘My Lord Jesus Christ, help me. My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. I praise You, My Lord Jesus Christ.’*”

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<sup>791</sup> See Louis Bouyer, *History of Christian Spirituality, Volume 1: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, trans., Mary P. Ryan (London: Burns and Oates, 1968): p. 377.



## 12

# The Holy Spirit and Divine Salvation <sup>792</sup>

*The love of God the Father,*

*And the grace of His only-begotten Son, our Lord God, and Savior Jesus Christ,*

*And the communion and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Liturgy of St. Gregory.

### 409. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our attainment of divine salvation?

The Archangel Gabriel appeared to a poor young girl from Nazareth and announced: “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus” (Luke 1:31). In astonishment, she asked him, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34). So, he proceeded to reveal to her the role of the Holy Trinity in this divine work that all generations had anticipated, from the fall of Adam until that very moment, when he said, “The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and the power of the **Highest** will overshadow you; therefore also the **Holy One** who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

The incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, was born, and never ceased to direct the attention of His listeners to the Father, affirming, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). In His parting words to His disciples, He directed their attention to the other Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will abide with them forever (John 14:16): “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7). He drew a connection between His own work for our salvation and this other Comforter, saying, “He will guide you into all truth ... He will take what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13–14).

We know that the Father has given to us His fatherhood and love, and takes care of humanity. And the Son says, “All things that the Father has are Mine” (John 16:15), which is to say, “all of the Father’s surpassing love for you, I also bear, translated into action upon the cross. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Also, through the Cross, the Holy Spirit began to guide the Church, raising her up towards the heavens.

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<sup>792</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic) Books 1–8, second edition, revised and updated (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2010), Book 6: pp. 970-988; and Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Gospel of John: A Patristic Commentary, Part 2, Chapters 9–21*, trans., Mary Rose Halim and Mary Barsoum (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2003) Chapter 17.

The Holy Spirit’s pastoral journey of caring for humanity began in practice from the moment when He hovered over the face of the waters, when the earth was without form and void (Gen. 1:2). Then, over generations, He anointed prophets, priests, and kings for God’s people, and prepared the way for the incarnation of the Word of God. He also witnessed, together with the Father, to the Lord Christ who was baptized in the Jordan River that he might make children of God out of those who believe in Him. And His journey continues until now, until He crosses us over with us to the heavenly Jerusalem.

**St. Irenaeus** encourages us, describing the role of the Holy Trinity in the Church, saying, “The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature; also that they ascend through the **Spirit** to the **Son**, and through the **Son** to the **Father**, and that in due time the Son will yield up His work to the Father, even as it is said by the apostle [1 Cor. 15:24].”<sup>793</sup>

He also says, “the **Father** planning everything well and giving His commands, the **Son** carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the **Spirit** nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One.”<sup>794</sup>

#### **410. What was Christ’s purpose in speaking the words He did on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles regarding the descent of the Holy Spirit?**

It was the custom of the Jews to leave their homes during the Feast of Tabernacles and live in temporary tents for a week to remind them that they were strangers and lodgers in this world. During the first seven days of the feast, they would bring water from the Pool of Siloam in a golden vessel, and the High Priest would pour it out in front of the people, announcing that whoever was thirsty should approach and drink. This was a type of the rock from which water flowed for the people in the wilderness (Ex. 17:6). But on the eighth day, they would not bring water from the pool, indicating that the people will now drink from the springs of Canaan, and not from the water of the wilderness. It was on this day that the Lord Christ, the great High Priest, stood and offered Himself as the spring of water that overflows with Living Water in the depths of the souls of the faithful; inviting them to drink joyfully from the wells of salvation (Isa. 12:3; Zech. 14:8).

The Gospel of John tells us, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of Living Water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37–39).

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<sup>793</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.36.2 (ANF 1:567; PG 7:1223B).

<sup>794</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3 (ANF 1:521; PG 7:1108B).



From this divine promise of the descent of the Holy Spirit we can learn the following:

**First:** those who followed the prophet Moses drank water from the rock in the wilderness where that rock followed them and overflowed with thirst-quenching water. This rock is a type of the Lord Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Whosoever believes in Christ carries the Rock within himself, and from his inner person he overflows with that which builds up the Kingdom of God.

**Second:** the Jews called running water “living water,” because it is constantly in motion. If the Lord Christ indeed dwells within the heart of a believer, the Holy Spirit continually works in him, giving him grace upon grace, which graces overflow upon those around him (Prov. 10:11). But it is not enough for us to drink from the streams that flow within us, content merely to rest in divine grace; we must also let these inner streams overflow and water many. Then, the parched land will not only become itself a garden, but its waters will also overflow upon many parched souls and transfer the nature of a paradise to them, fresh and fruitful.

**Third:** on the last day of the feast, the Lord Christ issued an invitation to the people returning to their homes. The last day was dedicated to Israel alone. That is why the eighth day was considered an especially worthy High Day.

**Fourth: St. Ambrose** draws a connection between this living spring to which the Lord Christ refers and the words we find in the book of Revelation when he says, “And this, again, is not a trivial matter that we read that a river goes forth from the throne of God. For you read the words of the Evangelist John to this purport: ‘And He showed me a river of living water, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on either side, was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of all nations’ (Rev. 22:1–2). This is certainly the River proceeding from the throne of God, that is, the Holy Spirit, Whom he drinks who believes in Christ, as He Himself says (John 7:37–38).”<sup>795</sup>

#### 411. What does John the Evangelist say about this divine promise?

“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). God created the human being so that the Spirit of God could work within him, and he could abide in the Spirit. However, the human being chose to turn his back on God and reject Him; so the Spirit became more like a guest working in godly people and prophets, and even sometimes in non-believers, to attract them to faith. However, when the Lord was glorified on the cross and paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins so we may be glorified in Him, He gave the Spirit abundantly, as previously promised in Joel 2:28.

<sup>795</sup> St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.20.153–154 (NPNF II/10:156).

The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift, or rather, He is the giver of all the gifts we receive, through His descent upon the Church and His dwelling in the hearts of the faithful, widely bestowing gifts and talents as He sees fit, for the glory of God and for the growth of the Church and the salvation of souls.

**412. Why did the Holy Spirit descend upon the Church after the Lord was glorified through His suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven?**

The Evangelist says, “**since Jesus had not yet been glorified**” (John 7:39). What does this glory that had not yet been fulfilled mean here? He had not yet been taken to trial, nor whipped, crucified, and died in the flesh. Nor had He yet been buried, nor risen and ascended to the heavens. He considers these events in the life of the Lord Christ to be His glorification, since all of this was not the fruit of any sin He committed, but rather for the sake of His love and His desire for the salvation of sinners. **St. Cyril the Great** says that all that the Lord Christ did was for our sake.

The role of the Holy Spirit here is to take all that is Christ’s and declare it to us; and thus to make it our own. For our sake, He was led to judgment and was unjustly condemned. So now if we are unfairly judged, we are counted as partakers of the suffering Christ; for Christ, to whom be the glory, counted His suffering as glorifying Him. He accepted it with joy for our sake; so, we also count it as a glory for us when we share in the suffering of love, especially if it is unjust.

Let us sing then, by the Holy Spirit, with the apostle Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). For our sake He was buried, and His soul went down to Hades to bear the souls of those who died in hope, bestow upon them His own righteousness, and offer them as the spoils of victory to His rejoicing Father. And as with the crucifixion, so also with the resurrection and ascension, through which the heavens have become our eternal home.

**413. What can we learn from the early Church Fathers’ experiences in drinking from this spring of which the Lord Christ spoke when He described Himself as the Fountain that quenches the thirsty?**

**First:** the Lord is referred to as the river that overflows with His grace to quench the thirst of humanity. As the psalmist says, “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasure. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light” (Ps. 36:8–9). And again, “Behold, I will turn to them like a river of peace and like a brook, to flood them with the glory of the Gentiles” (Isa. 66:12 LXX). Whoever believes in Him will have the Holy Spirit who overflows with Life dwell in his heart. Thus, he will become a spring overflowing with the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, freedom, and enlightenment. The Jews used symbols of the work of

the Holy Spirit such as the early and late rain, springs, wells, rivers, etc. (see Ps. 36:8–9; Isa. 44:3–4; Joel 2:23).

The phrase “**If anyone thirsts**” (John 7:37) refers to any person who feels that his righteousness is impoverished, or that he needs spiritual blessings, or is empty on the inside. “**Let him come to Me and drink**” means he need not stand by the high priest anymore, admiring the golden vessel from which he pours a little water from the pool of Siloam; nor does he need to seek out the many conflicting varieties of pagan philosophy whose attractions can be deceptive. Rather, he can come to the Lord Christ who is revealed in the two Testaments of the Holy Bible.

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “he who does not disbelieve shall revel in richest graces from God. For he shall be so replete with the gifts through the Spirit, as not only to fatten his own mind, but even to be able to overflow into others’ hearts, like the river stream gushing forth the God-given good upon his neighbour too.”<sup>796</sup>

Moreover, **St. Augustine** says, “What is the fountain, and what the river that flows from the belly of the inner man? Benevolence, whereby a man will care for the interest of his neighbor. For if he imagines that what he drinks ought to be only for his own satisfying, there is no flowing of living water from his belly; but if he is quick to care for the good of his neighbor, then he does not become dry, because there is a flowing.”<sup>797</sup>

In the Church, those who are truly faithful are invigorated by the wine of divine Love, filled with joy and gladness, and so well irrigated that they do not thirst for the fountains of earthly desires. In the Savior, they discover the mystery of their true joy, their happiness, and their contentment.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**, says, “To be drunken in this manner is, as the prophecy says, for those who drink the fatness of God’s house and water themselves at the stream of delight (cf. Ps. 35:9). The great David too was drunken in this way on one occasion, when, having gone out of himself and entered into ecstasy [*ekstasis*], he saw the invisible Beauty and cried out that famous word, ‘Every human being is a liar’ (Ps. 115:2), and so committed to speech an account of inexpressible things.”<sup>798</sup>

**Second: St. Jerome** invites us to **take drinking from this fountain most seriously**, saying, “He does not say, you must drink ... but whoever is **willing and able to run and to drink**, he shall conquer, he shall be satisfied.”<sup>799</sup> **Caesarius, Bishop of Arles**, says, “What

<sup>796</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 5.1 on John 7:38 (LFHCC 43:544).

<sup>797</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 32.4 (NPNF I/7:194) amended.

<sup>798</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 10: p. 325.

<sup>799</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.12 (NPNF II/6:355).

is this fountain, except our Lord Jesus Christ ... It is a good fountain which cools us after the heat of this life, and with its flood tempers the aridity of our heart.”<sup>800</sup>

**Third: St. Augustine** invites us to **move towards the spring with love**: “If we thirst, let us come; and not by our feet, but by our affections; let us come, not by removing from our place, but by loving.”<sup>801</sup>

**Fourth: St. Cyril the Great** calls us to **drink from Him with joy**: “one ought to take everything out of the brook, and again to therefore rejoice; we said that our Lord Jesus Christ was compared to a brook, in Whom we shall find all delight and enjoyment in hope, and in Him He shall delight us Divinely and spiritually.”<sup>802</sup>

**Fifth: St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**, says that the believer’s soul or spirit yearns to drink from the spring of **her heavenly Bridegroom**, with joy and unceasingly, as he says: “And just as now the soul that is joined to God is not satiated by her enjoyment of him, so too the more abundantly she is filled up with his beauty, the more vehemently her longings abound. For since the words of the Bridegroom are ‘spirit and life’ (John 6:63) and everyone who is joined to the Spirit becomes spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), while everyone who is attached to life ‘passes from death to life’ (John 5:24), according to the Lord’s word, it follows that the virgin soul longs to approach the fount of the spiritual life. And **that fount is the mouth of the Bridegroom, whence ‘the words of eternal life’** (John 6:68) as they gush forth fill the mouth that is drawn to it, just as the prophet does when drawing spirit through his mouth (cf. Ps. 118:131 LXX). Since, then, it is necessary for the one who draws drink from the fount to fix mouth to mouth and the fount is the Lord who says, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink’ (John 7:37), it follows that the soul, thirsty as she is, wills to bring her own mouth to the mouth that pours out life, saying *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* (Song 1:2).”<sup>803</sup>

He also says, “it is time to set out our understanding of the divine oracles: *Come away from frankincense, my bride, come away from frankincense. Come and pass through from the beginning of faith, from the peak of Sanir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards.* What meaning, then, did we detect in these words? The wellspring of good things always draws the thirsty to itself ... **For in using these words, he sets no limit, whether to thirst, or to the urge to come to him**, or to the enjoyment of the drinking ... the tasting becomes, as it were, an invitation to partake of yet more. On this account the

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<sup>800</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II (81-186)* 170.3 (FOTC 47:421).

<sup>801</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 32.1 (NPNF I/7:193).

<sup>802</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 5.1 on John 7:37 (LFHCC 43:543) amended.

<sup>803</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 1: p. 34–35.

invitation to come to him that has been offered, and that ever and again draws us to better things, is never lacking to the person who is journeying upwards.”<sup>804</sup>

And, “The Word with his praises brings the Bride to her greatest height by calling her *a spring of water that is living and that flows from frankincense*. As to these things, we know from the Scriptures that they pertain to the life-giving Nature, since on the one hand the prophecy says, in the very person of God, ‘They have deserted me, the fountain of living waters’ (Jer. 2:13); and then, on the other hand, the Lord says to the Samaritan woman, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would ask him, and he would give you living water’ (John 4:10)—not to mention, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink; for those who believe in me, as the Scripture says, “Rivers of water shall flow from their hearts.” **Now this he said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were going to receive**’ (John 7:37–38). Everywhere, then, it is the divine Nature that is understood when living water is mentioned, and here in our text the truthful witness of the Word **constitutes the Bride a well of living water** ... And the most unbelievable thing of all is this ... **she contains the inflow within the well of her soul and so becomes the storehouse of that living water that flows from frankincense**—or rather *gushes*, as the Word has phrased it. And may we too, having taken possession of that well, become participants in that water, so that in accordance with Wisdom’s injunction, we may drink not of strange water but of the water that is ours (cf. Prov. 5:15) in Christ Jesus our Lord, To whom glory belongs to the ages of ages. Amen.”<sup>805</sup>

#### 414. What is the meaning of the words, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture had said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38)?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “In another context, then, He said ‘life everlasting,’ while here He speaks of ‘**living water**’ ... For, when the grace of the Spirit enters into the soul and takes up its abode there, it gushes forth more abundantly than any fountain and does not cease ... to show at the same time its unceasing attendance upon the soul and its ineffable activity He called it ‘a fountain’ and ‘rivers’: not one river, but rivers without number. And in the other context He indicated its generous flow by the word ‘springing up.’ Moreover, one may see clearly what is meant if one considers the wisdom of Stephen, the fluency of Peter, and the forcefulness of Paul.”<sup>806</sup>

And **St. Ambrose** says, “Thus the holy one [i.e., Elijah] is bidden by the Lord to cross over to the stream (cf. 1 Kings 17:3), for he who has drunk of the New Testament not only is a river, but from his belly will flow rivers of living water (cf. John 7:38) rivers of understanding, rivers of meditation, spiritual rivers. However, these dried up in the time of

<sup>804</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 8: p. 261.

<sup>805</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, eds., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald; trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 9: p. 307–309.

<sup>806</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 51 (FOTC 41:36; PG 59:300–301).

unbelief, lest the sacrilegious would drink and lest unbelievers sup. There the ravens recognized the Prophet of the Lord [i.e., Elijah], whom the Jews did not recognize. Crows fed the one whom a royal and noble race was persecuting.”<sup>807</sup>

**415. Why does the believer not receive the gift of speaking in the tongues of many nations when he is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit?**

**St. Augustine** believes that the Holy Spirit had come upon many individuals before Jesus was glorified by His resurrection; such as Simeon the Elder, Anna the Prophetess, and St. Mary at the divine incarnation. But after the resurrection, on the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the whole Church rather than individuals, and they spoke with the various tongues of the nations. Why, then, does a believer today not receive the gift of speaking in tongues when he is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit? **St. Augustine** answers this question by pointing out that as the Church spread throughout the world, people who natively spoke all the languages of the world became Christians. So, each Christian, as a member of the universal Church, can consider himself to speak all the languages of the nations, since **whatever his brethren utter is as though he himself utters it, being a member of the one Body.**<sup>808</sup>

Elsewhere, **St. Augustine** says that after His resurrection, the Lord Christ granted us the Holy Spirit through whom we receive the Church and its unity and love. Thus, we are granted to rise with her, our hearts fleeing this world to live with Him in heaven: “... we too receive the Holy Spirit if we love the Church, if we are joined together by charity ... For here we are born and die: let us not love this world; let us migrate hence by love; by love let us dwell above, by that love by which we love God. In this sojourn of our life let us meditate on nothing else, but that here we shall not always be, and that by good living we shall prepare a place for ourselves there, whence we shall never migrate.”<sup>809</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “So, then, the Holy Spirit is the River, and the abundant River, which according to the Hebrews flowed from Jesus in the lands, as we have received it prophesied by the mouth of Isaiah (Isa. 66:12). This is the great River which flows always and never fails. And not only a river, but also one of copious stream and overflowing greatness, as also David said: ‘The stream of the river makes glad the city of God’ (Ps. 46:4). For neither is that city, the heavenly Jerusalem, watered by the channel of any earthly river, but that Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Fount of Life, by a short draught of Whom we are satiated, seems to flow more abundantly among those celestial Thrones, Dominions and Powers, Angels and Archangels, rushing in the full course of the seven virtues of the Spirit.”<sup>810</sup>

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<sup>807</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* 59 (FOTC 26:350).

<sup>808</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 32.7 (NPNF I/7:195).

<sup>809</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 32.8–9 (NPNF I/7:195–196) amended.

<sup>810</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.16.177–178 (NPNF II/10:113).

#### 416. Did Jesus need the Holy Spirit to descend upon Him at His baptism in the River Jordan?

**St. Irenaeus** answers this question, saying, “For [God] promised, that **in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids**, that they might prophesy; wherefore He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ ... Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter (John 16:7), who should join us to God.”<sup>811</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “God the Father began to give again the Spirit, and Christ first received the Spirit as First-fruits of the renewed nature. For *John bore witness saying, I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven and It abode upon Him* (John 1:32) ... **not for Himself did Christ receive the Spirit**, but rather for us in Himself, for all good things flow through Him into us too. For since our forefather Adam being turned aside by deceit into disobedience and sin, did not preserve the grace of the Spirit, and thus in him the whole nature lost at last the God-given good, God the Word Who does know turning, needed to become Man, in order that **by receiving as Man He might preserve the Good permanently to our nature**. Of such mysteries will the Divine Psalmist himself too be our exponent: for thus he says to the Son, *You loved righteousness and hated wrong, therefore God, Your God, anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows* (Ps. 45:7).”<sup>812</sup>

He also says, “Let us consider again ... that in the holy Prophets there was a certain rich shining upon and torch-illumination from the Spirit, mighty to lead them to the apprehension of things to come and the knowledge of things hidden: but in those who believe in Christ, we are confident that not torch-illumination simply from the Spirit, but **the Spirit Itself dwells and has His habitation** ... let us understand him to mean the full and complete habitation in men of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>813</sup>

#### 417. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Lord Christ as Savior?

The birth of the Lord Christ according to the flesh opened the door for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us. The life of the Lord Christ witnesses to the work of the Holy Spirit, who is His own Spirit and one with Him in divinity. For example, John the Baptist, the forerunner, the messenger who prepared the way for the Lord Christ was filled by the Spirit, while he was still in the womb (Luke 1:15). The same Spirit descended upon the Virgin St. Mary and overshadowed her like the Shekinah that rested on Mount Sinai to prepare her so that the

<sup>811</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.17.1–2 (ANF 1:444; PG 7:929–30).

<sup>812</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 5.2 on John 7:39 (LFHCC 43:547–548) amended.

<sup>813</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 5.2 on John 7:39 (LFHCC 43:550, 552) amended.

Holy One born of her would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). When St. Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and the baby leaped in her womb with joy (Luke 1:41–42). The Holy Spirit inspired the praises of both Mary and Zechariah (Luke 1:46, 68). By the Holy Spirit, Simeon the Elder received the child Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:25–32). And it was the Holy Spirit that led our Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1:12).

The Lord Christ sends the Holy Spirit to us so that He may dwell in us, and so that we may carry Christ in our inner person and He Himself becomes our prayer and worship “by the Spirit,” as our depths cry out to the Father, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “Christ is born [or incarnate]; the Spirit is His Forerunner. He is baptized; the Spirit bears witness. He is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up (Luke 4:1, 18). He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them. He ascends; the Spirit takes His place.”<sup>814</sup> He also says, “The dispensations of the Body of Christ are ended ... and that of the Spirit is beginning.”<sup>815</sup>

The proper work of the Holy Spirit is to complete our unity with Christ. As **St. Cyril the Great** says, “For that which knits us together, and, as it were, unites us with God, is the Holy Spirit; Which if we receive, we are proved sharers and partakers in the Divine Nature, and we admit the Father Himself into our hearts, through the Son and in the Son.”<sup>816</sup>

“(The Son Himself) forms us according to His glory, and stamps us with the seal of His likeness.”<sup>817</sup>

“He who grants us the divine Spirit, the Giver of Life is the Son, begotten of God.”<sup>818</sup>

“The fullness given to us by the Father and the Son becomes reality ... by the Holy Spirit who fills us with divine gifts, through which He makes us partakers of the ineffable nature.”<sup>819</sup>

“Thus, where the Son lives in us in an indescribable way, by His Spirit (Gal. 4:6) we say that we are called to the spirit of being His children.”<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>814</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 31.29 Fifth Theological Oration (NPNF II/7:327; PG 36:159B).

<sup>815</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 41.5 On Pentecost (NPNF II/7:380; PG 36:436B).

<sup>816</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 2* 11.10 on John 17:18, 19 (LFHCC 48:537; PG 74:544).

<sup>817</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 3 (PG 75:837A).

<sup>818</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 3 (PG 75: 965A).

<sup>819</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 3 (PG 75:800A).

<sup>820</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 3 (PG 75:833A).



“Being thankful for our union with the Son, which comes about through the Spirit working in those who receive Him, that we may be fashioned into His children.”<sup>821</sup>

“For the Son Himself is the true and perfect image [of the Father]; but the pure and natural image of the Son is the Spirit, to whom we are conformed through sanctification and conformed to the true image of God.”<sup>822</sup>

“We are formed in similitude to Christ and from Him we receive the image; and the image of our spirit is very good, the image of those who resemble Him by nature.”<sup>823</sup>

“Due to His power and nature, the Spirit is surely able to conform us to the sublime image.”<sup>824</sup>

#### **418. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments?**

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God would come upon a person for a specific purpose; and when that purpose was completed, the Spirit would depart. He did not dwell in the person as though he were a divine temple. But in the New Testament, the apostle Paul says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

The Old Testament often refers to the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of the Lord working in the people of God. For example, when Joshua asked the prophet Moses to prohibit Eldad and Medad from prophesying, Moses replied, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29).

In the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit as the giver of gifts beyond nature becomes clearer. For example, it was said of John the Baptist, “And from the womb of his mother he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:15); of Elizabeth, “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41); of Zacharias the Priest, “His father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67); and of Simeon the Elder, “And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26).

In the conversation between the Lord Christ and the Samaritan woman, He said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me to drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10). On another occasion, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has

<sup>821</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 3 (PG 75:837A).

<sup>822</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 7 (PG 75:1089A).

<sup>823</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 7 (PG 75:1089B).

<sup>824</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Trinity* 7 (PG 75:1113A).

said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37–39). On the cross, Jesus was glorified when He gave His life for the salvation of the world; and His gift to those who believe in Him is that they may become the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God may dwell in them (1 Cor. 3:16).

**419. Is there evidence in the Holy Bible that the Spirit spoke through the prophets?**

The apostle Peter says, “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:12).

**420. If the Spirit spoke through the prophets and descended upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire, does He also work in the faithful?**

The apostle Paul says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

**421. How do we become partakers of the Holy Spirit?**

**First:** through fervent prayer. The Lord of Glory says, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13). If we are careful to provide bread, fish, and eggs for our children to sustain them in their life on earth, our Heavenly Father is careful to provide the Holy Spirit for us, who is alone the Spirit of communion. He makes us steadfast in the only-begotten Son, carrying us off into the bosom of the Heavenly Father. His work is to give us the “new life” that bears the marks of heaven; that we might return to the Fatherly embrace once more.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “‘And if we, being evil, know to give good gifts’ (Luke 11:13), much more is it the nature of the Father of mercies, the good Father of all consolation, much pitying, very merciful, to be long-suffering, to wait for those who have turned.”<sup>825</sup>

**Second:** through baptism and the renewal of the Holy Spirit: “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:4–6).

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<sup>825</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?* 39 (ANF 2:602).

**St. Ambrose** comments on this, saying, “It is, then, the Holy Spirit Who has delivered us from that Gentile impurity. For in those kinds of four-footed creatures and wild beasts and birds there was a figure of the condition of man, which appears clothed with the bestial ferocity of wild beasts unless it grows gentle by the sanctification of the Spirit.”<sup>826</sup> He also says, “Who is he who is born of the Spirit, and is made Spirit [spiritual], but he who is renewed in the Spirit of his mind (Eph. 4:23)? This certainly is he who is regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit, since we receive the hope of eternal life through the laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).”<sup>827</sup>

**St. Augustine** comments, “In baptism, all past sins are washed away. By baptism, the spirit that lusts against the flesh [cf. Gal. 5:17] finds aid, that we might not suffer defeat in our [spiritual] battles. Through it, the Lord’s Prayer is effective, when we pray, ‘forgive us our debts’ [Matt. 6:12]. In this way, we are renewed, we find aid in our wrestling, prayer is poured out, and our heart is not adulterated. In this way, we become blameless.”<sup>828</sup>

As **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “For if [the Holy Spirit] is not to be worshipped, how can He make me divine by Baptism? ... And indeed from the Spirit comes our New Birth, and from the New Birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from Whom it is derived.”<sup>829</sup>

**Third:** feast on the nourishment of the soul. It is good for person to strive with all the means of grace, whether by reading the Holy Bible, prayer, fasting, or metanoias (prostrations). But without the grace of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit who is the soul’s nourishment, a person cannot attain to eternal life.

**St. Macarius the Great** emphasizes this thus: “When God made this body of ours, He did not grant to it that it should have life either from His own nature or from the body itself, nor meat and drink, raiment and shoes; He appointed that it should have all the supplies of life from without, making the body in itself quite naked, and it is impossible for the body to live at all apart from things outside itself, without food and drink and clothing.<sup>830</sup> If it attempts to subsist upon its own nature alone, taking nothing from without, it wastes and perishes. In the same manner is it with the soul also. It has not the divine light, though it is created after the image of God. So has He ordered its conditions, and has been pleased that it should not have eternal life of its own nature; but of His Godhead, of His Spirit, of His light, **it has**

<sup>826</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.107 (NPNF II/10:128).

<sup>827</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.64 (NPNF II/10:144).

<sup>828</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Psalms* 19.80. Cf. St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise Concerning the Correction of the Donatists* 9.39 (NPNF I/4:647).

<sup>829</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 31.28 Fifth Theological Oration (NPNF II/7:327; PG 36:105A) amended.

<sup>830</sup> The body came to need clothing and shoes when humans deprived themselves of God’s righteousness by disobeying the divine command and becoming isolated from the Holy God.

**spiritual meat and drink, and heavenly clothing, which are the soul's life, the life indeed**

...

“The divine nature contains the bread of life, who said, *I am the bread of life* (John 6:35) and *living water* (John 4:10), and *wine that makes glad the heart of man* (Ps. 104:15), and *the oil of gladness* (Ps. 45:7), and the whole variety of the food of the heavenly Spirit, and the heavenly apparel of light which comes from God. In these things the eternal life of the soul consists. Woe to the body when it stands upon its own nature, because then it wastes and dies; and woe to the soul if it takes its stand upon nothing but its own nature, and puts its trust in nothing but its own works, **not having the fellowship of the Spirit of God**, because it dies, not having the eternal life of the Godhead vouchsafed to it.

“When men are sick, as soon as the body is no longer able to receive nourishment, all hopes of them are given over, and all true friends and kinsfolk and lovers are in tears. In the same way, God and the holy angels are in tears over **souls that are not nourished with the heavenly nourishment of the Spirit**, and have not come to life in incorruption.”<sup>831</sup>

#### **422. What are the most important gifts and talents endowed by the Holy Spirit?**

It is possible to subdivide the different gifts of the Spirit as **gifts of salvation, gifts of encouragement, and gifts of evangelism and martyrdom**. But in practice, it is difficult to separate these gifts from one another. The individual believer's life is one of indivisible unity; and our salvation, in its essence, is becoming one with the Father, being his children in Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. We cannot partition off the different aspects of our lives: our Church life; our personal behavior; our witness to the Gospel of Christ; and our love for all humanity and service towards them by all holy means. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to draw boundaries that separate the gifts of salvation, encouragement, and evangelism and testimony. **St. Augustine** says, “without the spirit of faith no one will rightly believe, without the spirit of prayer no one will profitably pray; not that there are so many spirits, ‘but in all these things one and the same Spirit works, dividing to every one according as he will’ (1 Cor. 12:11).”<sup>832</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “‘In many ways and in diverse manners, God spoke to the fathers in the prophets’ (Heb. 1:1). And the Wisdom of God said: ‘I will send prophets and apostles’ (Luke 11:49). And ‘To one is given,’ as it is written, ‘through the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit; to another, the gift of healings, in the one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy’ (1 Cor. 12:8–10). Therefore, according to the Apostle, prophecy is not

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<sup>831</sup> *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 1.10–11: pp. 9–10, amended.

<sup>832</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters Volume IV (165–203)* Letter 194 To Sixtus (FOTC 30:312–313).

only through the Father and the Son, but also through the Holy Spirit, and therefore the office is one, and the grace one. So you find that the Spirit also is the author of prophecies.”<sup>833</sup>

The following gifts are mentioned in the book of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:2). When the Lord Christ came to us and become the representative of all humanity, the Holy Spirit, who is not foreign to Him, descended upon Him, for He is His Spirit. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ differs from His descent upon us. For Christ, it is a hypostatic dwelling; the Spirit and Christ are one in essence with the Father, and their unity is infinite. For us, it is a grace granted to us in Christ Jesus insofar as our nature can bear it, and for the work of our ongoing renewal.

On the feast of Pentecost, **St. John Chrysostom** spoke about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, saying, “Every gift among the gifts we enjoy unto the salvation of our souls — is it not received through the work of the (Holy) Spirit? Through this work we are freed from servitude and called to liberty. Through it we become children of God by His adopting us. And above all, if I may say so, we are renewed, putting off the burden of our repulsive sins. Through it we see before us the ranks of the priests. Through it our Teacher brings us joy. From Him we receive gifts of prophecy, gifts of healing, and all the other gifts with which the Holy Spirit ornaments the Church of God. This is what the apostle Paul proclaims when he says, ‘But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills’ (1 Cor. 11:12). He says, ‘as He wills’ and not ‘as He commands.’ And he says, ‘distributing’ and not ‘dividing,’ showing that these gifts are His own and that He does not submit to the authority of another. The apostle Paul testifies that this authority is the authority of the Father while at the same time, it is attributed to the Holy Spirit. He says of the Father, ‘But it is the same God who works all in all’ (1 Cor. 12:6); and of the Holy Spirit, ‘But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills’ (1 Cor. 11:12). Behold the perfection of this authority. If the (divine) nature is one, then there is not the slightest doubt regarding the authority; and if there is an equality of honor, the power and authority are also one.”

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as being the spring from which our goodness flows, saying, “He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ ... and Himself the Lord, the Spirit of Adoption, of Truth, of Liberty; the Spirit of Wisdom, of Understanding, of Counsel, of Might, of Knowledge, of Godliness, of the Fear of God. For He is the Maker of all these, filling all with His Essence, containing all things, filling the world in His Essence, yet incapable of being comprehended in His power by the world; good, upright, princely, by nature not by adoption; sanctifying, not sanctified; measuring, not measured; shared, not sharing; filling, not filled; containing, not contained; inherited, glorified, reckoned with the Father and the Son; held out as a threat; the Finger of God; fire like God [the Father]; to manifest, as I take it, His consubstantiality; the Creator-

<sup>833</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.13.143 (NPNF II/10:133) amended.

Spirit, Who by Baptism and by Resurrection creates anew; the Spirit That knows all things, That teaches, That blows where and to what extent He wills; That guides, talks, sends forth, separates, is angry or tempted; That reveals, illumines, quickens, or rather is the very Light and Life; That makes Temples; That deifies [grants us to partake of God]; That perfects so as even to anticipate Baptism (as in the case of the Centurion Cornelius, Acts 10:9), yet after Baptism to be sought as a separate gift; That does all things that God does; divided into fiery tongues; dividing gifts; making Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers; understanding manifold, clear, piercing ...”<sup>834</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “since no one has the capacity to receive all spiritual gifts, but the grace of the Spirit is given proportionately to the faith of each, when one is living in association with others, the grace privately bestowed on each individual becomes the common possession of his fellows ... He who receives any of these gifts does not possess it for his own sake but rather for the sake of others.”<sup>835</sup>

He also says, “Already, the Spirit has been considered as the whole that exists in the parts, according to the distribution of gifts, for we are all members of each other, ‘having gifts that differ according to the grace of God given to us’ (Rom. 12:5). On account of this, ‘the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or, again, the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor. 12:21). Rather, all things together fill up the body of Christ in the unity of the Spirit, and from their gifts they exchange with each other a necessary help, for God has placed the members in the body, each one of them, as he wished (see 1 Cor. 12:18); and yet the members have the same care for each other (see 1 Cor. 12:25), according to the spiritual communion and fellowship that exists among them. On account of this, ‘if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice together’ (1 Cor. 12:26). As the part is *in* the whole, we are one *in* the Spirit, because we all were baptized in one body, into one Spirit.”<sup>836</sup>

And, “Through the Holy Spirit comes the restoration to paradise, the ascent to the kingdom of heaven, the return to adopted sonship, the freedom to call God our Father and to become a companion of the grace of Christ, to be called a child of light, to participate in eternal glory, and generally, to have all the fullness of blessing in this age and in the age to come.”<sup>837</sup>

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<sup>834</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 31.29 Fifth Theological Oration (NPNF II/7:327) amended.

<sup>835</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 7 (FOTC 9:250; PG 82:323).

<sup>836</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 26.61: p. 100.

<sup>837</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 15.36: p. 68.

#### 423. What is faith, considered as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9)?

**Faith** is one of the most valuable of the gifts of the Spirit; granted to all and yet at the same time, a rare gift, disdained by those who arrogantly rely on human ability. The apostle Paul speaks of the faith that moves heaven and the earth, by which the mountains can be moved (1 Cor. 13:2), and some believe that faith is the miracle of drawing hearts to accept Christ's work of salvation.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, "This faith then which is given by grace from the Spirit is not merely doctrinal, but also works things above man's power. For whosoever has this faith, *shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove* (Mark 11:23) ... And of this faith it is said, *If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed* (Matt. 17:20). For just as the grain of mustard seed is small in size, but fiery in its operation, and though sown in a small space has a circle of great branches, and when grown up is able even to shelter the fowls (Matt. 13:32); so, likewise, faith in the swiftest moment works the greatest effects in the soul."<sup>838</sup>

#### 424. Who defies the violent winds of sin and the darkness of Satan?

**St. Macarius the Great** calls us to seek refuge in the Holy Spirit whose holy winds revive the soul and grants it illumination and a spirit of power that defies the dark and violent squalls of sin. The saint says, "As in a gloomy black night a fierce wind blows, and stirs and searches and shakes all the plants and seeds, so when man falls under the power of the darkness of the devil's night, and is in night and darkness, he is agitated by that dreadful wind of sin that blows [on him], and is shaken and stirred, and searched through all his nature, his soul, his thoughts, his understanding; and all the limbs of his body are shaken, and no member of either soul or body escapes free and immune from the sin that dwells in us. In like manner there is a day of light and a divine **wind of the Holy Spirit**, which blows and refreshes the souls that are in the day of the light of God."<sup>839</sup>

#### 425. Why did the Lord Christ say, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7)?

**St. Augustine** says, "For at that time the apostles were not yet fitted even to die for Christ, when He said to them, 'You cannot follow me now' (John 13:36) ... and yet afterwards a countless number both of men and women, boys and girls, youths and maidens, old and young, were crowned with martyrdom; and the sheep were found able for that which, when the Lord spoke these words ... Well, then, let us grant that it is so, that many can now

<sup>838</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.11 (NPNF II/7:31) amended.

<sup>839</sup> See St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 2.4: p. 14, amended.

bear those things when the Holy Spirit has been sent, which could not then, prior to His coming, be borne by the disciples.”<sup>840</sup>

#### **426. In whom can we find heavenly comfort amidst our struggles and battles with the vicious devil?**

In His parting words before His arrest, the Lord Christ repeatedly reassured His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to them, saying, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16); “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26); “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26); and “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

The Lord Christ completed our redemption on the cross, ascended into heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit in order to grant His Church the sweetness of partaking in the cross, the experience of the power of resurrection, and the token of the heavenly life. The Holy Spirit is the “other Comforter” who takes what is Christ’s and gives it to us. The work of the Holy Spirit continues in the life of the Church until the end of this age, preparing her as a bride bearing the image of her heavenly Bridegroom.

The word “**Paraclete**,” usually translated as “Comforter,” can also mean “Lawyer,” “Defender,” or “Advocate”; for He advocates for the Church of Christ before divine justice on behalf of sinners; those who, because of their living faith that works in love, bear the righteousness of Christ. The Lord Christ calls Himself the “**Comforter**,” but he calls Holy Spirit “**the other Comforter**” (cf. John 14:16). A **Targum** describes the days of the Messiah as days of comforting. Christ comforted His disciples while He was with them in the flesh, and when He departed from them in the flesh, He sent them His Holy Spirit, the other Comforter.

Because the Lord Christ offers Himself as a sacrifice of love for the sake of humanity, it is the right of those who believe in Him for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them and dwell within them; He who had previously ceased to dwell within humanity from the moment Adam fell. This gift means, in fact, that we receive the Giver of gifts Himself. It is an abiding gift that cannot be taken from the believer until he takes it with him beyond this life. The Holy Spirit will not leave him as long as he accepts Him and cooperates with Him.

First, the Savior established the foundation of knowledge, which is faith. Upon this foundation, He established the work of love, which is obedience to the commandments.

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<sup>840</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 96.1–2 (NPNF I/7:371–372).



Finally, He sent to us His Holy Spirit from the Father, who alone is able to bring all this to completion.

Here, the Lord Christ makes manifest the role of the Holy Trinity in perfectly fulfilling the divine plan for our glorification in eternity. The Father sends His Son as a Comforter who sacrifices Himself for the salvation of the world, and now receives Him upon His ascension, and in doing so also receives the universal Church, from Adam till the end of ages, in Himself, with Him as its Head. The Father receives the first Comforter and is pleased in Him who has fulfilled the work of salvation of humanity and proclaimed the love of the Father in practice. Having ascended to be received by the Father in heaven, this Comforter is now separated from humanity in the flesh, although He remains always present in the midst of His holy Church, always interceding for her before the Father; and sending the other Comforter who fills the Church and enlightens, sanctifies, and guides her, without departing from the Father or separating from Him. Here we see the relationship of mutual love between the Holy Trinity, working for the salvation humanity and its eternal glory.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “But why did He say: ‘I will ask the Father?’ Because, if He had said ‘I will send,’ they would not have believed in the same way, and at the moment what He was striving to achieve was this: that He should be believed.”<sup>841</sup>

#### **427. How is the mission of the head of Abraham’s household a type of the mission of the Holy Spirit?**

In the twenty-fourth chapter of the book of Genesis we see that the sequence of events related about Abraham and his family bears a symbolic resemblance to the events of salvation. For example, the sacrifice of Isaac, Sarah’s firstborn, is a type of the cross of Christ and His resurrection. In a similar way, Abraham sending the head of his house, after Sarah’s death, to the city of Nahor in Haran to bring back Rebekah as a wife for Isaac is a type of the work of the Holy Spirit, who brought the nations back from their evil land — the worship of idols — to present them as a bride to the true Isaac, our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham called his servant, the head of his household who was responsible all his affairs, and charged him not take a wife for his son Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom he dwelt; but rather to go to his people in Mesopotamia and bring back a wife from his own family, lest Isaac marry a Canaanite woman who might draw his heart away from God’s love, pervert his thoughts, and corrupt them. Firmly, Abraham firmly refused to allow his son Isaac to go himself to Mesopotamia, trusting that God who had called him, would Himself send a wife for his son that would support Isaac in the way of the Lord just as Sarah had supported him.

Abraham was not concerned with choosing a wife for his son that was rich or beautiful; his highest priority was that she should be holy and faithful, a support to his son in his

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<sup>841</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 75 (FOTC 41:301).

spiritual life, and not an obstacle in his way. Therefore, the Lord gave Isaac Rebekah, a woman beautiful in appearance and spirit, and the secret of his consolation and joy throughout the days of his sojourn.

The head of Abraham’s household is a type of the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the only-begotten Son from the Father. He came into our lives, as into the city of Nahor, to take us away from our land, borne upon our Master’s camels, and take us back to His land; that is, carrying us to His heavens to be with the heavenly Bridegroom forever.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Since then Christ made a covenant with us (for He was about to take me as a bride) he also assigned a dowry to me not of money, but of blood. But this dowry which He assigns is the bestowal of good things ‘such as eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man’ (1 Cor. 2:9). He assigned them for the dowry — immortality, praise with the angels, release from death, freedom from sin, the inheritance of a kingdom (so great are his riches), righteousness, sanctification, deliverance from present evils, discovery of future blessings. Great was my dowry ... He came; He took me: He assigns me a dowry: He says, ‘I give you my wealth.’ How? ‘Have you lost paradise?’ He says, ‘Take it back’ ... But yet the dowry was not given to me here. ‘Why do You not give me the dowry here?’ ‘It will be given when you have come to my Father, when you have entered the royal palace. Did you come to me! Nay I came to you. I came not that you should abide here but that I might take you and return. Seek not the dowry here: all depends on hope, and faith.’”<sup>842</sup>

The Holy Spirit comes to us like the Abraham’s servant, leading ten camels, to give generously to the Church, out of the riches of God, and draw her always towards heaven where she can bask in the fullness of glory. Is it not strange that Abraham’s servant went to the well in the evening to look for a bride for Isaac? This well can only be the water of baptism in which the Lord Christ encounters the Church as her Bridegroom. As **Bishop Caesarius of Arles**, says, “If the Church had not come to the waters of Baptism, she would not have been joined to Christ.”<sup>843</sup> He also says, “Look, brethren: Isaac’s servant found Rebecca at the well, and Rebecca in turn found Isaac himself at the well. It is true: Christ does not find the Church, nor the Church Christ, except at the sacrament of Baptism.”<sup>844</sup>

And the scholar **Origen** finds in the well a type of the Holy Bible in which the soul meets her Bridegroom: “Rebecca came to the wells daily; she drew water daily. And because she spent time at the wells daily, therefore, she could be found by Abraham’s servant and be united in marriage with Isaac ... [this] teaches you to come daily to the wells of the Scriptures, to the waters of the Holy Spirit, and always to draw water and carry home a full vessel just as also holy Rebecca used to do.”<sup>845</sup>

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<sup>842</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Two Homilies on Eutropius* 2.12–13 (NPNF I/9:260) amended.

<sup>843</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II (81-186)* 85.3 (FOTC 47:22).

<sup>844</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II (81-186)* 85.4 (FOTC 47:23).

<sup>845</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.2 (FOTC 71:159–160).

#### 428. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of the Church after the ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven?

“Pentecost [the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church] resolves the tension between Christ elevated to heaven, sitting at the Right Hand of the Father, and His promise, ‘and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’ (Matt 28:20) ... St. Macarius said that when Christ and the Spirit come in us, we experience this in various ways—in joy or in tears—in silence or in rapture. There are numerous forms of the presence of God, but the fruit of the Spirit is always the unifying presence of Christ who lives hypostatically in the Church and in the heart of the believer.”<sup>846</sup>

**St. Augustine** says that the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church bestowed the ability to witness to the Lord Christ upon the disciples who had followed Him from the beginning of His ministry. This ability was something they lacked in their conversations with the Lord Christ, for the fullness of the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. But when they had received the Holy Spirit, He granted them the faith that works through love, and perfect love casts out fear. Before receiving the Holy Spirit the apostle Peter denied the Lord Christ just before the crucifixion; but after he received the Spirit, he witnessed to His name with joy, even at the cost of pain and persecution. St. Augustine says, “For He, in bearing witness Himself, and inspiring such witnesses with invincible courage, divested Christ’s friends of their fear, and transformed into love the hatred of His enemies.”<sup>847</sup>

He also says, “In the words preceding this chapter of the Gospel, the Lord strengthened His disciples to endure the hatred of their enemies, and prepared them also by His own example to become the more courageous in imitating Him: adding the promise, that the Holy Spirit should come to bear witness of Him, and also that they themselves could become His witnesses, through the effectual working of His Spirit in their hearts. For such is His meaning when He says, ‘He shall bear witness of me, and you also shall bear witness.’ That is to say, because He shall bear witness, you also shall bear witness: He in your hearts, you in your voices; He by inspiration, you by utterance: that the words might be fulfilled, ‘Their sound has gone forth into all the earth’ (see Ps. 19:4). For it would have been to little purpose to have exhorted them by His example, had He not also filled them with His Spirit.”<sup>848</sup>

The disciples, the apostles, and all the faithful were waiting for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of their Bridegroom, to betroth them as His bride. He did not send them a servant or an angel — the one who came was the Spirit of God Himself. As Abraham’s servant took “ten of his master’s camels and departed, **for all his master’s goods were in his hand**” (Gen. 24:10), so also the Holy Spirit demonstrated to humanity the riches of her Bridegroom and His

<sup>846</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*, trans., Anthony P. Gythiel (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999): pp. 72–73.

<sup>847</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 92.2 (NPNF I/7:364).

<sup>848</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 93.1 (NPNF I/7:364) amended.

greatness. His work is not exhausted by this demonstration and invitation to the wedding; **He offers the bride the token of our Bridegroom**: “he brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing and gave them to Rebekah” (Gen. 24:53). **He urges us to travel** on the Bridegroom’s road, saying, ‘Do not hinder me’(Gen. 24:56). And He accompanies us on the journey, never leaving us alone on the road, until we come face to face with the Bridegroom of our souls. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us:

The day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended, is the day the Church, the Body of Christ, was born. We enter into communion with Christ the Head, for He is our Head and we are members of His body. In the Church, through the Holy Spirit, we enter into communion with the Holy Trinity. We experience the fatherhood of the Father, for He has granted us the Spirit of being His children. We experience Christ as the Head, the Bridegroom, and the firstborn Brother. And we experience the Holy Spirit who dwells within us; who is at the same time both the Spirit of our Father and the Spirit of our Bridegroom, and who proceeds from the Father. His main work in our lives is our continual renewal. With every morning we count ourselves as having been granted the token of heaven as if for the first time. We are granted continuous sanctification that we may bear the image of the Holy One. And we partake of heavenly consolation and uninterrupted joy and experience the life of love and oneness with God, the heavenly hosts, and humanity.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “This is our renewal: He makes us the image of God anew **by the washing of renewal and the Holy Spirit** who renews us, so that we become children of God, a new creation once more by the communion of the Spirit, and He saves us from our old state.”<sup>849</sup>

The Holy Spirit grants us talents whose purpose is the fulfilment of the free salvation of humanity, so that we may enjoy it and live in it, and progress along the path of salvation towards this aim, which is to become the icon of Christ. By His work in the soul, its path is cleared and its journey becomes fruitful until the day of its departure, when it will receive its inheritance of eternal glory.

He grants us divine truth, growth in knowledge, and access to divine mysteries.

#### **429. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer?**

When corruption entered human nature through the first Adam, the whole of humanity was exiled from Paradise, and the Spirit of the Lord departed from us, who is the source of our life and goodness, and our hidden treasure. Thus, the need arose for a new Adam who alone could bless our nature in Himself, as **St. Gregory the Theologian**<sup>850</sup> says; who alone cannot be separated from the Spirit of the Lord since it is His own Spirit. Through Christ, the

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<sup>849</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Ad. Eunom.* 5.

<sup>850</sup> “You blessed my nature in Yourself,” from the *Sanctus* of the Coptic Liturgy of St. Gregory, Coptic Reader translation.

Holy Spirit returned to our nature and dwelt within it once more, restoring it to its original glory. So, the renewal of our human nature was not possible except in the Lord Christ, who descended to dwell in our midst and crown us with the glory of victory over sin; and who enriched our nature by His Holy Spirit, offering upon the cross the price of this divine work.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** captures this splendidly, as the following example shows: “Since on account of the transgression in Adam, *sin has reigned against all* (Rom. 5:14), and then the Holy Spirit fled away from the human nature and its state came therefore to be awful in all, and it needed that by the Mercy of God, [human nature] mounting up to its pristine condition should be accounted worthy of the Spirit:—the Only-Begotten Word of God became Man, and appeared to them on earth with a Body of earth, and was made free from sin, that in Him Alone the nature of man, crowned with the glories of sinlessness, should be rich in the Holy Spirit, and thus be re-formed unto God through holiness.”<sup>851</sup>

**St. Macarius the Great** calls us to revel in the hidden treasure of the Holy Spirit, saying, “If a man is very rich in this world, and possesses a hidden treasure, out of that treasure and wealth that he has he purchases whatever he has a mind to purchase. Whatever rare articles in the world he fancies, he readily amasses them, relying upon the treasure, because by means of it he easily procures any piece of property he fancies. In like manner those who seek at God’s hand, and have found, and **have the heavenly treasure of the Spirit, which is the Lord Himself shining in their hearts, accomplish every righteousness of virtues, and every acquisition of goodness commanded by the Lord, out of the treasure of Christ in them**, and by means of it they amass a yet more abundant heavenly wealth. By means of that heavenly treasure they effect every virtue of righteousness, relying upon the multitude of the spiritual riches within them, and easily work every righteousness and commandment of the Lord by means of the invisible wealth of grace that is in them. The apostle says, *Having this treasure in earthen vessels* (2 Cor. 4:7), that is, the treasure which it was granted to them in this life to possess within themselves, the sanctifying power of the Spirit; and again, *Who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption* (1 Cor. 1:30).

“So one who has found and has within him this **heavenly treasure of the Spirit**, effects thereby every righteousness of commandments and every accomplishment of virtues unblameably and purely, without forcing and with ease. **Let us therefore beseech God, and seek and beg of Him, to bestow on us the treasure of His Spirit**, and that thus we may be able to walk in all His commandments unblameably and purely, and to fulfil **all the righteousness of the Spirit** purely and perfectly, by means of the heavenly treasure, which is Christ ... Nevertheless, every one should force himself to ask of the Lord to be permitted to receive and find the heavenly treasure of the Spirit, so as to be able without difficulty and

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<sup>851</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten* 1 (LFHCC 47:186) amended.

with readiness to do all the commandments of the Lord unblameably and purely, which before he could not succeed in doing, whatever force he might use.”<sup>852</sup>

#### **430. Were the disciples in need of another teacher to comfort them?**

**First:** The Lord Christ exhorted His disciples to receive the other Comforter as their Teacher, not in competition with Him, but rather reminding them of all the Lord had said to them, and revealing to them other mysteries, for He is the Spirit of wisdom. The Spirit does not come with a new gospel — He reminds them of the Gospel of Christ, and proclaims to them things they had previously been unready to accept. He said to them, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “In order that they might not be dejected, He then said that, as long as He Himself remained with them, the Spirit would not come, nor would they be able to comprehend anything great or sublime. Moreover, He said this to them to prepare them to bear up nobly under the trial of His departure, because it would be productive of great blessings for them. And He continually referred to Him as the Advocate (or Comforter) because of the afflictions then besetting them.”<sup>853</sup>

The Lord Christ promised them that they would experience the coming of the “**Spirit of Truth**” who would guide them to all truth. Previously, the Lord had described Himself to them, saying, “I am the truth”; so, whoever possesses Him possesses truth. But how can they possess Him? By the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth working in them and making them steadfast in Christ, who is the divine truth.

Did Jesus conceal the truth from His disciples? He came to the world to bestow the truth. He told His disciples as much as they could bear, and He told the crowds that which was within their ability to receive. But they were incapable of accepting all truth, so He sent His Holy Spirit to guide them and bring them in to new depths of knowledge of the truth. Furthermore, the Lord affirmed that the Spirit of Truth knows nothing that contradicts the knowledge of the Lord Christ; rather, what the Spirit hears from the Father who is in harmony with the Son, that He speaks by Him to the glory of the Holy Trinity and the salvation of humanity.

**St. Ambrose** says, “we were living like little children without the Spirit. He said that the Spirit was to come Who should make of these little children stronger men, by an increase, namely, of spiritual age. And this He laid down not that He might set the power of the Spirit

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<sup>852</sup> See St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 18.1–3: pp. 151–152.

<sup>853</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John 75* (FOTC 41:308–309).

in the first place, but that He might show that the fulness of strength consists in the knowledge of the Trinity.”<sup>854</sup>

He also says, “the Son of God said concerning the Holy Spirit: ‘He shall not speak from Himself’ (John 16:13) that is, not without the participation of the Father and Myself. For the Spirit is not divided and separated, but speaks what He hears ... This means, He shall not speak without Me; for He speaks the truth, He breathes wisdom. He speaks not without the Father, for He is the Spirit of God; He hears not from Himself, for all things are of God ... Therefore what the Spirit says is the Son’s, what the Son has given is the Father’s. So neither the Son nor the Spirit speaks anything of Himself. For the Trinity speaks nothing external to Itself.”<sup>855</sup>

And again He says, “For this does not signify any actual hearing of words, but the unity of will and of power, which exists both in the Father and in the Son. He has stated that this exists also in the Holy Spirit, in another place, saying, ‘For He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak’ (John 16:13), so that we may learn that whatsoever the Spirit says, the Son also says; and whatsoever the Son says, the Father says also; for there is one mind and one mode of working in the Trinity.”<sup>856</sup>

**Second: St. Augustine** says, “For the Spirit dwells in no man without the Father and the Son; as neither does the Son without the Father and the Holy Spirit, nor the Father without them. Their indwelling is inseparable, as their operation is inseparable; but sometimes they manifest themselves separately by symbols borrowed from the creatures, not in their own substance.”<sup>857</sup>

He also says, “The whole Trinity, therefore, both speaks and teaches [John 6:45; Matt 23:10; Acts 10:20] ... in themselves they cannot be anything other than simultaneous.”<sup>858</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.”<sup>859</sup>

<sup>854</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.14.99 (NPNF II/10:149).

<sup>855</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.12.131, 133, 134 (NPNF II/10:131–132) amended.

<sup>856</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 5.11.133 (NPNF II/10:301).

<sup>857</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 1*, trans., R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1844) 21.33: p. 192.

<sup>858</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 77.2 (NPNF I/7:339) amended.

<sup>859</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 40.41 On Holy Baptism (NPNF II/7:375; PG 36:417C).

**Third: St Isaac, bishop of Nisibis,** says, “When the Spirit establishes His dwelling in a person, the latter does not cease from prayer, for the Spirit does not cease from prayer within him.”

**Fourth: St. Irenaeus** believed that wherever the Spirit of God is found, there also is the Church and every grace. It is the Spirit who grants the believer the fruit of the Spirit: “our faith; which, having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also. **For this gift of God [i.e., the Holy Spirit] has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man,** for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the [means of] communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God ... For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace.”<sup>860</sup>

He also says, “And as dry earth does not bring forth unless it receive moisture, in like manner we also, being originally a dry tree, could never have brought forth fruit unto life without the voluntary rain from above. **For our bodies have received unity among themselves by means of that laver which leads to incorruption; but our souls, by means of the Spirit.** Wherefore both are necessary, since both contribute towards the life of God.”<sup>861</sup>

**Fifth:** without the Holy Spirit, we cannot experience union with the Lord Christ and attain perfection. **St. Irenaeus** says, “For as a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, **neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven** ... The Lord, receiving this [water] as a gift from His Father, does Himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of Himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon all the earth.”<sup>862</sup>

The scholar **Origen** also says, “We still have need of another who uncovers and reveals everything to us ... Through the Lord and Savior repentance and conversion from evil to good are preached and the remission of sins is given to all who believe and all things are completed that seem conducive to the perfection of the age. Nevertheless, the perfection and summit of all good things consist in this: whether anyone, after all these things, deserves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. None of these things will be considered perfect in anyone for whom is lacking the Holy Spirit, through whom the mystery of the blessed Trinity is fulfilled.”<sup>863</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

<sup>861</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.17.2 (ANF 1:445; PG 7:903A).

<sup>862</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.17.2 (ANF 1:444–445).

<sup>863</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3:2 (FOTC 105:45; PG 12:838A).



**St. Macarius the Great** says, “Here the soul has need of a divine lamp, even of the Holy Spirit, who sets in order the darkened house. It needs the bright sun of righteousness, which enlightens and rises upon the heart, as an instrument to win the battle.”<sup>864</sup>

**Sixth:** the Holy Spirit works in the Church, attracting the nations to faith. **St. Irenaeus** says, “This Spirit did David ask for the human race, saying, ‘And establish me with Your all-governing Spirit’ (Ps. 51:12); who also, as Luke says, descended at the day of Pentecost upon the disciples after the Lord’s ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant; from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations. Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter (John 16:7), who should join us to God.”<sup>865</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** imagines that the disciples of the Lord Christ might well say to Him, “‘What, then? If they have not kept Your word, therefore they will not keep ours. If they have persecuted You, therefore they will persecute us, also. If they have seen such miracles as no one else has performed, if they have heard such words as no one else has spoken, and have not profited by this, if they have hated Your Father and have hated You with Him, why have You embroiled us in this?’ someone might ask. ‘How shall we obtain a hearing? And who of our fellow men will pay attention to us?’ Accordingly, see what sort of consolation He went on to mention, lest they be disturbed by these reflections. ‘When the Advocate has come, whom I will send you, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness concerning me. And you also bear witness, because from the beginning you are with me’ (John 15:26–27). He will be trustworthy, for He is the Spirit of Truth. That is why Christ called Him, not ‘the Holy Spirit,’ but ‘the Spirit of Truth.’”<sup>866</sup>

**Seventh:** through the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts, we look towards the Father, and we do not cease from crying out to Him. The apostle Paul says, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal. 4:6). He fills our hearts with love without which our cry would be in vain, for he also says, “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Rom. 8:9).

**Eighth:** the Holy Spirit grants us knowledge of divine love. The scholar **Origen** says, “We ought to inquire as to how many and various things need to be said about (this) love; and how many great things we need to know about God, for He is Love. Just as ‘no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him’ (Matt. 11:27), so also, no one knows Love except the Son. And in the same way, no one knows the Son who is Love itself, except the Father. In addition to this, since the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father is called Love, He

<sup>864</sup> See St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 11.3: p. 81, amended.

<sup>865</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.17.2 (ANF 1:444; PG 7:930) amended.

<sup>866</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 77 (FOTC 41:330–331).

alone knows the things of God, just as ‘what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?’ (1 Cor. 2:11). Therefore, the Paraclete is the ‘the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father’ (John 15:26), roaming the world in search of worthy souls capable of receiving the greatness of His love, which is the love of God who desires His love to become manifest to them.”<sup>867</sup>

**Ninth:** the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to know the incarnation of the Word. **St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers**, says, “These words ... were spoken to prepare the road for our understanding ... in order that the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is, as it were, the pledge of His assistance, might throw light upon the difficult article of our faith, the Incarnation of God, since our human weakness cannot comprehend the Father and the Son.”<sup>868</sup>

**Tenth: St. Basil the Great** believes that souls that bear the Spirit are enlightened by the Spirit, so that they themselves become spiritual and pass on grace to others. He says, “Just like the sun [the Paraclete] will use the eye that has been cleansed to show you in himself the image of the invisible [i.e., the Father], and in the blessed vision of the image you will see the unspeakable beauty of the archetype ... The Spirit illuminates those who have been cleansed from every stain and makes them spiritual by means of communion with himself. When a ray of light falls upon clear and translucent bodies, they are themselves filled with light and gleam with a light from themselves. Just so are the Spirit-bearing souls that are illuminated by the Holy Spirit: they are themselves made spiritual, and they send forth grace to others.”<sup>869</sup>

#### **431. Who sent the Holy Spirit: the Father or the Son?**

The Holy Spirit was sent from the Father who is the giver of salvation and sanctification. The Spirit is also sent from the Son who paid the price on the cross so that the Spirit can abide in humanity, and so that the righteousness of Christ may be found in humanity.

**St. Ambrose** says, “So both the Father and the Spirit sent the Son; the Father sent Him, for it is written: ‘But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name’ (John 14:26). The Son sent Him, for He said: ‘But when the Paraclete is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth’ (John 15:26). If, then, the Son and the Spirit send each other, as the Father sends, there is no inferiority of subjection, but a community of power.”<sup>870</sup>

He also says, “That this same Comforter is also to be sent by the Father He has already taught, saying, ‘But the Comforter, that Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name’

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<sup>867</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Holy Spirit in Origin the Scholar* (Arabic).

<sup>868</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.33 (FOTC 25:62).

<sup>869</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 9.23, p. 54 (PG 32:109).

<sup>870</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.1.8 (NPNF II/10:136).

(John 14:26). Behold their unity, inasmuch as whom God the Father sends, the Son sends also”<sup>871</sup>

#### 432. Do all enjoy the Holy Spirit to the same extent?

**St. Anthony the Great** says, “This great fiery Spirit that I have received, you also have received. And if you will to receive Him to dwell in you, first offer the labor of the body and the humility of the heart. Raise your thoughts up to heaven night and day and plead with all your hearts for this holy fiery Spirit, and He shall be given to you. For in this manner, Elijah the Tishbite, Elisha, and all the other prophets were able to obtain Him. Do not ponder in your hearts, being double-hearted, and say, ‘Who is able to receive Him?’ Do not allow such thoughts to enter your minds, but with uprightness of heart ask and you will receive.

“And I, your father, strive with you and pray for you to receive Him; for I know that you have denied yourselves in order to make yourselves able to receive Him. For in every age, all those who tend to themselves in this manner will receive the selfsame Spirit who dwells in the upright of heart. And I bear witness of you, that you seek God with an upright heart; so, persist in striving to plead from all your hearts, and He will be given to you.”<sup>872</sup>

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “how much more when an immortal, imperishable, incorruptible soul, labouring under the disease of ignorance, wickedness, unbelief, unconcern, and all the other maladies of sin, comes nevertheless to the Lord, and seeks His help, and fixes its eyes upon His mercy, and desires to receive of Him the grace of the Spirit for its deliverance and salvation and riddance of all wickedness, and all passion, will He not grant more speedily and more readily His healing deliverance, according to His own word, *How much more shall your heavenly Father avenge those that cry unto Him day and night* (Luke 18:7)? And He adds, *Yes, I say unto you, He will avenge them speedily* (Luke 18:8); and in another place He exhorts, *Ask, and it shall be given unto you, for every one that asks, receives, and he that seeks, finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened* (Luke 11:9–10); and at the close He adds, *How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Verily I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as much as he needs* (Luke 11:8).”<sup>873</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “He fills all things with power (see Wisd. of Sol. 1:7), but only those who are worthy participate in him ... he sends out grace that is complete and sufficient

<sup>871</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 2.9.76 (NPNF II/10:233).

<sup>872</sup> St. Anthony the Great, *Letters* 8.

<sup>873</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 4.26: pp. 35–36, amended.

for all. The things that participate in him enjoy him to the extent that their nature allows, not to the extent that his power allows.”<sup>874</sup>

**433. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19)?**

God who grants us His Holy Spirit as a free gift that constantly works within us warns us through the mouth of the apostle Paul not to quench the Spirit; that is, not to stop His work of enlightening us by resisting His work in us. However much we might sin, truly, the Spirit never departs from us. But He grieves for us, and His work in us diminishes when we cease to cooperate with Him.

**St. John Chrysostom** likens the gift of the Holy Spirit to the flame of a lamp or a lantern shining inside a house; if a person opens two doors facing each other, a strong draft will enter and extinguish the flame. So, he says, “For instance, has any one insulted and reviled you? You should shut the mouth; for if you open it, you add force to the wind. Do you not see in houses, when two doors stand directly opposite, and there is a strong wind, if you shut one, and there is no opposite draught, the wind has no power, but the greater part of its force is abated? So also now, there are two doors, your mouth, and his mouth who insults and affronts you; if you shut your mouth, and do not allow a draught on the other side, you have quenched the whole blast; but if you open it, it will not be restrained. Let us not therefore quench [the flame].”<sup>875</sup>

And the oil in this lamp is the working of love, for the fiery Holy Spirit continues to work, aflame within us, so long as our we cooperate with Him in our inner depths, through our love for God and people. But if, in our inner depths, we are closed towards God and people, we lose the oil of love that burns within us. And **St. John Chrysostom** says that when thieves enter to ransack a house, they extinguish the lamp inside it, so that in the darkness they can achieve their goal. Thus, the main strategy of Satan in assaulting a believer’s heart is to destroy the work of the Spirit within him and to deprive him of that work his whole life. **St Basil** says, “he does not remain with those [sinners] who by the instability of their will, easily drive away the grace that they have received.”<sup>876</sup>

**434. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin” (John 16:8)?**

While Peter was talking to Cornelius and those with him, the Holy Spirit pierced their hearts: “The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word ... Then Peter answered,

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<sup>874</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 9.22: p. 52 (PG 32:108–109).

<sup>875</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians* 11 (NPNF I/13:370–371) amended.

<sup>876</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 26.61: p. 100 (PG 32:180D).

‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:44–48). If the Spirit can pierce the heart before baptism, would He not pierce the heart all the more after He dwells in it through the sacrament of Chrismation? His work is to convict a person of sin so that he repents and confesses, and through the sacrament of Repentance and Confession, to have his sins forgiven by the Holy Spirit, who Himself forgives through the justifying blood of Christ: “Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven them ...” (John 20:22).

With both believers and unbelievers, the Holy Spirit does not cover up their sins; on the contrary, He is the light that reveals sin and exposes it to the inner eye, revealing the bitterness of transgression before our hearts; yet at the same time also revealing the work of the cross and the power of God’s irresistible love. From here the Holy Spirit proceeds with our confessions, and attaches them to the shed blood, along with the tears of repentance and the faithful prayers. Instantly, a person is freed of his previous sins, whether through the sacrament of Baptism or the sacrament of Repentance and Confession.<sup>877</sup>

For **St. Augustine**, the greatest sin is lack of faith in Christ the Savior of the world. If one does not believe, one cannot receive forgiveness for his sins. Therefore, remorse for sin means feeling the urge to abandon unbelief in Christ, and thus, it opens the door to forgiveness. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “the words, ‘He will convict the world of sin,’ mean: ‘He will deprive them of all defense and will show that their transgressions are inexcusable.’”<sup>878</sup>

**Convict the world of sin:** the Lord Christ highlights the role the Holy Spirit plays in our feeling of remorse for sin when He says, “because they do not believe” (John 16:9). If sin reigns over the heart, then there is no way to be free of it, except the coming of another king who is able to destroy it. This is faith in Christ who reigns over the heart. Sin reigned and became a source of corruption and squalor; so it became urgently necessary to believe in the Savior who expels corruption and squalor and replaces them with incorruption and holiness. Through sin, humanity broke the law and brought down the curse upon itself; and by faith in Christ who fulfilled the law and bore the curse in our place we are freed from the letter that kills and the curse, we encounter the Spirit, the Life Giver, and we live the blessed life. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “The reproof of sin, then, has been set first ... that is those who are ignorant and persist in unbelief.”<sup>879</sup>

The Holy Spirit alone is able to enter the heart and make sin taste bitter, exposing its true nature; so that the heart becomes capable of enjoying the sweetness of communion with God. He is able to convince the heart, the mind, and the very depths of the soul that happiness,

<sup>877</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *My Holy God* (Arabic, 1967) pp. 12–13.

<sup>878</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John 78* (FOTC 41:341).

<sup>879</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 2* 10.2 (LFHCC 48:444–445).

peace, joy, eternity, and incorruption lie in clinging to the Savior and not to sin; and that the pleasure of fellowship with God cannot compare to any pleasure of sin.

**435. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: “And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of righteousness” (John 16:8)?**

Convicting the world of sin means revealing the truth about the evil the world has committed. This is revealed through Christ, that is, through the cross, for the suffering of Christ the Savior and His crucifixion were for the purpose of making us righteous. It is the Spirit who enlightens our eyes that we may acknowledge our sins and that we may know the power of the death of Christ, the bestower righteousness. The Spirit convicts us of our ignorance of the righteousness of Christ and His holiness. His resurrection and ascension to heaven are evidence of His righteousness. Thus, the Lord ascended to heaven and He sent to us His Spirit to carry the hearts of humanity to the place where Christ is enthroned that we may encounter Him and experience His righteousness within us; that Christ may Himself become our righteousness.

Few people knew Christ’s righteousness until His ascension to heaven. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, according to the divine promise, is proof of the glory of Christ “who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Acts 2:33), and this is evidence of His divine righteousness.

**St. Augustine** wonders why the Lord Christ said that the Holy Spirit convicts of righteousness because He was going to His Father. He answers that the Word in His incarnation and His coming to us from the Father, revealed to the world His mercy upon us; and by His ascension to heaven and His returning to the Father, we ascend with Him to seek what is above where Christ is enthroned. When He sits at the right hand of the Father, He sits as a whole — head and body — for the Church has become His body enjoying the righteousness of Christ, and so has become worthy to sit in heaven at the right hand of God.<sup>880</sup>

**Saint Augustine** says, “And therefore we ought not to deem ourselves separated from that righteousness, which the Lord Himself makes mention of, saying, *Of righteousness, because I go to the Father*. For we too have risen with Christ, and we are with Christ our Head, now for a while by faith and hope; but our hope will be completed in the last resurrection of the dead. But when our hope shall be completed, then shall our justification be completed also. And the Lord who was to complete it showed us in His Own Flesh, (that is, in our Head,) Wherein He rose again and ascended to the Father, what we ought to hope

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<sup>880</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 94.3–5: pp. 672–674.

for. For that thus it is written, *He was delivered for our sins, and rose again for our justification* (Rom. 4:25).<sup>881</sup>

He also says, “when a righteous man is reprov’d, he is reprov’d of sin, and not of righteousness. Since in that divine utterance also, where we read, ‘Be not made righteous over-much’ (Eccles. 7:16), there is notice taken, not of the righteousness of the wise man, but of the pride of the presumptuous. The man, therefore, that becomes “righteous over-much,” by that very excess becomes unrighteous. For he makes himself righteous over-much who says that he has no sin, or who imagines that he is made righteous, not by the grace of God, but by the sufficiency of his own will: nor is he righteous through living righteously, but is rather self-inflated with the imagination of being what he is not.”<sup>882</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘And of justice, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more,’ that is, ‘I have given the example of a blameless life. And my going to the Father is an evidence of this. For, since they were continually charging that He was not of God, and therefore they maintained that He was a sinner and a transgressor of the Law (e.g., John 9:16–34), He meant that the Spirit would deprive them even of this pretext for condemning Him. ‘For, if the supposition that I am not of God proves that I am a transgressor of the Law, when the Spirit proves that I have gone to the Father, and not for a time only, but to abide there (for the words “You will see me no more” clearly have this meaning), what will they say then?’ Notice that their evil suspicion was completely dispelled by these two statements. For the performing of miracles is not the work of a sinner (a sinner, to be sure, is not capable of performing miracles), nor is it the mark of a sinner to be forever with God. ‘So that you can no longer assert that this man is a sinner, or that He is not from God.’”<sup>883</sup>

#### **436. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: “And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of judgment” (John 16:8)?**

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment for He declared that He will say to those on the left: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). In the Bible there are many passages about the Lord Christ being the one who convicts. Why then does He attribute this to the Holy Spirit as if this prerogative were proper to the Spirit? **St. Augustine’s** answer is that the Holy Spirit was poured out into the hearts of the disciples (Rom. 5:5), granting them the love that casts out fear (1 John 4:8) and bestowing upon them the right to rebuke and reproach. The saint continues: “We have frequently said, however, that the operations of the Trinity are inseparable; but the Persons needed to be set forth one by one, that not only without separating Them, but also without

<sup>881</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 94.6: pp. 674 amended.

<sup>882</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 95.2 (NPNF I/7:369).

<sup>883</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 78 (FOTC 41:341–342).

confounding Them together, we may have a right understanding both of Their Unity and Trinity.”<sup>884</sup>

The Holy Spirit convicts of judgment, “**because the ruler of this world is judged**” (John 16:11). The world thought that it had judged Christ and condemned Him; but the Holy Spirit reveals to the faithful that through the cross, it is the enemy of good who is judged and made a spectacle (Col. 2:15). Through the preaching of the cross of Christ, the devil was exposed as a deceiver and destroyer of humanity, and the nations began to reject him and abandon worshipping him. The work of the Holy Spirit affirms that Christ is greater and stronger than the devil, Christ who gave authority to His disciples to trample upon the powers of darkness. Thus, the believer experiences in his daily life the token of authority that is given to him, that he may enjoy its perfection on the Day of Judgment, when the devil will be condemned and humanity will be greatly honored. Humanity occupies the highest echelon of heaven, that from which Satan and all his army fell. Therefore, the verb “**judge**” carries the meaning of continuity, for the victory over the powers of darkness is an ongoing daily work.

**St. Augustine** says, “And therefore of *judgment* too is the world convinced, *because the prince of this world has been judged already*; that is, the devil, the prince of the unrighteous, who in heart are invested only in this world which they love, and therefore are called *the world*; whereas our conversation is in heaven, if we have risen again with Christ. **Therefore as Christ together with us — that is His Body — is One; so the devil with all the ungodly whose head he is, with as it were his own body, is one.** Wherefore as we are not separated from the righteousness, of which the Lord said, *Because I go to the Father*; so the ungodly are not separated from that, judgment, of which He said, *Because the prince of this world has been judged already.*”<sup>885</sup>

And He says, “Therefore the prince of this world, that is, the prince of the darkness thereof, or of unbelievers, out of whose hands that world is rescued, to which it is said, ‘For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord’ (Eph. 5:8); the prince of this world, of whom He elsewhere says, ‘Now the ruler of this world will be cast out’ (John 12:31), is assuredly judged, in as much as he is irrevocably destined to the judgment of everlasting fire.”<sup>886</sup>

Therefore, the Holy Spirit presents us with three important facts that affect our lives: our nature is corrupted by sin; our nature can be restored and imbued with the righteousness of Christ; the judgment of evil is everlasting.

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<sup>884</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 95.1 (NPNF I/7:369).

<sup>885</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament, Volume 2*, trans. R. G. Macmullen (Oxford University Press, 1845) 94.6: pp. 674, amended.

<sup>886</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 95.4 (NPNF I/7:370) amended.



### 437. What concept of freedom does the Holy Spirit grants us?

**St. Macarius the Great** outlines the role of the Holy Spirit in our enjoyment of true freedom:

For St. Macarius, freedom is the liberation of the heart, thought, and behavior of the believer to fly up towards the heavens.

The devil does not remain silent over this liberation; he actively resists it. And aided by the Holy Spirit who lives within him, the believer actively strives against this resistance.

The sign of our freedom is our liberation from the spirit of anxiety and disturbance under any circumstances.

We taste the true sweetness of freedom when we are liberated to move towards the depths, rather than just being content with the literalistic outward appearance of worship.

Worldly people cannot enjoy this freedom, because they are preoccupied with shows of outward religiosity, and choose to be restricted to loving only those things that are passing.

The Holy Spirit grants us the joy of the righteousness of Christ, who covers us so that we are not found naked.

The Day of the Lord will reveal those souls whom the Holy Spirit has made rich as they strove in the spirit of faith.

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “The Christian mind and way of thinking is always in the heavenly frame; they behold as in a mirror the good things of eternity, by reason of their partaking and having the Holy Spirit, by being born of God from above, and being privileged to be children of God in truth and efficacy, and by having arrived, through many conflicts and labours spread over a long time, at a fixed and settled condition of freedom from disturbance and of rest, no longer sifted and wave-tossed by unquiet and vain thoughts ... Not in form or in outward appearance lies the distinguishing mark of Christians. Most men think that the difference which distinguishes themselves from the world consists in a form and in figures; and lo! in mind and frame they are like the world, undergoing the same shaking, and inconstancy of thoughts, and unbelief, and confusion, and helter-skelter as all other men. In outward form and appearance they differ from the world, and in a few points of religious ordinance; but in heart and mind they are bound with earthly bonds, never having acquired rest from God and the peace of the heavenly Spirit in their heart, because they never sought it from God, nor believed that He would vouchsafe these things to them.”<sup>887</sup>

He also says, “*If, it says, being clothed, we shall not be found naked (2 Cor. 5:3), naked, that is, of the communion and in blending of the Holy Spirit, in which alone the faithful soul can find rest ... Let us then strive by faith and virtuous living to gain here that clothing, that*

<sup>887</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 5.4: pp. 40–41, amended.

when we put off the body we may not be found naked, and there be nothing in that day to glorify our flesh. For in proportion as any one has been permitted to become through faith and diligence a partaker of the Holy Spirit, his body also shall be glorified in that day. What the soul has now stored up within, shall then be revealed and displayed outwardly in the body.”<sup>888</sup>

#### **438. What does the Holy Spirit bestow upon the soul when He accompanies it?**

When the Holy Spirit befriends the soul of the believer, He lifts the veil from before its face, so that it sees its heavenly crucified Bridegroom. It gazes upon Him, and He in turn shines His splendor and light upon it.

The Holy Spirit grants the soul trust in its Bridegroom who was crucified for it, and it loves Him and desires to be crucified with Him; always looking forward to dying with the One who died for it.

As the Holy Spirit accompanies the soul in its journey, He grants it the spirit of power, which enables it to defy the devil, escape from the darkness of desires, and be completely freed from sin.

With each morning, the soul is renewed, sanctified, and grows in faith and knowledge, becoming worthy of eternal life and of sitting as a queen at the right hand of the heavenly King.

As the Holy Spirit accompanies the soul in its journey, He builds it into a holy temple, in which He dwells (1 Cor. 3:16).

“The face of the soul is unveiled, and it gazes upon the heavenly Bridegroom face to face in a spiritual light that cannot be described, mingling with Him in all fulness of assurance, being conformed to His death, ever looking with great desire to die for Christ, and trusting with assurance to receive by the Spirit a perfect deliverance from sin and from the darkness of the passions; in order that having been cleansed by the Spirit, sanctified in soul and body, it may be permitted to become a clean vessel to receive the heavenly unction and to entertain the true King, even Christ; and then it is made meet for eternal life, being henceforward a clean dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>889</sup>

#### **439. When will the Spring season of Resurrection begin and proclaim the hidden glory?**

**St. Macarius** likens our life in the Lord to the lives of those who live in very cold lands. They see around them trees that lose all their beauty and their fruits in winter and appear to

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<sup>888</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 5.7–8: pp. 51–52, amended.

<sup>889</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 10.4: p. 78, amended.

be dead. Then, as spring arrives, the trees become covered with new leaves, flowers, and fruits within a short period of time. Their life is hidden in the winter; then in the spring what was hidden is revealed. Likewise, in the springtide of the general resurrection, the work of the Holy Spirit that was hidden will become manifest as we journey towards heaven.

Even the dead and decomposed bodies will be enlightened and will enjoy the power of the Holy Spirit, who becomes to them a covering, food, drink, elation, and joy. Whatever they have acquired in their inner selves during their journey in the world will become outwardly manifest in the eternal life. And as the glory of the Spirit radiated from the face of Moses so that none could bear to gaze upon him, so shall our bodies be.<sup>890</sup>

We ought to strive here, in this life, asking the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, so that we are not found naked on the day of the Lord, but rather find our bodies covered by divine glory and filled with the glory of the Spirit. **St. Macarius** says, “Every one of us therefore ought to strive, and take pains, and be diligent in all virtues, and to believe, and to seek from the Lord that the inward man may be made partaker of that glory here and now, and that the soul may have **fellowship in that sanctity of the Spirit**, in order that we may be cleansed from the defilements of wickedness and may have at the resurrection wherewithal to clothe our bodies as they rise naked, and to robe their uncomeliness, and enliven them, and refresh them in the kingdom of heaven ... Then shall the bodies of these be arrayed with divine glory from their good works, and shall be full of **the glory of the Spirit**, which they had in their souls even here; and thus being glorified in the divine light, and caught up into heaven *to meet the Lord in the air* (1 Thess. 4:17), as it is written, *we shall ever be with the Lord*, rejoicing with Him to ages without end. Amen.”<sup>891</sup>

**St. Macarius** says, “That heavenly fire of the Godhead, which Christians receive in their hearts now in this present world, that same fire which now ministers inwardly in the heart becomes outward when the body is dissolved, and recomposes the members, and causes a resurrection of the members that had been dissolved. As the fire that ministered on the altar at Jerusalem lay buried in a pit during the time of the captivity, and the selfsame fire, when peace came and the captives returned home, was renewed, as it were, and ministered in its accustomed manner (2 Macc. 1:19), so now the heavenly fire works upon this body that is so near us, which after its dissolution turns to mire, and renews it, and raises up the bodies that had decayed. The inward fire that now dwells in the heart becomes then external, and causes a resurrection of the body.”<sup>892</sup>

<sup>890</sup> See St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 5.8–10: pp. 52–54.

<sup>891</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 5.12: pp. 54–55, amended.

<sup>892</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 11.1: p. 79.

#### **440. What do the fire of the Holy Spirit and the fire of the world offer you?**

The psalmist says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4). **St. Macarius the Great** clarifies how our hearts’ desires direct both visible physical fire and the invisible fire of the Holy Spirit:

The righteous Three Young Men were cast into the midst of the fiery furnace; but by the divine fire burning in their hearts and working in their thoughts, the visible fiery furnace was transformed into coolness. The furnace could neither burn them nor destroy them; instead it glorified them, and the king saw a fourth person like a son of god embracing them and walking with them.

When the children of Israel worshiped idols, they forced Aaron to collect their golden vessels and ornaments. Aaron told Moses that when the golden ornaments were cast into the fire, a golden calf came out. Their inner intention was to commit idolatry, and the fire fulfilled that intention for them by producing the golden calf that they worshipped openly (Ex. 32:24).

The hearts of the three young men longed for paradise and the fiery furnace was transformed for them into a kind of paradise. The people of Israel longed for the worship of the calf Apis, which was in Egypt, and the fire molded the golden calf for them to worship.

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “the Three Children, because of their righteousness, while they were in the visible fire, had in their hearts the divine and heavenly fire ministering within their thoughts and exerting its energy in them. That very fire showed itself outside them. It stood between them and the visible fire, and restrained it, that it should not burn the righteous, nor do them any manner of hurt ...” In like manner, when the mind of Israel and their thoughts were bent upon departing far from the living God and turning to idolatry, Aaron was compelled to tell them to bring their golden vessels and ornaments. Then the gold and the vessels, which they cast into the fire, became an idol, and the fire, as it were, copied their intention. That was a wonderful thing. They, secretly, in purpose and thought, determined upon idolatry, and the fire accordingly fashioned the vessels thrown upon it into an idol, and then they committed idolatry openly (Ex. 32:24). As, then, the Three Children, having thoughts of righteousness, received in themselves the fire of God, and worshipped the Lord in truth, so now faithful souls receive that divine and heavenly fire, in this world, in secret; and that fire forms a heavenly image upon their humanity.”<sup>893</sup>

And he says, “As the fire formed the golden vessels, and they became an idol [Ex. 32:24], so does the Lord, who copies the intentions of faithful and good souls, and forms an image even now in the soul according to their desire, and at the resurrection it appears external to them, and glorifies their bodies within and without. But as the bodies of some are at this time decayed for a season, and dead, and dissolved, so also are their thoughts decayed by the action of Satan, and are dead to the life indeed, and buried in mire and earth; for their soul is

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<sup>893</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 11.2: pp. 79–80.

perished. As, therefore, the Israelites cast the golden vessels into the fire, and they became an idol, so now the man has given over his pure and good thoughts to evil, and they have been buried in the mire of sin, and are become an idol. And what shall a man do to discover them, and discern them, and cast them out of his own fire ? **Here the soul has need of a divine lamp, even of the Holy Spirit, who sets in order the darkened house.** It needs the bright sun of righteousness, which enlightens and rises upon the heart, as an instrument to win the battle.”<sup>894</sup>

#### **441. Can our souls abide in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit abide in us?**

**St Basil the Great** says, “the Spirit is often called the place of those being made holy ... So, the Spirit is truly the place of the saints, and the saint is the proper place for the Holy Spirit, as he offers himself for indwelling with God and is called a temple of God [1 Cor. 6:19].”<sup>895</sup>

Also **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For God bestowed [the mind upon us] that it might learn and receive help from Him, not that it should consider itself sufficient unto itself. For eyes are beautiful and useful, but should they choose to see without light, their beauty profits them nothing; nor yet their natural force, but even does harm. So if you mark it, **any soul also, if it choose to see without the Spirit, becomes even an impediment unto itself.**”<sup>896</sup>

And **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “For he is our true baptism, and for this reason we remain always baptized, for the Holy Spirit is within us always, and no sin can strip us of our baptism—neither adultery, nor theft, nor fornication, nor false testimony nor any action of this sort: only the denial of God and consorting with demons can do this, for in such cases the Holy Spirit really does depart, for he does not consent to remain in a place where Satan dwells.”<sup>897</sup>

#### **442. Was the human being deprived of wings with which to fly?**

Birds have physical wings with which to fly in the air, but human beings were given the Holy Spirit to fly up as though to heaven. **St. Macarius the Great** says, “When God created Adam, He did not provide him with bodily wings, like the birds, but He had designed for him the wings of the Holy Spirit, those wings which He purposes to give him at the resurrection,

<sup>894</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 11.3: pp. 80–81, amended.

<sup>895</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans., Stephen Hildebrand (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011) 26.62: p. 101.

<sup>896</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 7.9 (NPNF I/12:38).

<sup>897</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, “On the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit” in Sebastian Brock and M. A. Mathai Remban eds., *Philoxenus of Mabbug* (Kottayam, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI), undated): p. 47.

to lift him up and catch him away wherever the Spirit pleases which holy souls even now are privileged to have, and fly up in mind to the heavenly frame of thought. For Christians have a different world of their own, another table, other raiment, another sort of enjoyment, other fellowship, another frame of mind ... The power of these things it is their privilege to have now within them in their souls, through the Holy Spirit; therefore at the resurrection their bodies also will be permitted to share those eternal blessings of the Spirit, and will be mixed with that glory, which their souls in this life had known by experience.”<sup>898</sup>

#### **443. Before the Fall, were Adam and Eve clothed with the glory of God for a cloak?**

**St. Macarius the Great** answers, “As in the case of the prophets, the Spirit wrought in them and taught them, and was within them, and appeared to them outwardly, so with Adam. The Spirit, when it pleased Him, was with him, and taught him, and suggested, ‘Speak thus,’ and he said it. For the Word was all things to him, and so long as he abode in the commandment he was a friend of God. And yet why should we be surprised if in spite of such conditions of existence he transgressed the commandment? Those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit still have the thoughts of nature, and have the will to comply with them. Thus Adam, though present with God in paradise, transgressed of himself by his own will, and obeyed the evil side. Still, even after the transgression, he had knowledge.”<sup>899</sup>

#### **444. Is the Holy Spirit with the hosts of heaven?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “David said: ‘The stream of the river makes glad the city of God’ (Ps. 46:4). For neither is that city, the heavenly Jerusalem, watered by the channel of any earthly river, but that Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Fount of Life, by a short draught of Whom we are satiated, seems to flow more abundantly among those celestial Thrones, Dominions and Powers, Angels and Archangels, rushing in the full course of the seven virtues of the Spirit. For if a river rising above its banks overflows, how much more does the Spirit, rising above every creature, when He touches the, as it were, low-lying fields of our minds, make glad that heavenly nature of the creatures with the larger fertility of His sanctification.”<sup>900</sup>

#### **445. If the Holy Spirit is described as God’s “power” (Acts 1:8), does this contradict His being a divine Hypostasis?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “In this place he used the word Power, and implied the Spirit. For as the Father is Power, so, too, the Son is Power, and the Holy Spirit is Power. Of the Son you have read that Christ is ‘the Power of God and the Wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:24). We read,

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<sup>898</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 5.11: p. 54, amended.

<sup>899</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 12.8: p. 92.

<sup>900</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.16.177–178 (NPNF II/10:114).

too, that the Father is Power, as it is written: ‘You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power of God’ (Matt. 26:64).”<sup>901</sup>

#### **446. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the renewal of the Church?**

By the **renewal of the Church** we mean its continuous growth, for the Church is a living being that is constantly growing, not a static being. She bears the streams of the Holy Spirit who is working in her — growth bursting with life. These fiery streams burn and invigorate, through which we preserve the past without stagnation, and upon which we build solutions to new contemporary problems. For the mystery of her renewal is the indwelling of the Lord Christ in us and the coming of His Holy Spirit in our inner depths.<sup>902</sup>

#### **447. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our continuous sanctification and our steadfastness in the Holy God?**

In baptism the Holy Spirit of God severed us from the wild and fruitless olive tree and grafted us into Christ Jesus the new olive tree (Rom. 11:17), and so transported us out of our barren life and into the holy life. But the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop at this point; He makes us steadfast in the Root (the Holy Son) so that the sap of the holy life can flow from the Root through the branches. And the branches do not remain the same as they are, but are always growing in the Root and bearing much fruit. This is the mystery of steadfastness, which in fact is the fullness of the gift of the Holy Spirit, who pledges our spiritual growth, pledges the growth of our new man in the sanctified life, that we may reach the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ.

The Lord Christ taught us that we need to be steadfast in Him through the Holy Spirit: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4–6).

And the apostles drew our attention to the work of God by which we are adopted in Him, in His Son Jesus Christ through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, by saying, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:21–22); “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you ... and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:27); “And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24).

<sup>901</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.1.19 (NPNF II/10:117).

<sup>902</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Holy Spirit Between the New Birth and Continuous Renewal* (Arabic), second edition (2003): p. 9.

On this matter **St. Ambrose** says, “And then remember that you received the seal of the Spirit; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and godliness, and the spirit of holy fear (Isa. 11:2), and preserved what you received. God the Father sealed you, Christ the Lord strengthened you, and gave the earnest of the Spirit in your heart (2 Cor. 5:5), as you have learned in the lesson from the Apostle. The people cleansed [by baptism], rich with these adornments, hasten to the altar of Christ.”<sup>903</sup>

#### **448. What role does the Holy Spirit play in consecrating the heart to God?**

In the past, physical fire transformed the golden vessels of the people of Israel into the idol of the golden calf, which they had continued to worship covertly in their hearts. Thus was their innermost intention revealed and their hidden idol exposed (Ex. 32:24). And in the days of Nebuchadnezzar when the three holy youths entered the visible fiery furnace because of their righteousness, their hidden God, who was working in their hearts, was manifest in the form of one like the Son of God walking with them in the furnace, embracing them and protecting them from the visible fire. In like manner God sent His divine fire, His Holy Spirit, the divine Hypostasis, to manifest the Lord Christ who is hidden in our hearts.

The work of the fiery Holy Spirit within us is to seal us with the **royal seal** in the depths of the inner soul, so that we bear the image of the Lord Christ within us, and so that the soul and the body and all their capabilities and actions belong to the Lord. This is the concept of consecration: we carry the divine seal, proclaiming that all that is in us is His.

The apostle Paul speaks of this divine seal, saying, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:21–22); “In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ...” (Eph. 1:13–14); “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30); “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal ...” (2 Tim. 2:19).

In the Constitutions of the Apostles we find, “Now concerning baptism, O bishop, or presbyter, we have already given direction, and we now say ... you shall beforehand anoint the person with the holy oil, and afterward baptize him with the water, and in the conclusion shall seal him with the ointment.”<sup>904</sup>

**St. Cyprian** said, “only that which was lacking was supplied by Peter and John, after having prayed for them and imposed hands upon them [Acts 8:14–17] that the Holy Spirit should be invoked and infused into them. This now also is being done among us that. those who are baptized in the Church are offered to the bishops of the Church and, through our

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<sup>903</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 7–8.42–43 (NPNF II/10:322–323) amended.

<sup>904</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7.2.22 (ANF 7:469).



prayer and the imposition of hands, may receive the Holy Spirit and be signed with the seal of the Lord.”<sup>905</sup> He also says: “Behold how you have become partakers in the priestly name of Christ and how the seal of communion with the Holy Spirit was given to you.”

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “The gates that are in your head are stamped with the stamp of the Spirit ... The King has written you as his epistle, and has sealed it with seals of fire: do not let strangers read it and mar its letters.”<sup>906</sup>

The purpose of this sacred seal, the seal of the Holy Spirit, is to make us holy to Lord, a house of God consecrated to Him, as the apostle Paul says: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ... therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:19–20). This seal of fire consecrates the soul as well as the body so that a person can truly become the spiritual bride of Christ the heavenly King. And as **St. Macarius the Great** says, “The five rational senses of the soul, if they receive grace from above and the sanctification of the Spirit, are really wise virgins, receiving the wisdom of the grace from above.”<sup>907</sup>

<sup>905</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 73.9 (FOTC 51:273–274).

<sup>906</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Rhythms: Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian*, trans., J. B. Morris (London: John Henry Parker; F. and J. Rivington, 1847) footnote 6b: p. 266.

<sup>907</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 4.7: p. 24.



## Book 3

# *The Church:* **The Kingdom of God**

1. The Church: The Kingdom of God
2. The Heavenly High Priest and the Church
3. The Church as a Heavenly Wedding Feast
4. The Unique Work of the Church
5. The Church: House of Salvation
6. The Eminence of the Church
7. The Church and Daily Renewal
8. The Church and Society  
    The Role of Women in Society and Church
9. The Person of the Church
10. The Mystery of the House of God
11. The Iconostasis
12. Coptic Art and Symbolism
13. The Holy Utensils
14. The Church Nave
15. The Church Belfry
16. The Holy Sacraments
17. The Sacrament of Baptism

On the Rites of Baptism

The Rites of Holy Baptism

18. The Sacrament of Chrismation
19. The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession
20. The Sacrament of the Eucharist

On the Main Features of the Coptic Liturgy

21. The Sacrament of Priesthood
22. The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony
23. Unction of the Sick
24. The Coptic Church and the Monastic Movement

## 1

**The Church: The Kingdom of God**

The Church was in God's mind from before the fall of Adam and Eve, and the three Hypostasis were and will always be seeking the salvation of humanity. From God's perspective, humanity has become like a lost pearl because of sin since humanity was created according to the image of God. God still cares for His beloved humanity and His Church as He desires to establish His kingdom on earth by transforming the Church to be heaven when she receives her eternal inheritance with Christ, being His holy bride. Members of the Church become among the heavenly hosts and they even become the center of their attention and marvel as they see humanity which was created from dust and were deceived by the devil who envies them for the great blessings they have received from God. No one ever imagined what they have enjoyed at the moment and what they will receive as an eternal inheritance.

**449. What do we mean by “the Church is God’s kingdom on earth”?**

In Book 2 of this Catechism, Chapter 6 on “The Exalted Nature of the Human Creation,” we saw that God the King of kings created man to make him a king who has freewill. He has authority primarily over his own heart and also over the fish, birds and all the animals and creatures on earth (Gen. 1:26), not so that he may be prideful and arrogant but so that he may be an ambassador of God who is the lover of mankind and servant of all.

Many people wonder, “What would have happened if Adam and Eve did not listen to the devil’s advice and deception?” Undoubtedly, if corruption did not enter the human race, earth would have been transformed into heaven where love, holiness and joy rules and not evil and oppression, and humans would have been like the angels of God.

Corruption has entered the human race, and as St. Augustine says that even an infant no longer accepts for his mother to breastfeed any other infant with him and would get very angry if he sees another baby trying to share his toys with him.

Despite this, among humans there were those who lifted up their eyes to God, singing, “**I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.**” The believer prays this verse in the Prime Hour that he may experience it by day and by night.

Since humanity lost its status as kings and queens both collectively and individually, the King of kings came to restore this royal life to them, both at the level of the individual and collectively. For this reason, St. John the evangelist does not say, “He made me a king” but “**He has made us kings and priests to His God and Father**” (Rev. 1:6).

When we talk about the Church as Christ’s kingdom on earth, we refer to the Church which is one’s heart, mind, emotions and his entire being, and also one’s house and family, as well as the Church which worships the Lord and whose members enjoy being the children

of God through Baptism and Eucharist, while partaking with the heavenly hosts in their joy in the Lord and their unceasing praise and prayers for the salvation of the whole world and its open heart for everyone even those who persecute her.

#### **450. Who builds the Church and guards it?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “As for the motive of this baptism of the Lord, the Lord Himself explains it in these words: ‘permit it to be now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:15). God having done so much, by a divine favor, that, for the construction of his Church, after the patriarchs, the prophets, the angels, the only Son of God descended and come to baptism, do we not recognize with what truth How divinely has it been said of the Church: ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it’ (Ps. 127:1). And nothing surprising that man cannot build, since he cannot keep: ‘Unless the Lord guards the city the watchman stays a wake in vain.’ Thus speaks some psalm (Ps. 126:1). I dare say, however, that man can not engage in a way unless he has the Lord to go before him; so it is written, ‘You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him’ (Deut. 13:4).”<sup>908</sup>

#### **451. What are the characteristics of this bride and what is her relationship with the Bridegroom the King of kings like?**

She is the icon of her Bridegroom, the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ. She bears Him within her and walks in the Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Her most important traits are:

**First: Enjoying the spirit of holiness.** Her Bridegroom is the Son of God, who is Holy together with His good Father and the Holy Spirit. In His transfiguration, it was said: “**He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light**” (Matt. 17:2). The white clothes resemble the Church of Christ who is united with Him as though He is clothed in her. This Church has become as white as the light because of her Bridegroom who dwells in her, and is the Sun of Righteousness who illuminates her, making her shine with light. We have already seen that these clothes refer to the eternal wedding where the bride is also arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright (Rev. 19:8) as she goes into the wedding in a great procession in the presence of the twenty four presbyters as **St. Augustine** says, “It is said: ‘**though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow**’ (Isa. 1:18). Of these people, Christ makes for Himself a garment without spot or blemish (Eph. 5:27). For this reason, when He was on the mountain and His clothes turned as white as the light (Matt. 17:2), which refers to the church that has been purified of sin.”

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<sup>908</sup> See St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 2.84: pp. 58–59.

**St. Cyril the Great** says: “For the heaven is small in quantity, yet forthwith it seizes upon the whole mass, and quickly communicates to it its own properties. And the word of God operates in us in a similar manner: for when admitted within us, it makes us holy and without blame, and pervading our mind and heart, it renders us spiritual.”<sup>909</sup>

The source of the Church’s holiness and perfection is Christ’s resurrected life and her unity with Christ who is risen. The Church is called to live in dignity and glory as though perfection has already been attained. **Origen** explains that Christ is the Life of the Church as He says, “And the fact that the Church is the aggregate of many souls and has received the pattern of her life from Christ ...”<sup>910</sup> He again says, “**‘Rise up my love, my fair one and come away. for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth’** (Song. 2:12). We can say this passage is a sort of prophecy given to the Church to call her to the promised blessings of the future. She is told to ‘arise’ as though the consummation of the age were already reached and time of the resurrection come. And because this word of command forthwith seals the work of resurrection, she is invited into the Kingdom, as being now, by virtue of the resurrection, brighter and more splendid.”<sup>911</sup>

**Second: The Church’s pride in the spirit of spiritual royalty.** She follows the example of her Bridegroom in that she does not ask for any vain authority. When the multitudes wanted to take Him to make Him a king, He departed to the mountain by Himself alone (John 6:15). When Pilate asked Him, “Are you the king of the Jews,” He did not deny that He is a King and said to Him, “it is as you say” (Matt 27:11, Mark 15:2). At the same time, He corrected Pilate’s understanding of Christ’s Kingdom, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). If Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, the Church as well as the believers should realize that they are not of this world, so they ought not to occupy themselves with worldly politics or even church politics.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “When you hear some good news, do not take heed to it and do not even rely on it as though it was true. Likewise, if you hear bad news, do not be afraid of it, for it cannot endure forever. In this age, good and bad news come and go like day and night, they chase each other like that, but have no authority to stay in one place or leave it, for Wisdom desires them to be like that. Let not your thoughts be troubled so that some news upset you and other news rejoice you. But let this news come and go, and you trust in God and in the hope of our faith as the Psalmist says, ‘the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night, the Lord shall preserve you from all evil’ (Ps. 121:6–7).”<sup>912</sup>

And so, the Bridegroom directs the eyes of His bride to search her depths rather than outside of her, thus he tells His disciples, “indeed the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke

<sup>909</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 98: p. 458.

<sup>910</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* 2.6 (ACW 26:143).

<sup>911</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* 3.14 (ACW 26:239, 245).

<sup>912</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, Letter 26.

17:21). He calls us to be kings that we may walk as kings, children of the King of kings, having this heavenly royalty within us, so that we may live in holiness and dignity without desiring any of the worldly matters. Thus, we do not allow these desires to rule over our hearts, our thoughts, or our emotions nor do we allow Satan to have any authority over us, since Christ Himself granted us a special authority, “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

**Third: Taking Heed to the Purity of the inner temple:** The heavenly Bridegroom was occupied with sanctifying the temple as Scripture says, “Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the many chargers and the seats of those who sold doves. and He said to them “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but have made it a den of thieves” (Matt. 21:12–13). Imagine if Christ were to go into a church to find a fundraising party where a widow who only has two mites would not be allowed to enter, what would He do? St. Peter said to the lame man, “**Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk**” (Acts 3:6). Is there a church today with no silver or gold, and is instead offering Jesus of Nazareth who supplies all needs?

**St. Jerome** says that the priests used to abuse the fact that all Jews used to come from all over the world to celebrate the Passover, so they turned the temple into a marketplace. They let the moneychangers do their business in lending people money so they can buy sacrifices. These loans were offered without any interest (since the law prohibits it), but instead were offered in exchange to some gifts, which were pretty much a sort of interest.

It is a truly painful sight for God’s temple to lose its main goal and for the priests to deviate from their spiritual duty, and turn their message to be exclusively collecting money as **Origen** says, “So, if anyone sells, he is cast out, especially if he sells doves ... For if I display before the common crowd what the Holy Spirit has revealed and entrusted to me, I sell it for a price and do not teach without payment, what else am I doing except selling doves, that is, the Holy Spirit? When I sell the Spirit, I am cast out of God’s temple.”<sup>913</sup> The shepherds lose their pastoral work when they use the word of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a way to do business.

**St. Jerome** says, “Jesus daily enters the Temple of the Father and expels from his own Church all such bishops, priests, and deacons, as well as laymen and the whole crowd. He holds them all guilty of a single crime, namely, of selling and buying ... Now let each one understand also concerning himself what we have said about the churches. For the apostle Paul says: ‘You are the temple of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in you.’ May there not be business in the house of our heart. May there not be the commerce of selling and buying. May there not be desire for donations, lest an angry and stern Jesus enter and cleanse his own

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<sup>913</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 38.5 (FOTC 94:158).



temple in no other way but with a whip that he administers in order to make a house of prayer out of a den of thieves and a house of business.”<sup>914</sup>

**St. Jerome** also comments on the cleansing of the temple and the overturning of the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves by saying, “Most people think that the greatest sign is that Lazarus was raised from the dead, that the man blind from birth received the light, that the Father’s voice was heard at the Jordan, that he was transfigured on the mountain and showed the glory of the triumphant one. But to me it seems that among all the signs that he did, this one is more wonderful, that one man, who was at that time so contemptible and lowly that he was later crucified, could expel such a great multitude at the crack of a single whip, with the scribes and Pharisees raging against him, seeing that their profits were ruined; that one man could overturn their tables and wreck their chairs and do the other things that an infinite army could not have done. For some sort of heavenly fire was radiating from his eyes, and the majesty of divinity was shining in his face, so that none of the priests dared to lay hands on Him.”<sup>915</sup>

**Fourth: Turning children into leaders in Christ Jesus.** The Heavenly Bridegroom cared to elevate the status of children and called us to learn from their simplicity, humility, and faith in their parents, until we enter the kingdom of heaven. He says, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3) It was marvelous for them to see the Lord calling on a child to stand in their midst as a model for the kingdom of heaven. Romans used to despise children, so they had no rights protecting them, causing parents to be violent in dealing with them. Childhood suffered a lot among the gentiles and even among the Jews; women and children were not counted during the census in Numbers 1–2.

On the other hand, as the Lord was elevating humanity into a spiritually mature life, He presented children as a model for this life that is able to take them into the kingdom. He was thus elevating humanity above the bodily maturity which is dependent on age to the inner soul’s maturity which is independent of age. I wish we can spread the spirit of leadership among our children, so that we do not control them like they were chess pieces when they are young, and then they repay us back in the same way by controlling us when they get the chance.

**St. John Chrysostom** warns parents from neglect in raising their children, highlighting the danger of this sin and went as far as deeming it as murder. He says,<sup>916</sup> “Your children will always be sufficiently wealthy if they receive from you a good upbringing that is able to order their moral life and behavior. Thus, strive not to make them rich, but rather to make them **pious masters of their passions**, rich in virtues. Teach them not to think up illusory

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<sup>914</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 3.21.12–13 (FOTC 117:236–237).

<sup>915</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 3.21.15–16 (FOTC 117:238).

<sup>916</sup> St. John Chrysostom—*Lessons on Education Part 1*, Inner Light Productions, February 20, 2013. Online at <http://www.innerlightproductions.com/2013/02/st-john-chrysostom-lessons-on-education.html>

needs, reckoning their worth according to worldly standards. **Attentively watch their deeds,** their acquaintances, and their attachments—and do not expect any mercy from God if you do not fulfill this duty ...

“We spare neither labors nor means in order to teach our children secular sciences, so that they can serve well the earthly authorities. Only the knowledge of the holy Faith, the service of the Heavenly King are a matter of indifference to us. We allow them to attend spectacles but we care little whether they go to Church and stand within it reverently. We demand an account from them of what they learned in their secular institutes—why do we not demand an account from them of what they heard in the Lord's house? ...

“If good fathers would strive to give their children a good upbringing, then we would need neither laws, judges, courts, nor punishments. Executioners exist because we have no morality.”

**Fifth: Do not hurt the feelings of anyone, even sinners.** The Heavenly Bridegroom did not hurt the feelings of sinners, but lovingly guided them to repentance. He told the sinful woman who was caught in adultery, “‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more’” (John 8:10–11). Some people think that this woman was treated very cruelly and violently, so He considered this as enough chastisement for her.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “When Christ tells the adulterous woman, ‘Neither do I condemn you,’ He is telling her, ‘I am the only one who is able to judge you, for I alone am the Judge but I have come to save the world and not to condemn it, so I will not condemn you.’ When He tells her, ‘Go,’ He was telling her, ‘Go and be at peace for your adultery has been taken away from you since I have taken away your sins so go!’ And when tells her to sin no more, He meant to tell her, ‘I ask you not to sin again. From now on, do not go back to this sin like a dog that returns to its own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22) so that you may not be punished.’”

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “He who changed the nature of the five loaves into the nature of a multitude, and gave a voice to the irrational nature of an ass, and converted the harlot to chastity, and prepared the nature of burning fire to bedew those who were in the furnace, and tamed for Daniel the nature of savage lions; He is able also to change the soul, which was waste and had become savage, from sin into His own goodness and loving-kindness and peace, by the holy and good Spirit of promise.”<sup>917</sup>

**St. Augustine** also says, “We have heard the voice of justice (John 8:7–11), let us also hear the voice of clemency ... For He, who had driven back her adversaries with the tongue of justice, raising the eyes of mercy towards her and tells her, ‘Neither will I condemn you. Go and sin no more.’ Let them take heed, then, who love His gentleness in the Lord, and let

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<sup>917</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 44.2: p. 276.

them fear His truth. For The Lord is sweet and right. You love Him in that He is sweet but fear Him in that He is right ... The Lord is merciful and pitiful. So He is, certainly. Add yet further, Long-suffering; add yet further, and very pitiful: but fear what comes last, And true. For those whom He now bears with as sinners, He will judge as despisers. The Lord is gentle, the Lord is long-suffering, the Lord is pitiful; but the Lord is also just, the Lord is also true. He bestows on you space for correction; but you love the delay of judgment more than the amendment of your ways. Have you been a bad man yesterday? Today, be a good man. Have you gone on in your wickedness today? But why do you assume that tomorrow will come? As if He, who has promised you pardon through repentance, promised you also a longer life. How do you know what tomorrow may bring forth?"<sup>918</sup>

**Sixth: Praying for all humanity.** Even though Christ was very popular, He never involved Himself in politics and likewise all church leaders as well as all the congregation members should pray for everyone and not concern themselves with the politics of this world.

**Seventh: Outreaching to everyone** just like the Heavenly Bridegroom who came to our world in the flesh to visit humanity. Likewise, we should outreach to everyone in the spirit of love and wisdom that they may join us in the kingdom of heaven through the Holy Spirit.

**Eighth: Partaking of the divine nature.** The Apostle Peter says, "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:4). We are not called to merely acquire some virtues but to unite with Christ and imitate Him so that we may acquire His love, His holiness, His longsuffering, His meekness and His simplicity. For this reason St. Peter says, "... you may be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." As long as we are in the world, how can we escape corruption? The only way is by uniting with the Holy Lord and by His imitation. We should imitate Him so the corruption of the world may not harm us. It is a precious calling for us to reflect the rays of the divine attributes such as love, holiness, and meekness that we may be like Him (1 John 3:2).

**St. Ambrose says,** "How great is Christ's love! For He has granted His disciples to be called by His titles. He says, 'I am the Light of the world' and then grants this title of His to His disciples saying, 'You are the light of the world.' He says, 'I am the Bread of Life.' And we, though many, are one bread. (1 Cor. 10:17). He says, 'I am the True Vine' and then tells you, 'I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality' (Jer. 2:21). Christ is the rock, 'For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:4) and did not keep this title from his disciple who is also a rock as he had the strength of a rock and the steadfast faith. Your rock is your work and your spirit, on which you build your house so that no storm may destroy it. Your rock is the faith which is the steadfastness

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<sup>918</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 33:7 (NPNF I/7:199) amended.

of the Church so **if you were a rock, you are a church!** And if you are in the Church, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

**Ninth: Do not accept any person who wants to replace the Heavenly Bridegroom.** **St. Augustine** says, “You see that he who loves any person in place of Christ is adultery ... “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (John 3:29) ... Be chaste, love the bridegroom ... Now I see many adulterers who desire to get possession of the bride, purchased at so great a price, loved while deformed that she might be made fair, having been purchased and delivered and adorned by such an one; and those adulterers strive with their words to be loved instead of the bridegroom ... Let us hear the friend of the bridegroom, not the adulterers against the bridegroom; let us hear one jealous, but not for himself.”<sup>919</sup>

“John the Baptist says I rejoice not because of my own voice, but because of the Bridegroom's voice. I am in the place of hearer; He, of speaker: I am as one that must be enlightened, He is the light; I am as the ear, He is the word. Therefore the friend of the Bridegroom stands and hears Him. Why does he stand? Because he falls not. How does he not fall? Because he is humble. See him standing on solid ground; I am not worthy to loose His sandal strap. You do well to be humble; deservedly you do not fall; deservedly you stand, and hear Him, and rejoice greatly for the Bridegroom's voice.”<sup>920</sup>

“What is his joy? To rejoice at the Bridegroom's voice. It is fulfilled in me, I have my grace; more I do not assume to myself, lest also I lose what I have received ... so that man may understand, then, that he ought not to rejoice of his own wisdom, but of the wisdom which he has received from God. Let him ask nothing more, and he loses not what he found. For many, in that they affirmed themselves to be wise, became fools. The apostle convicts them, and says of them, ‘because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them ...’ so they should not attribute to themselves that which they did not have from themselves, but to Him from whom they had received it. Therefore, what God gave freely, He took from the unthankful. John would not be this; he would be thankful: he confessed to have received, and declared that he rejoiced for the Bridegroom's voice, saying, Therefore this my joy is fulfilled.”<sup>921</sup>

**Tenth: Looking forward to the second coming of the Lord.** **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “For it is them who wait for the return of their Lord from the marriage feast and sit at the heavenly portals with sleepless eyes, in order that the King of Glory, when he comes back from the marriage feast, may enter with their help into that supercelestial blessedness. Hence, as the hymn in the Psalms (Ps. 18:6) would have it, the Bridegroom, having emerged as from the bridal chamber, espoused the virgin—that is to say, us— in the mystic rebirth, even

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<sup>919</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 13.10 (NPNF I/7:90) amended.

<sup>920</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 13.10 (NPNF I/7:90) amended.

<sup>921</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 14.3 (NPNF I/7:94).

though she had been prostituted to idols, and restored her nature to virginal incorruptibility. Since, then, the marriage rites have already been carried out and the Church has been taken by the Word as His Bride (just as John says: ‘He who has the bride is the bride groom’ [John 3:29]), and the Bride has been taken into the inner chamber of the mysteries and the angels are awaiting the return of the King of Glory as He leads His Church as a bride, preparing her nature to be ready for His grace. And the point is that in our living we are to become like them, in order that just as they, dwelling far from evil and error, are ready to greet their Lord at His coming, so we also, sitting wakeful by the gates of our dwellings, may render ourselves for may render ourselves ready to hear when he arrives and knocks at the door, “for,” he says, ‘blessed are those servants whom their Lord finds doing this when he comes’ (Luke 12:37, 43). Since then, it is a blessed thing to hear and answer the one who knocks, the soul that ever seeks blessedness and that rightly watches over her treasures detects the one who stands at her door, and she says, ‘The voice of my Beloved knocks at the door’ (Song. 2:5).”<sup>922</sup>

#### **452. What were the stages of God’s wondrous salvation of His believers, the people of God?**

By His foreknowledge, God knew the gifts that first man would enjoy, the devil’s envy of him, and all that would happen to him after. Therefore, God had a plan for saving humanity and restoring what they lost and that was through the following phases:

**First: The era after Adam’s fall until Moses received the Law:** God spoke to Adam about the Cross when He told the serpent, “On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:14–15). The people of God knew that this divine promise spoke of the Savior who would be born from the seed of a woman (not from the seed of man), and that He would bruise Satan’s head and abolish his authority over humanity. For this reason, the people of God earnestly waited for the Savior’s coming.

Also, the men of God of the Old Testament resembled the Savior such as: the blood of Abel, who was slaughtered by his brother, was crying out from the ground; Enoch who was taken up to heaven and thus resembled the Savior who is to ascend to heaven from earth and grant the faithful the privilege of ascending to heaven; Noah who was saved along with his wife, three children and their wives and were granted to enjoy the new world after the flood, and their ark became a symbol of the Church of the New Testament; Abraham who offered his beloved son as a sacrifice was a symbol of the Father who has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16); Isaac who carried the wood of the burnt offering was a symbol of Christ who carried His cross; and Jacob who saw the open heavens and the Church of the

<sup>922</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 11: p. 335–337.

New Testament and so he chanted saying, “**this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven**” (Gen. 28:17).

**Second: The era of the Mosaic Law and Prophets:** The law explained in detail the sacrifices and their rituals as a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice. The prophets wrote many prophecies about the Savior, His birth, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

**Third: The era of the incarnation of the Logos until His ascension:** The Lord revealed His divine love to us, so He fed the hungry, healed the sick, comforted the brokenhearted and revealed to them His providence even after His ascension when He sent them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He announced to them the Father’s love to all humanity and the Holy Spirit’s work to declare the divine truth and lead the Church to heaven as she struggles in the world.

**Fourth: The era between Christ’s ascension until His second coming:** Here, He acts as a heavenly high priest. The Apostle Paul spoke about this era in his epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 6:20) in which he compares between the high priests who were in need of redemption and the unique heavenly High Priest.

#### **453. Why does the Creed mention the Church after talking about the oneness of God and the Holy Trinity?**

The goal of the Orthodox Creed is not to mention some theoretical facts about God, the world, the Church, the final judgment, and the eternal life, but its main goal is to help the believer encounter God, enjoy His love as he struggles in the world, prepare him for the great day of the Lord, help him have communion with the heavenly, and have eternal life. So, as we confess our faith saying, “**and in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,**” we are affirming our commitment to be in communion with the Holy God, to love one another, to have a relationship with our friends in heaven as we join their praising choir and enjoy our sonship to God on an eternal level.

Our knowledge of the Church drives us to look forward to our life in heaven when we depart and meet the heavenly Bridegroom who will welcome us in a joyful heavenly procession which the heavenly hosts look forward to saying, “thrust in your sickle and reap” (Rev. 14:15). We should not marvel that the heavenly hosts are earnestly looking forward to the day of the Lord, since they view our Church not as a social institution governed by some laws that are in place to ensure man’s happiness, but as the people of God who are being prepared to partake in the angelic life where the believer experiences God’s plan for him every day. Therefore, we should not be surprised if we hear about many of the saints such as **St. John Chrysostom** who felt that they were the happiest people in the world. The believer has his eyes fixed on his Creator and Savior and what He is preparing for him in heaven, so he is joyful in the midst of his hardships. The believer performs his job with all honesty and is faithful in his relationships with others, because he considers himself to be a child of God who does not know failure, despair, or greed as he is the ambassador of heaven on earth.

**St. Isaac the Syrian** and other saints spoke about their practical lives saying that the believer loves God and those who persecute him as well as all the animals and birds, so he does not accept the torture of any being, even if he wanted to get rid of them such as in the case of snakes. He does not just care for all living creatures but also cares for the beauty of the non-living creatures so that he would not waste the world's resources. This calls us to care for our membership in the Church, our sonship to God and our friendship with the heavenly that we may know the characteristics of the Church, whether at the ecumenical level, local level, or personal level. It also calls us to know the Word of God who is present in His Church and to honor one another regardless of the other's nationality, culture, talents, age, or capabilities, even if that person was just a baby or has special needs.

**St. Augustine** says, "Peter is the eye in the body, that man is the finger, yet is he in the same body in which Peter is; and if the finger has less power than the eye, yet it is not cut off from the body. Better is it to be a finger and to be in the body, than to be an eye and to be plucked out of the body. Therefore, my brethren, let no man deceive you, let no man seduce you: love the peace of Christ, who was crucified for you, while He was God. Paul says, 'so then neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase' (1 Cor. 3:7) ... so let the members love one another but live all under the Head."<sup>923</sup>

#### **454. What are the fruits of our unity with Christ our head, and with each other as members of the one body?**

**St. Augustine** says, "He descended for our sake, that we may ascend for His own sake. He alone descended and ascended, Him who said, 'No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven' (John 3:13). Should not those who have been made the children of God be able to ascend? Certainly they will ascend! This is what He promised us that we shall be, 'like angels of God in heaven.' So how can no one ascend except Him who descends? For it is one who descended and one who ascended. But what about the others? Their hope is that He descended that they may become one in Him and through Him, and will therefore ascend with Him. Here, the unity of the Church is manifested. Woe to those who hate unity and make for themselves segregated groups!

"We must journey on then, yet there is no need of anointing the feet, or looking out for beasts, or providing a vessel. Run with the heart's affection, journey on with love, ascend by charity. Why do you seek the way? Cleave unto Christ, who by Descending and Ascending has made Himself the Way. Do you wish to ascend? Hold fast to Him that ascends. For by your own self you cannot rise.

"For no man has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven. If no one ascends but He that descended, that is, the Son of

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<sup>923</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 13.17–18 (NPNF I/7:93) amended.

Man, our Lord Jesus, do you wish to ascend also? Be then a member of Him who Only has ascended. For He the Head, with all the members, is but One Man. And since no one can ascend, but he who in His Body is made a member of Him; that is fulfilled, that no man has ascended, but He that descended. He left His father and mother and was joined to His wife, so that **‘the two may become one flesh’** (Eph. 5:31). He left His mother also, the synagogue of which He was born after the flesh. He cleaved to His Wife, that is, to His Church ...

“He showed that the marriage bond might not be dissolved: ‘Have ye not read,’ said He, ‘that God which made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, They two shall be in one flesh? What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’ And what is the meaning of ‘They two shall be in one flesh’? He goes on to say; ‘Wherefore they are no more two but one flesh.’ Thus ‘no man has ascended, but He that descended.’ For that you may know, that the Bridegroom and the Bride are One according to the Flesh of Christ, not according to His Divinity ... that you may know then that this whole is One Christ, He said by Isaiah, ‘He has put on me a headdress as on a bridegroom and adorned me with ornaments like a bride’ (Isa. 61:10 LXX).”<sup>924</sup>

#### **455. When we use the word “church,” what do we mean?**

In the New Testament the word “church” is mentioned seventy-five times. When we study the different verses in which the word was used, we can understand the biblical meanings of it.

**First: The faithful community since Adam till the Lord’s second coming.** This church is characterized by the life of praise and holiness that she may be prepared to join the angelic hosts. In the book of Acts it was written that they were, “praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

**Second: The local church in a certain country or nation** such as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:26): “So when they had appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23); “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write” (Rev. 2:8). There were also priests and deacons who were ordained for pastoral care, service, and worship in the language that the people understand. These churches were connected to each other in the spirit of unity and love in Christ Jesus, even though they were sometimes organizationally separate from each other and thus it was said, “So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia, and Samaria, describing the conversion of Gentiles, and they caused great joy to all the brethren” (Acts 15:3).

**Third:** The expression: “**the church in your house**” (Phil. 1:2) was often repeated. This was meant to describe how some believers opened their houses to be churches where the

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<sup>924</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 41.7–8 (NPNF I/6:399–400) amended.



believers in the area would gather, since there were no churches yet dedicated for Christian worship and service. The “house” here could also signify a holy family where each family member dedicates their life to the Lord and though their families could be small, it is still a church where God dwells.

The house could also signify the believer himself as the Lord told His disciples: “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). So, when we talk about the characteristics of the Church as God’s kingdom on earth, we feel as though we are speaking about all the believers throughout the ages from Adam and until the end of time. We also feel our commitment to the Church and to the holiness of our homes, our families, and even ourselves for the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

#### **456. Have we entered into the holies while we are still in the world?**

**St. John Chrysostom** answers saying, “He shows that while we are still in the world, and not yet departed from [this] life, we are already among the promises. For through hope we are already in heaven. He said, Wait; for it shall surely be. Afterwards giving them full assurance, he says, not rather by hope. And he said not, We are within, but ‘This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil’ (Heb. 6:19). For as the anchor, dropped from the vessel, does not allow it to be carried about, even if ten thousand winds agitate it, but being depended upon makes it steady, so also does hope.”<sup>925</sup>

St. Paul believes that the death of the high-priests and Levitical priests proved their inability to grant their people the life that God desires for them. Therefore, their service only prepared the way for the coming of the heavenly Priest who alone can grant eternal life. “Also there were priests because they were prevented by death from continuing but He because He continues forever has an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:23–24). As He is the King of kings, Lord of lords and the heavenly High Priest, He offers the sacrifice of the cross through His love to the Father and humanity. He sacrificed Himself for us and in that He is alive and one with the Father as St. Paul says, “He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

#### **457. What is the difference between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Christ?**

In his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul compares Aaron’s priesthood with Christ’s to show what the Church of the New Testament is enjoying as God’s kingdom on earth. The main points that the Apostle highlights are:

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<sup>925</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 11.3 (NPNF I/14:419).

Aaron and his descendants the priests became priests without an oath, but of Christ it was said, “The Lord has sworn and will not relent, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek by so much more Jesus has become a surety of better covenant” (Heb. 7:21–22).

His capabilities: “[He] has come not according to the law of a fleshy commandment but according to the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16) The priests of the Old Testament had limited capabilities based on the law and descendancy. As for Christ, He is the only-begotten Son, whom death cannot overcome. Hence, the Church prays in the Sixth Hour of Good Friday saying, “Holy Mighty, who by weakness showed forth what is greater than power” (*The Hymn of Omonogenees*).

Christ’s Priesthood does not expire for He lives to fully save those who come forward through Him to the Father (Heb. 7:24). As for the Levite priests, they are limited by their lives that perish.

The Levitical priesthood offered many animal sacrifices (Heb. 9:12), but Christ offered His blood only once.

Through the law, a covenant was established with the house of Judah and the house of Israel (Heb. 8:7), where the believer discovers his shortcomings and need for the Savior who will elevate him to the heavens, “[He] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High priest (Heb. 5:5). How then was He appointed (one says)? For Aaron was many times appointed as by the Rod (Ex. 7:8–13), and when the fire came down and destroyed those who wished to intrude into the priesthood. But in this instance, on the contrary, they [the Jewish Priests] not only suffered nothing, but they even rejoiced.”<sup>926</sup>

**458. How did Stephen see the High Priest (Christ); was He sitting or standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56)?**

Why did the psalmist say (one thousand years before the incarnation of the Word): “The Lord said to my Lord *sit* at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool ... the Lord has sworn and will not relent, you are priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:1, 4), while it was said that Stephen, when he was being stoned, “saw the glory of God and Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56)?

What the psalmist said was a declaration that the Levitical priesthood has been cancelled after it achieved its goal in Christ’s priesthood in the heavenly holies, for He is one with the Father and sits at His right hand to intercede on behalf of humanity, not by supplications, but by His unity with Him so that the Father sees the Church concealed in the Son’s body who

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<sup>926</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 8.2 (NPNF I/14:403).

sits at His right hand. So when Stephen was being persecuted by the high priest, leaders and the people, who were concerned with keeping the law in its literal interpretation to the extent that they were cut to the heart and gnashed at him with their teeth, he looked up to heaven, being full of the Holy Spirit, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55).

Jesus' standing here does not signify a physical position, for the heavens cannot be confined by some physical movements, so He is not standing to ask the Father to save His Church that is being persecuted in the person of Stephen, the disciples or Apostles, but to announce that He is attaching her to Himself like an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil (Heb. 6:19). He declares that His Church is united to Him, being His body and heavenly bride, which the waves of persecutions and hardships that Satan rages against her, can never shake the believers' hearts or hope. He is at the right hand of the Father, working like someone who is standing up, and being glorified like someone who is seated, so the struggling Church appears as a queen sitting at the right hand of the King of kings.

Just as the devil was able to cause non-believers to persecute the Church, the Savior, who sits at the right hand of the Father, was stopping Saul of Tarsus from going to Damascus to persecute the believers, was causing the believers in Jerusalem to spread all over the lands of Judea and Samaria to preach the word (Acts 8:4), and was sending His angel to guide Philip to meet the eunuch under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians in order to bring him to the faith and baptize him (Acts 8:26–39). And Philip did not stop his ministry in all cities till he came to Caesarea.

Christ's standing in the heavenly holies was to speak to Saul (who persecutes the Church) and ask him to go to His disciple Ananias (Acts 9) and to preach in the synagogues that Christ is the Son of God, instead of persecuting the believers in Damascus. At the same time that the high priest and those with him in Jerusalem were extremely angry, it was said that "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). This is the work of the Heavenly High Priest, Our Lord Jesus, who sits and stands at the right hand of the Father, in whom the Father sees the unceasing growth of the Church, especially when the persecutions and wars against her intensify.

#### **459. What is the meaning of the Church or "*Ecclesia Εκκλησία*"?**

Before Christ, the Greeks used the word *ecclesia* to refer to the gathering of citizens with their rulers for a general assembly. The same meaning was used in the Old Testament when it was said, "I have hated the assembly of evildoers" (Ps. 26:5) and in the New Testament when it was said, "for the assembly was confused" (Acts 19:32; 39–40). Most of the time, when expressions like "the church of the faithful" or "saints" were used in the Old Testament, it was to refer to the people of God when they assemble to glorify God or to worship Him

whether inside the temple or outside of it. In the New Testament, it was used to refer to the assembly of the faithful either in a specific city (like the church of Jerusalem or Alexandria) or to refer to all the faithful all over the world since Adam and until the second coming of Christ.

Christ's Church is the body of Christ. So where Christ, the Head of the body, is, there the Church will be also. He is the Church's Head and Savior who sanctifies her, nourishes her and cherishes her (Eph. 5:26, 29) and the believers are counted as "members of His body" (Eph. 5:30) and she is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The synonyms for the word "Church" include "kingdom of God" (2 Tim. 4:18), "The heavenly kingdom" and "the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15) where believers realize that they are the people of God, who enjoy His salvation and sanctification and where they struggle towards perfection for the glory of God through the work of the Holy Trinity and enjoy being "partakers in the divine nature" (1 Pet. 1:4). The Lord Jesus says, "Do not fear little flock for it is your fathers' good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The Church is also called "the house of God" (Heb. 10:20), built on "the foundation of the apostles and the prophets" (Eph. 2:20). This house is built using living stones which are the believers who offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable before God through Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:21). She is also called "**a chaste virgin to Christ**" (2 Cor. 11:2) for He "loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25–27). She is also called the Bride of Christ (John 3:29; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). He is the Church's Bridegroom and the Bridegroom of every soul who enters into a personal relationship with Him.

#### **460. What is the Church Fathers' view of the Church?**

In the second century, **St. Ignatius of Antioch** sent letters to the local churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna, describing them as being elected by a divine and holy will before the ages for "an enduring and unchangeable glory" and that they are blessed by the grace of God the Father and are beloved by Him. These churches are favored before God, are enlightened by His will, rejoice in His sufferings, and enjoy the blessings of His resurrection. God bestows every spiritual gift upon them so that they would not lack any spiritual talent.

St. Paul emphasized that every believer is a member of the same body along with his brethren, so it is not appropriate for them to be divided so as not to lose their membership in Christ. St. Irenaeus focused on the commitment of the Church throughout the world to the oneness of faith that she received from the apostles so that all her members may enjoy the knowledge of the divine truth.

In the fourth century, **Saint Basil** emphasized the Church's need for continuous discipleship, saying, "You and I share the same teachers of the mysteries of God, and the

same spiritual fathers who from the beginning founded your Church.”<sup>927</sup> “What clearer evidence can there be of my faith, than that I was brought up by my grandmother, blessed woman, who came from you? I mean the celebrated Macrina who taught me the words of the blessed Gregory, which, as far as memory had preserved down to her day, she cherished herself, while she fashioned and formed me, while yet a child, upon the doctrines of piety. And when I gained the capacity of thought, my reason being matured by full age, I travelled over much sea and land, and whomsoever I found walking in the rule of godliness delivered, those I set down as fathers, and made them my soul's guides in my journey to God.”<sup>928</sup>

**St. Augustine** asserts that the Church throughout the world is one flock, and that the kingdom of God is established on earth and is perfected in heaven. He calls heaven the city of God and those who have departed are considered to have joined the “kingdom of heaven.” The Catholic (universal) Church includes members from Abel to those who will be born in the last days and believe in Christ. According to **St. Epiphanius of Salamis**, the Church is born in one faith through the Holy Spirit.<sup>929</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** wonders how the bride of Christ is counted as His daughter and how this same daughter is counted as His bride? According to the flesh this is impossible but for Christ, the Church is His daughter and His bride at the same time. He begets her in baptism and is united to her. The birth of the Church is compared to the birth of Eve from Adam's side. On the cross, Christ's side was pierced and blood and water came out, by which the Church was born and the believers were born in the water of baptism were nourished by His blood. Just as Eve was created while Adam was asleep, so Christ died and the Church was formed from His side.<sup>930</sup> Before coming to the true faith, the Church was like an adulterous woman but after accepting it, she became a virgin.<sup>931</sup>

#### 461. Did the Old Testament ever reveal the Church?

It was said that it shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44). It is the house of God which shall be established on top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it (Isa. 2:2). She will rejoice when compared to the barren church of the Old Testament as it was said: “For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman” (Isa. 54:1). There is no comparison between the Church of the Old Testament which was exclusive only to the Jewish nation, and the Church of the New Testament which has the treasures of grace and includes all nations and peoples. The Head of the Church is Christ who is the cornerstone that unites the Jews with the Gentiles, to

<sup>927</sup> Mike Aquilina, *The Way of the Fathers: Praying with the Early Christians* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000): Article 65.

<sup>928</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 204.6 (FOTC 28:76–77).

<sup>929</sup> St. Epiphanius of Salamis, PG 42:781.

<sup>930</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Praise to Maximus*, 3.

<sup>931</sup> St. John Chrysostom, PG 52:402.

establish from them His divine house. The Church of the New Testament enjoys a new life through baptism, and is established in Christ, the firstborn of those who have fallen asleep.

**462. Do the so-called saints make up the Church?**

The believers who make up the Church are called by the Apostle Paul “to be saints” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24). They are saints because God calls them and thus, they are special among all their fellows. When they receive the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, they become consecrated to God. The Commemoration of Saints always includes priests who labored for the edification of the body of Christ and served the holy mysteries, so that the believers may be sanctified. It also includes sinful preachers who used God's Word to attract new members to the Church. Although the scribes and pharisees were corrupt, the Lord did not take away their honor from them but gave them authority despite their wickedness, because they themselves do not do what they teach others (Matt. 23:3).

**463. Can Church members who cannot be rectified be cut off from the Church?**

Although the Church, the body of Christ, portrays God's love for humanity, there are limits that she will never exceed. A sinner is cut off from the fellowship of the Church since he isolates himself from the life and salvation that spring from her. Thus, the rebellious sinners who have trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), who preserves salvation within the Church — outside of which there is no salvation — set themselves apart from Christ and His community, the Church, and thus break every relationship with her.

On the other hand, the heretics who misinterpret the teachings of Christ and His holy apostles (even if they quote phrases from the true Gospel), are excommunicated and separated from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus St. Paul teaches, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8–9). St. John the Apostle forbids receiving anyone who comes and does not have the true teachings. It is necessary not to receive them in homes and not to greet them (2 John 10). In fact, St. Paul commands us, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10–11). Heretics, because of their inaccurate faith and their arrogance, persist in their false teachings and isolate themselves from the source of life; the faith in Christ, and so they grow lukewarm and are thus expelled. If we do not stand firm on the foundation of the Apostles, we will lose our foundation and will collapse.<sup>932</sup> And we become like those who wanted to return to the

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<sup>932</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, PG 30:149.

circumcision, and were alienated from Christ, trying to be justified by the law, which made them fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Those who are associated with wicked heretics and participate in their evil sacrifices (prayers), multiply their sins, since they slaughter the lamb outside the holy divine camp which is the Church.”<sup>933</sup>

The Church Fathers consider those who set themselves apart from the Church (schismatics) in the same category as the heretics. **St. Basil** distinguishes between heretics and schismatics: “Heretics are those who distort the faith and do not care about it, while schismatics are those who, for ecclesiastical reasons, separate themselves from the Church in matters that could be dealt with.” **St. Jerome** says, “A heresy is based on a distorted teaching, while schismatics are those who set themselves apart from the church and the bishop.”<sup>934</sup> A person falls into schism from the Church when he becomes unfit for this body. He falls into a certain sin and does not care about the public scandal caused by it and does not offer repentance, so he alienates himself from the Christian life and is excommunicated from the Church.

#### **464. Why do some people believe that there are no saints in the contemporary Church?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Whoever looks at a tree sees many leaves, but often the fruit is hidden behind the leaves, such as the case of figs. Thus, the heretics and wicked are easily noticeable among people so that it could seem to one person that there are no believers, but whoever looks closely at the tree with a spiritual eye will realize the presence of God’s holy children who are hidden and are founded on Christ Himself as St Paul said, ‘For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 3:11). He also says, ‘having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Eph 2:20–22). This is the secret behind the Spirit’s strength within us, that we are founded on the Lord Christ Himself and we have the seal of His Holy Spirit, by whom ‘the Lord knows those who are His.’”

Not only should we not judge and separate the wheat from the tares, and the vessels for honor from those for dishonor, but it is appropriate for us to be assured that the wheat is not neglected by God because of the tares, nor do the honorable vessels lose their honor because of those that are dishonorable as the Apostle Paul says, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Concerning this, **St. Augustine** says, “Not for the chaff’s sake shall the wheat also perish: (Matt. 3:12) nor on account of bad fish shall nothing be cast into the vessels from that net

<sup>933</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, PG 71:209.

<sup>934</sup> St. Jerome, PL 26:633.

(Matt. 13:47) ... He predestined us before we were born, promising us with certainty: ‘Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified’ (Rom. 8:30).”<sup>935</sup>

He also says, “Even if the seed is hidden in the straw. But it is known to the owner of the field. No one should be afraid when he is a seed, even if he is in the midst of straw, for the eyes of the one who sprouts us will not be deceived.”<sup>936</sup>

**Saint Augustine** sees in the conception of Jacob and Esau a prophecy of what happens in the Church of Christ, which was like Rebecca who carried in her womb the righteous and the wicked, as he says, “They struggled in their mother’s womb and when they struggled, it was said to Rebecca: ‘Two nations are in your womb. Two people shall be separated from your body,’ one is good and another is evil. They struggled together in one womb. How many bad people are in the church! One womb carries them until they are finally isolated. The righteous and the wicked both wrestle with one another in the womb of one mother.”<sup>937</sup>

#### **465. Are all the saints, across all the generations, members of the Church?**

The saints who were called by God’s grace are not limited to a specific time period or generation but are counted as “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). These are members of the Church including those who pleased the Lord even before the coming of Christ, along with those who believed in Christ and those who put their hope in Him. This was explained by Christ when He said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56), and “Moses, in whom you trust ... for he wrote about Me” (John 5:45–46).

The struggling Church includes the living members who were told, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). Meanwhile, the struggling Church says, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2). The victorious Church in heaven encompasses those who passed from the struggling Church such the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the prophets, the apostles, the teachers, the martyrs, the hermits, and all the righteous who have pleased the Lord throughout all generations.

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<sup>935</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 89.31 (NPNF I/8:436).

<sup>936</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Psalm 50*.

<sup>937</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel According to John* 9.10 (NPNF 1/7:78).



**466. What titles are given to the Church?**

Just as Christ gave Himself up for her sake and revealed the role of the Father and the Holy Spirit in her life and salvation, the Church was linked to Him, so that she was counted as the bride of Christ and His daughter.

**467. What do we mean by “One Church”?**

**Origen** believes that the unity of the Church is built on the basis of her one faith, her one order and framework. Although diversity of cultures exists and the impact of such diversity on some rituals such as iconography and hymnology, the Church bears one theological and spiritual thought. It is the one kingdom of Christ on earth. The Lord Christ Himself declared this oneness by saying, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). He affirms this by saying that He is the “true vine” (John 15:1). He also says, “that they all may be one ... as We are one” (John 17:21–22).

He also says: “The whole sacrifice (the Passover lamb) is eaten in one house, and no meat is taken from it outside. This means that one house receives salvation in Christ, that is, the Church throughout the world. She who was foreign to God, now has a unique affinity with Him. The Church accepted the apostles of the Lord Jesus, just as the house of ‘Rahab the harlot’ accepted Joshua’s spies and he was the only house that was saved from the destruction of Jericho. Although the Hebrews had many houses, they were equivalent to one house and in the same way, the churches at the level of the city and the state, no matter how many, constitute one church. For Christ is one in all, the perfect, indivisible Christ. Therefore, in every house the sacrifice was complete and was not divided over many houses. In this, St. Paul says, we are all one in Christ, who is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph. 4:5).”<sup>938</sup> The unity of the Church is also built on her continuity in the faith. **Origen** summarizes the apostolic continuity in the confession of faith as follows: “There is one God, who created and arranged all things, the God of the Apostles and the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>939</sup>

The Apostle Paul presented the unity of the Church in two ways:

He referred to the Church as the body of Christ, saying, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27); “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12), emphasizing the unity among the members of the Church as the body is connected to the head. **Origen** says, “If we are the body of Christ, God has arranged for the members to care for each other and to be in harmony with one other. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with him and when one member is honored, the other members rejoice with him. We must have this tenderness that

<sup>938</sup> An anonymous Paschal homily in the tradition of Origen; Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 87.

<sup>939</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* Preface (ANF 4 :240).

springs from this divine melody so that when we gather together in the name of Christ, the Word of God, His wisdom, and power will be in our midst.”<sup>940</sup>

The Apostle Paul calls the Church the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), and the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), as the Spirit of God dwells in it. He also describes Christ as the living stone and the believers as the living stones being built up a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4–5).

This unity of faith is reflected in the unity in worship. Even though the Church is spread throughout the world, the Church still believes in one baptism and one Eucharist for all these local churches. All the believers have one mother, as everyone is born from one baptism, and they eat one food (the Body of the One Lord).

The unity of faith provides the unity of education, unity of worship, and the belief in the one divine truth. St. Paul says, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:14–16).

#### **468. Was there anyone in history who was an example of the desire for Church unity?**

**St. Basil** strove for the unity of the Church and what occupied his heart was his desire to restore unity to the churches that were torn apart by heresies. He says, “I think it suits those who serve the Lord in all honesty and sincerity, that the goal of their efforts should be the restoration of the unity of the divided churches.” Despite the sicknesses, hardships, and humiliations he had suffered, he was ready to go to any town, to speak and gather the bishops, and to take from them clear confessions of the Orthodox faith. He wrote to many bishops in the East and the West regarding the Arian heresy.

“For what could be more delightful than to behold all, who are separated by distances so vast, bound together by the union effected by love into one harmony of members in Christ's body? Nearly all the East (I include under this name all the regions from Illyricum to Egypt) is being agitated, right honorable father, by a terrible storm and tempest. The old heresy, sown by Arius the enemy of the truth, has now boldly and unblushingly reappeared. Like some sour root, it is producing its deadly fruit and is prevailing. The reason of this is, that in every district the champions of right doctrine have been exiled from their Churches by calumny and outrage ... I have looked upon the visit of your mercifulness as the only possible solution of our difficulties. Ever in the past I have been consoled by your extraordinary

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<sup>940</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 14.1 (ANF 10:495).

affection; and for a short time, my heart was cheered by the gratifying report that we shall be visited by you.”<sup>941</sup>

“If, therefore, there is any consolation of love, any communion of the Spirit, if there are any feelings of pity, bestir yourselves to come to our relief. Employ zeal in the pursuit of piety, deliver us from this storm. And let that blessed dogma of the Fathers be spoken fearlessly among us, that dogma which confounds the hateful heresy of Arius and builds up the churches on the sound doctrine in which the Son is acknowledged to be consubstantial with the Father, and the Holy Spirit is numbered with Them and adored with equal honor, in order that that fearlessness in defense of the truth which the Lord gave to you, and that glory in the confession of the divine and saving Trinity.”<sup>942</sup>

#### **469. How can we practically enjoy the mystery of unity?**

The Church Fathers invite us to love one another in order to enjoy the mystery of unity. **St. Basil** compares the churches in the world to islands and continents, which although they seem isolated from each other, the seas (and oceans) connect them to one another. The seas and oceans of divine and brotherly love bind us together in Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church. Even death cannot isolate those who have fallen asleep from those struggling on earth.

St. Basil says, “The Lord has separated the islands from the mainland by the sea, but He has bound the islanders and the dwellers on the mainland together by charity. Nothing separates us from each other, brethren, unless we by deliberate choice consent to a separation. We have one Lord, one faith, and the same hope. Even if you consider yourselves the head of the Church as a whole, the head is not able to say to the feet: ‘I have no need of you.’ Or, if you also rank yourselves in any other position among the ecclesiastical members, you are not able to say to us who are in the same body: ‘We have no need of you.’ The hands have need of one another, and the feet support each other, and the eyes possess distinctness of perception by their concerted action.”<sup>943</sup>

He also says, “Since, therefore, one mind and the attention of one man do not suffice even for a brief time for the comprehension of the splendors of God, he associates with himself all the meek for a participation in this activity. It is necessary, in fact, to achieve complete tranquility from outside confusions, and bringing about an entire silence in the hidden recesses of the heart, thus to devote oneself to the contemplation of the truth.”<sup>944</sup>

St. Jacob of Serugh calls on the soul to stay in the church in the spirit of love, saying: “The Bridegroom comes down to see the bride who is betrothed to Him! O soul, remain in

<sup>941</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 70 (FOTC 13:168–169).

<sup>942</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 90 (FOTC 13:200).

<sup>943</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 203 (FOTC 28:68).

<sup>944</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 32 (33).3 (FOTC 46:253).

the bridal chamber so that He may see you. Do not leave bridal chamber, for the King comes down to see you bearing riches from His Father's house ... remain with Him, because if He comes and does not see you, He will be angry.”

#### **470. What do we mean when we say, “a holy Church”?**

The secret of the Church’s holiness is that her head is the Holy Christ who overflows with holiness. The message of the Church is to sanctify everyone who joins it. “It is written, Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). The Apostle Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27).

Moreover, the Holy Spirit who gives life to the Church is holy. Scripture presents the divine truth and sanctifies those who hear it and accept it (1 Tim. 4:4–5). As the faithful respond to the holy heavenly call (2 Tim. 1:9), those who respond to it are sanctified and are called saints. That is why Christ considers His Church to be like dough that is sanctified with holy leaven (Matt. 12:23) which slowly transforms everything, proclaiming the power of the Church and the impact of her teachings on the evil world. Christ called His disciples the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:4, 13), as they obtained in Him the grace that is capable of healing the fallen human nature and liberating it from its corruption.

In every generation we hear about the work of the Church in the lives of people, as many people accept the work of the grace of God in their lives, and many offer repentance in secret, and we shall see them as heroes on the great day of the Lord.

**Origen** reveals to us his understanding of the importance of the sanctity of the Church by saying, “I, who seem to be a right hand to you and am named a presbyter and seem to preach the word of God, if I should do anything against the teaching of the Church and the rule of the Gospel, so that I create a stumbling block for you the Church, may the whole Church in one accord, acting in concert, cut me off and fling me, their right hand, away.”<sup>945</sup>

In the ninth homily on the book of Joshua, **Origen** talks about the temple of God, where Christ offers His sacrifice to the Father. It is built of intact, unbroken stone: “you shall not use an iron tool on them” (Deut. 27:5). These are the pure living stones, the holy apostles, who form one temple through the unity of their hearts (Acts 1:24) and their souls. They persevered with one accord in prayer (Acts 1:14) and had one mind. True unity, in other words, is based on holiness, love (unity of hearts), common worship (one voice), and one faith (one mind). **Origen** believes that the sanctification of each member is the basis for the unity of the Church since the actions of one member affects all the others. He says, “For by

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<sup>945</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 7.6 (FOTC105:82).

one sinner the people are defiled ... by one fornicator—or perpetrator of whatever other wickedness—the whole people are polluted.”<sup>946</sup>

#### **471. What do we mean when we say that the Church is Catholic (universal)?**

We are not referring here to a particular denomination. Rather, we mean that the Church is able, by the grace of God, to spread in many countries who accept the Orthodox faith and to be in Christ Jesus, enjoying their membership in the Church that extends from Adam to the end of the ages. **Origen** says that we will be astonished on the great day of the Lord when we see little children who are considered heroes, and unknown individuals among those who were considered to be saints more than many priests, servants, and missionaries.

The Church of the New Testament bears the title of universal or “catholic”: “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11), since the Church includes members from all nations and peoples. **Origen** tells us about the universality of the Church, **which is the continuity of the apostolic era, as her members preach to others as faithful apostles of Christ**. He speaks in a very realistic manner of the “**Teaching of the Apostles**,”<sup>947</sup> who, like the prophets of the Old Testament, were inspired by the Holy Spirit. He directs this definition of the apostolic continuity, against the separation of a single apostle from the apostolic community.<sup>948</sup>

#### **472. What do we mean by the “Apostolic Church”?**

It remains to this day bearing the apostolic thought, preserving the faith received by the apostles, as it did not break the apostolic continuity, and did not accept for any heretic to lead the Church.

#### **473. What do we mean by the Church, “the teacher and guardian of the truth”?**

Holy Tradition and rendition are the same thing. The apostles received the teaching of the Lord as divine truth and preserved it. The Church put before her eyes the commandment of the Apostle Paul to his disciple Timothy: “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20). Our Lord Jesus confirmed the infallibility of the Church from perversion when He promised His disciples, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). He also promised to send the Holy Spirit, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your

<sup>946</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 7.6 (FOTC 105:81; PG 12:861, 244).

<sup>947</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4 (ANF 4).

<sup>948</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, 1. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971): p. 112.

remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). Such promises confirm that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

#### **474. What is the system of Church service?**

Christ appointed twelve disciples to accompany Him, and to send them to preach and gave them authority to heal the sick and cast out demons (Mark 3:14–15; see Matt. 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16). Then He appointed seventy others, sending them two by two before His face in every city and every place He was about to go (Luke 10:1). When the twelve were in the upper room, He said to them after His resurrection, “‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also 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 them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (John 20:21–23). And before His ascension to heaven, He gave them this command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20), showing that the command and the authority given to the holy apostles remain in the Church forever, even after the apostles pass from this life. The Apostle Paul affirmed that the Lord gave the Church: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12).

#### **475. What did the Psalmist say about the Church?**

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters” (Ps. 23:1–2). The Church is the “green pasture” where our heavenly Christ nurtures us. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Each of us has a flock that he leads to green pastures.”<sup>949</sup>

#### **476. How do we see the Church in Noah’s Ark?**

The Church is the **ark of the New Testament**, which not only surrounds and protects humans from the flood, but also makes them into angelic creatures. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “The story of the flood is a mystery (Gen. 8), whose details were an example of the things to take place. The ark is the Church, Noah is Christ, the dove is the Holy Spirit, and the olive branch is the divine goodness. Just as the ark in the midst of the sea was a fortress for those within it, so the Church saves the lost. The ark offers protection, but the Church does something greater. For example, the ark contained and preserved irrational animals,

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<sup>949</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 77.6. (NPNF I/10:450).

while the Church brought in people who behave irrationally and not only protected them but also changed their nature.”<sup>950</sup>

#### **477. What is the role of the fiery Holy Spirit in the Church?**

**St. John Chrysostom** talks about the impact of this heavenly fire on the life of the Church, explaining that it gives the believer strength which he can challenge the world and all the forces of darkness with, so that he may walk in the spirit of victory, enjoying fellowship with the heavenly ones. “Let us then stretch our mind towards Heaven, let us be held fast by that desire, let us clothe ourselves with spiritual fire, let us gird ourselves with its flame. No man who bears flame fears those who meet him; be it wild beast, be it man, be it snares innumerable, so long as he is armed with fire, all things stand out of his way, all things retire. The flame is intolerable, the fire cannot be endured, it consumes all. With this fire let us clothe ourselves, offering up glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever and world without end.”<sup>951</sup>

#### **478. Can a believer isolate himself from his brothers and sisters?**

“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24), that is, let us support one another with prayer and good deeds. Our “competing” is “according to the rules” only<sup>952</sup> when we gather together in the spirit of love as members of one another. “Therefore, let us pursue the things which make up for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). Even a hermit is obliged to pray in plural, saying, “Our Father who art in heaven ... forgive us our sins.”

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For nothing so especially makes persons easily vanquished and subdued in temptations, as isolation. For, tell me, scatter a phalanx in war, and the enemy will need no trouble, but will take them prisoners, coming on them separately, and thereby the more helpless.”<sup>953</sup> “There is no such great evil as isolation and man staying out of the group without communication.”<sup>954</sup> “On this account the assembly of the whole Church has more power: and what each cannot do by himself singly, he is able to do when joined with the rest. Therefore most necessary are the prayers offered up, here, for the world, for the Church, from the one end of the earth to the other, for peace, for those who are in adversities, are important.”<sup>955</sup>

<sup>950</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Laz.* 6 (PG 48:1037–1038).

<sup>951</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 34.8 (NPNF I/14:522).

<sup>952</sup> Cf. 2 Timothy 2:5.

<sup>953</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 30.2 (NPNF I/14:503).

<sup>954</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St John* 78.41 (NPNF I/14:288).

<sup>955</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts* 37 (NPNF I/11:231).

#### 479. Does the Church include believers of different spiritual degrees?

**Origen** says, “There are in the Church certain ones who believe in God, have faith in God, and acquiesce in all the divine precepts. Furthermore, they are conscientious towards the servants of God and desire to serve them, for they also are fully ready and prepared for the furnishing of the Church or for the ministry. But in fact, they are completely disgusting in their actions and particular habit of life, wrapped up with vices and not wholly, “putting away the old self with its actions like the Gibeonites who ‘put on their old clothes, and their old and patched sandals’ ...” (Josh. 9).”<sup>956</sup>

**Origen** finds a symbol for this classification among the believers in the organization that took place in carrying the tabernacle (Cf. Numbers 4). **Aaron and his sons** were tasked with covering the holy place and its tools, covered with the skin of a certain type of animal, or in purple and scarlet garments. Then comes the turn of the children of Kohath to carry it, but it was not lawful for them to touch any of the sacred things, or else they will surely die, nor do they have the right even to enter to watch the process of covering it lest they die. Also, in our church rites, there are some things that everyone must practice, although some do not understand them. For example, why do we bow down during prayer? Or why do we pray facing the east? It is not possible to explain this to everyone. Also, who can explain the transformation that happens in the Eucharist, or explain the meanings behind the liturgical texts and the rites used in baptism? Yet, even though we perform these things while veiled and hidden, we continue to perform them as our High Priest and his children handed them down to us.

**Origen** says that the Church includes believers of high spiritual level, as well as weak ones. The first group he calls “people,” and the second, “animals” figuratively: “The Church also has animals, as it says in the Psalms, ‘Lord, You preserve man and beast’ (Ps. 36:6). These, therefore, who are dedicated to the study of the word of God and of reasonable doctrine, are called men. But those who are living without such studies and do not want exercises of knowledge, but are nevertheless faithful, they are called animals, though, to be sure, clean ones. For just as some are men of God, so some are sheep of God.”<sup>957</sup>

John Daniélou says that Origen introduced a new concept of typology, which includes a comparison of the animals of the ark to those who are saved in the Church. The animals are distributed among many degrees of perfection, since not all people have the same merit and their progress in the faith is not equal, so was the case in the Ark, where talents were not given to all equally. This also appears in the Church. Although everyone shares the one faith, and the waters of baptism purified them all, they differ in their progress, so that everyone remains in his rank.<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>956</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 10 (FOTC 105:110).

<sup>957</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 3.3 (FOTC 83:57).

<sup>958</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality, Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans., W. Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960): p. 106.



**480. Should we be troubled by the presence of corrupt people in the Church?**

**Origen** clarifies the presence of wicked people in the Church, saying, “We should not be surprised if it becomes clear to us, before the commissioned angels begin to separate the wicked from among the righteous, that our gatherings have wicked ones also.”<sup>959</sup>

As **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do not be troubled by the presence of corrupt and wicked people. In a large house there are both types of pots ... but they cannot obtain dignity.” “Alas for their utter madness! Was there need of a sign before they could cease their evil doings, and free the house of God from such dishonor? And was it not the greatest sign of His Excellence that He had gotten such zeal for that House? In fact, the well-disposed were distinguished by this very thing, for ‘They,’ His disciples, it says, ‘Remembered that it is written, “the zeal of your house has eaten me up.”’ But the Jews did not remember the Prophecy and said, ‘What sign do You show us?’ both grieving that their shameful traffic was cut off, and expecting by these means to stop Him, and also desiring to challenge Him to a miracle, and to find fault with what He was doing.”<sup>960</sup>

**481. What is the Church's stance on those who are corrupt and reckless?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “He who sins with his sister should remain outside the church gates for three years until he realizes the seriousness of what he committed, asking those entering the church to pray for him that he may find grace before God. Three years later, he joins the congregation of the listeners, and after the readings and the sermon he is to be expelled from the church and not allowed to attend the Liturgy of the Faithful. Three years later, he can rejoin the community.”

**482. What does the Apostle Paul mean when he says that the Church proclaims the mystery of salvation to the heavenly ones (Eph. 3:9–11)?**

St. Paul says, “and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:9–11). Until the great day of the Lord, the heavenlies remain in astonishment, as they behold the mysteries of God's hidden wisdom, as they see adulterers become saints, and humans become partakers with them in the heavenly life.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “True, to man it was not revealed and are you enlightening Angels and Archangels and Principalities and Powers? I am, says he. For it was ‘hidden in God,’ even in ‘God who created all things.’ And do you venture to utter this? I do, says

<sup>959</sup> Origen, *Comm. on Matt.*, Book 2.13.

<sup>960</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St John*, 23.2. (NPNF I/14:80).

he. But whence has this been made manifest to the Angels? ... The angels knew that the gentiles are called, but to be called to enjoy the same privileges of Israel and to sit on the throne of God (Rev. 3:21). Who has expected such a thing? Who would have believed it?”<sup>961</sup>

#### **483. Does the Church love all humanity?**

When Celsus accused Christians of believing that God abandoned all humankind and was concerned with the Church alone, **Origen** answered him that this was never a Christian belief.<sup>962</sup> **Origen** says, “But since it was the purpose of God that the nations should receive the benefits of Christ's teaching, all the devices of men against Christians have been brought to nothing; for the more that kings, and rulers, and peoples have persecuted them everywhere, the more have they increased in number and grown in strength.”<sup>963</sup>

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<sup>961</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 7 (NPNF I/13:80).

<sup>962</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.28 (ANF 4:508); N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): p. 76.

<sup>963</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.26 (ANF 4 :622).

## 2

**The Heavenly High Priest and the Church****484. Why did sorrow fill the hearts of the disciples during Christ's farewell speech?**

The word "sorrow" appeared in Christ's farewell speech to the disciples several times: "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts" (John 16:6); "I say to you that you will weep and lament; but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful; but your sorrow will be turned to joy" (John 16:20); and "You now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and your joy, no one will take from you" (John 16:22). Why did sorrow fill their hearts? How will they rejoice, and how will no one take their joy away from them?

Sorrow filled their hearts because they did not understand the mystery of the cross, that it would open to them the gates of heaven that were shut since the days of Adam who turned his back to God, did not trust in the divine commandment, and trusted in the deceptive words of the devil.

They had not yet experienced the power of the resurrection to sing: "[He] raised us up together. And made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

They had not yet experienced that the Church is the body of Christ and that whatever the Head does, is for our sake — His body.

They did not comprehend the work of the Holy Trinity for us and in us. Christ said, "My father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). And that when He ascends to heaven and sends the Holy Spirit, He would then say, "My Holy Spirit works in you while My Father and I are also at work within you."

The Holy Spirit did not stop working for the sake of our salvation, victory, and enjoyment of the heavenly glories.

They had not yet seen Christ as the unique High Priest, who is able to intercede on their behalf before the Father. The Apostle says, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Heb. 4:14). Not only does He forgive our sins, but we are also justified in Him (Gal. 2:17) and are made worthy of the heavenly inheritance.

**485. How did the sorrow of the disciples turn into great joy, directly after the ascension?**

According to St. Luke the Evangelist, "He led them out as far as Bethany. And He lifted up His hands and blessed them; Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; and they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:50–52). The cause of this great joy directly after the ascension, is

that the Word of God came down from heaven in the flesh to save humanity and to draw the hearts, minds, and all the energies of His believers towards Him. His ascension to heaven did not take their focus on Him, but rather fixed their eyes towards heaven. **Origen** says, “If you believe that He sat at the right hand of God in heaven, it would be befitting of you to believe that your place is no longer on the earth, but in heaven.”<sup>964</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, “blazing the trail [the Lord] made anew the way up to heaven, saying again, ‘*Lift up your gates, O princes of yours, and be raised up, everlasting gates*’ (Ps. 24:7). For it was not the Word Himself who needed the gates to be opened, since he is the Lord of all, nor was any made thing closed to its Maker; but we were those who needed it, who he himself carried up through His own body. For as He offered [it] to death on behalf of all, so through it he opened up again the way to heaven.”<sup>965</sup>

The monks the Monastery of St. Macarius comment on this, saying, “Here, St. Athanasius is basing his argument on the verse in Hebrews, ‘By a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh’ (Heb. 10:20). The importance of Christ’s ascension comes from the fact that He was in a human flesh taken from us, and therefore He represented us and whatever He accomplished was for the sake of the entire human race. Since this body belonged to the Word of God, existent in the bosom of the Father, it was His natural right to ascend and to enter into the presence of the Father, becoming the first fruits of humanity and our ambassador before the Father.”<sup>966</sup>

#### **486. What are the features of the Church of the New Covenant after the ascension of Christ?**

Since Christ, the Head of the Church, ascended to heaven, the Church enjoyed what the Lord promised His disciples, “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) and the main task of the Church became to draw the hearts and minds of the believers to the heavenly throne of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit, where the Head of the Church is seated at the right hand of the Father.

#### **487. Did the work of the Savior stop with His ascension to heaven?**

The story in the Gospels stopped at the Savior’s ascension to heaven, and the Church’s longing for His second coming on the clouds when she will join Him on His divine throne in a glorious heavenly procession. That being said, St. Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews focused on the Savior’s role pertaining to His struggling Church from the time of His ascension to His second coming. “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ” (Heb. 3:1). “This hope we have as

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<sup>964</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Comm. John Frag.* 144.

<sup>965</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 25 (PP 44A:105).

<sup>966</sup> Cf. St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 7 (PP 44A:65).

an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20).

**488. What does he mean by saying, “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil” (Heb. 6:19)?**

**First:** Under the priesthood of Aaron (the Levitical priesthood), sacrifices were not offered in the “Holy of Holies” or in the “Holy Place,” but outside on the “bronze altar.” The heavenly High Priest, on the other hand, offers Himself in the “Holy of Holies,” in heaven itself.

**Second:** The Apostle says: “Consider the apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Heb. 3:1). Through the incarnation, the Father sent His Son to us as a messenger to proclaim God’s love on the cross, to grant us the possibility of resurrection by His resurrection, and to bring us into His heavens by His sitting on the right hand of God. In this, Christ differs from the Levitical priests, the prophets, and the angels. He was not sent, in the sense that He left His place to go to another, but remained inseparable from His Father, filling heaven and earth. The goal of His mission was to proclaim our faith or our confession of the Truth. He offered Himself, being the unchangeable divine Truth whom we receive to see the mysteries of the Father as the Lord says, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on, you know Him ... He who has seen Me, has seen the Father” (John 14:7, 9)

His mission is therefore unique, and through it, He bears us in Him to bring us forth into the bosom of His Father that we may know Him; a knowledge of fellowship and union. We see in the Father, who is unseen and enjoy what the carnal senses can never comprehend.

**St. Athanasius** says, “And when did He become the ‘High Priest of our confession,’ but when, after offering Himself for us, He raised His Body from the dead, and, as now, Himself brings near and offers to the Father those who in faith approach Him, redeeming all, and for all propitiating God?”<sup>967</sup>

**Third:** By saying, “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,” he likens the Church and the believers to a ship that entered into the heavenly port, in the person of her Head, Jesus Christ, and is united with Him as a steadfast anchor which makes it impossible for the devil, the forces of darkness, the world currents, the storms of temptation, to draw it out of the port, something that the Levitical priests could not do. No matter how righteous Aaron and his priests were, they themselves were in need for someone to atone them and to draw them to heaven. For this reason, they offered sacrifices for themselves as well as on behalf of the

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<sup>967</sup> St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.7 (NPNF II/4:351).

people. As for Christ, He ascended on our behalf to heaven and drew our hearts to where He is seated.

**Fourth:** In the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle makes it clear that Christ is performing His priesthood while seated on the throne. We have never heard in history of a priest who offers sacrifices while seated, but while standing upright in front of God who is seated on His throne.

#### **489. What is Christ’s role with regards to His unique heavenly priesthood?**

**First:** Christ offered His unique sacrifice once. Its effectiveness extends from Adam to the end of the ages, without having to be repeated. As for animal sacrifices, they had to be repeated because of their deficiency until Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross and therefore invalidated it. In the Eucharist, Christ does not offer Himself again but instead we celebrate the same sacrifice that was offered on the cross.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What then? Do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of His death, and this [remembrance] is one and not many. How is it one, and not many? Inasmuch as that [Sacrifice] was once for all offered, [and] carried into the Holy of Holies. This is a figure of that [sacrifice] and this remembrance of that. For we always offer the same, not one sheep now and tomorrow another, but always the same thing: so that the sacrifice is one. And yet by this reasoning, since the offering is made in many places, are there many Christs? But Christ is one everywhere, being complete here and complete there also, one Body. As then while offered in many places, He is one body and not many bodies; so also [He is] one sacrifice. He is our High Priest, who offered the sacrifice that cleanses us. That we offer now also, which was then offered, which cannot be exhausted. This is done in remembrance of what was then done. For (says He) do this in remembrance of Me. It is not another sacrifice, as the High Priest, but we offer always the same, or rather we perform a remembrance of a Sacrifice.”<sup>968</sup>

**Second: St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “He took an earthly flesh, having Mary for the Mother of His Body as if virgin earth, that, as a High Priest, having He as others an offering, He might offer Himself to the Father, and cleanse us all from sins in His own blood, and might rise from the dead.”<sup>969</sup>

**Third:** Christ is the mediator and guarantee that the sacrifice will be accepted, since He is one with the Father (John 10:30). The Priest is the Son of God Himself who is of one essence with the Father. He is the advocate for the Church and the judge as St Paul says,

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<sup>968</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. The Life of Christ According to the Teaching of St. Athanasius the Apostolic and St. Cyril the Great (Arabic)* (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian)): p. 137. See also St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 17.6 (NPNF I/14:449) and Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist*. 2nd ed. (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1973).

<sup>969</sup> St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.14 (NPNF II/4:352).

“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ; who is even at the right hand of God; who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34)

**Origen** says, “Forget earthly things for a little while; move beyond the clouds and beyond heaven itself ... Seek there the tabernacle of God where ‘Jesus our forerunner entered for us’ (Heb. 6:20) and ‘is now present before the face of God interceding for us’ (Heb. 7:25).”<sup>970</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “When the Logos became like us and suffered for us in the flesh, He was called a High Priest, not as one who offers a sacrifice that is alien to Himself, but being Himself the lamb (John 1:29), the rational sacrifice, the pure dove, the Bread of Life and the golden altar.”<sup>971</sup> The saint repeats the same statement, “He is the Priest, the Sacrifice, and the Altar.”<sup>972</sup>

#### **490. How could He be the High Priest and the Forgiver of sins at the same time?**

**St. Cyril the Great** often spoke of the hypostatic union between Christ’s divinity and humanity. He says, “He became a High Priest according to His humanity while remaining according to His divinity as the One who accepts the sacrifices offered by all. He is the sacrifice Himself according to the flesh and according to the authority of His divinity, He is the forgiver of sins. In both cases, He is the one Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>973</sup> “It is true that every priest stands during the liturgy and is never counted as one who is seated or of equal in honor to God, but instead the priest worships Him. So Christ is a unique Priest for when He offers the liturgical service — according to His humanity — He is also the one who according to His divinity is seated on the divine throne.”<sup>974</sup>

St. Cyril the Great says that this interpretation is not his own but was previously proclaimed by the Psalmist in Psalm 110, in which he demonstrated the unity of the nature of Christ. That psalm makes it clear that the Messiah is going to be an eternal Priest: “The Lord has sworn, and will not relent, ‘You are a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps. 110:4). The psalm explained at the same time that that Priest is at the right hand of God on the heavenly throne; saying, “The Lord said to My Lord ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies Your footstool’” (Ps 110:1).

Such connection between Christ’s priesthood, and His sitting at the right hand of God, is in essence Christ’s hypostatic unity in His incarnation, namely, the unity of Christ’s divine and human natures. He is the incarnate God, with His human nature parting not from His divinity not for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye.

<sup>970</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 3.3.2: p. 11.

<sup>971</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On Hebrews*.

<sup>972</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria (PG 68:596–604; 616–625).

<sup>973</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On Hebrews*.

<sup>974</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On Hebrews*.

Again, St. Cyril talks about Christ's priesthood and His hypostatic union saying, "While offering the liturgical ministry according to His humanity, He is at the same time God who is seated on the divine throne."<sup>975</sup> Again he says, "About Him it is said that He 'passed through the heavens' (Heb 4:14) in the flesh and as God at the same time. For He ascended (in the flesh) to appear before the face of God (for our sake) and at the same time, He 'passed through heaven' (as God), to sit as a Son with His Father, above all principalities, even so He came to be like us according to the Divine will."

#### **491. What does St. Paul mean by "the apostle of our confession"?**

**St. Cyril the Great** believes that the goal of Christ's prayers during His life on earth was "to make the Father's ears attentive to the cries of the human nature," and, "We were the ones who were in Him, praying with vehement cries and tears."

St. Cyril believes that this verse speaks about Christ who as a High Priest ascended to heaven, as a delegate on behalf of all humanity to represent them before God the Father (Heb. 6:20; 9:24). He bore within Himself our confession of faith and all our worship and united these offerings with the sacrifice of Himself to grant them a limitless value. He ascended with these offerings as a High Priest to offer it on our behalf before the Father.

"When He became man, as St. John says that 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14) — He came to be an apostle for our sake and the High Priest of our confession, to offer God the Father our confession of faith." "When the Word of God the Father became man, He became the one who offers to Himself and to His Father, the confession of our faith."

Commenting on the verse, "Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you" (John 16:23), St. Cyril says that Christ is emphasizing that whatever they ask, they ask with "He Himself acting as Mediator and leading them into the Father's Presence. For this is the meaning of the words *in my Name*; for we cannot draw nigh unto God the Father save by the Son alone. For *through Him we have obtained access in One Spirit unto the Father* (Eph. 2:18), according to the Scripture. Therefore also He says: *I am the Door: I am the Way: no one comes to the Father but by Me* (John 10:7; 14:6) ... This did not enter into the life of the men of old time; they never practised this manner of prayer, for they knew it not. But now is it ordained for us by Christ, at the appropriate season, when the time of the accomplishment of our redemption was fulfilled, and the perfect fruition of all good was gained for us by Him."<sup>976</sup>

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<sup>975</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On Hebrews*.

<sup>976</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 2* 11.2 on John 16:23–24 (LFHCC 48:465–466) amended.



**492. What does the apostle mean by saying, “Now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24)?**

According to **St. Cyril the Great**, “What does it mean that He appears now before the face of God for our sake? Was He not always in the presence of God before He took flesh? He was definitely so, for He is the exalted wisdom of God by which all things came from nothing to existence that were ‘daily His delight; rejoicing always before Him’ (Prov. 8:30). But now, what is new, is that He appears before God, not any more as the Logos (without flesh) as He was always since the beginning, but now He appears before God in a nature like ours. That is why we say that He appears now for our sake in the presence of God the Father, to offer our nature, which was exiled from before God because of the sin of Adam. Therefore, He brings us to the Father’s presence, in Himself, since He became man that He may draw us near the Father, free us from our old sins, and transform our depths to the new life through the Spirit, that we may be counted worthy to see God the Father, being elevated to the honor of sonship.”

The apostle says, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: we have a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man ... But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Heb. 8:1–6).

Aaron ministered in the wilderness, as befitting the servant of the law. But the dwelling that is fit for Christ is the splendid city from above, namely, heaven itself; the divine and exalted tabernacle not made by man. The goal of His liturgical ministry is to sanctify those believing in Him by His Holy Spirit; and to offer them to the Father, as ones who are dead to the world and living by the Spirit. This is the ministry befitting of Him.



## 3

## The Church as a Heavenly Wedding Feast

### The Church as the Bride of Christ

The Alexandrian Fathers, especially Origen in his commentary on the Song of Songs, adopted the biblical understanding of the Church as the heavenly bride of Christ. In their view, this is foundational to the relationship between God and humanity.

R. B. Lawson<sup>977</sup> says, “The exquisite picture that the great Alexandrian portrays of his beloved Church is so vivid and so rich in color ... Small wonder that for too many today she stands only for an organization, rather than for what she was familiarly in Origen’s thought of her — Our Lord and Savior’s mystical Bride!”

Origen says, “Do not assume that the bride, namely, the Church, existed only after the resurrection of the Savior for she was there even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The foundations of the Church have been laid since the beginning.”<sup>978</sup>

### 493. Is the Church a heavenly bride or a social establishment?

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the Church is the bride of Christ and the subject of His love. He rejoices over her and lays down His life for her sake. He came down to raise her with Him to His heavens. He was incarnate and became man that she may enjoy His blessings and fellowship in His virtues. She is the unique heavenly bride! She never competes with the worldly institutions and at the same time she does not resist or ridicule such institutions but as a heavenly bride, she washes their feet in love, holiness and humility.

The secret of the true believer’s strength is that while he is practical in his life in the world, he is very much connected to his spiritual life with God and heaven without hypocrisy. The Church here on earth is the “icon of heaven” and her life here is a token of the heavenly life as St John Chrysostom says, “The church is heavenly! She is nothing but heaven!”<sup>979</sup>

“Let our souls be heaven ... Let us imitate Paul who while he was on earth, he was alive in heaven ... Amazing again, where has He raised the Church? As though he were lifting it up by some engine, He has raised it up to a vast height, and set it on yonder throne; for where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval to separate between the Head and the body; for were there a separation, then were it no longer a body.”<sup>980</sup>

“It is in our power, if we wish, no longer to be in the flesh, no, nor upon the earth, but in heaven, and in the Spirit. Let us then be in ourselves, in heaven, in the Spirit. Let us abide in

<sup>977</sup> R. P. Lawson in Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* (ACW 26:7).

<sup>978</sup> Origen, Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* 11.8 (ACW 26:149).

<sup>979</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 14.3 (NPNF I/14:434).

<sup>980</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 3 (NPNF I/13:62).

the peace and in the grace of God, that we may be set at liberty from all the things of the flesh, and may be able to attain to those good things which are promised in Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>981</sup>

“For we ought to go out from this place as if it were from some sacred place, as men who have descended from heaven itself, who have become sedate, and philosophical, who do and say everything in proper measure.”<sup>982</sup>

“Contemplate this marvelous privilege. He sends angels to humans to guide them to heaven. Behold heaven being established on earth that heaven may accept the earthly beings.”<sup>983</sup>

“Behold how he set forth with their senses to the heavenly matters. For, as I already said: He repeats again and again, that they have whatever Christ has. In all his epistles he concentrates on making it clear that, in everything, they are partners with Christ. Hence, he uses the terms ‘Head and body’, and does his best to provide this concept to them.”<sup>984</sup>

“As His body was raised up on high, the heavenly matters were manifested. It is, therefore, befitting of us to have our thoughts, hope, and expectations, there (in heaven), lest we fail.”

“There is nothing more stable than the church, she is your salvation and your refuge. She is higher above the heavens and nearer than earth. She never gets old but remains fruitful forever. Thousands of people tried to describe her honor just as the Lord is called with many names...She is called a bride one time, a daughter another time, a virgin, maidservant, and a queen.”<sup>985</sup>

#### **494. What is our role in getting ready for the heavenly wedding?**

The believer gets ready for the eternal wedding all his days of sojourn on earth, so that he grows in his understanding of the faith, his personal and communal worship, his spiritual struggle, his fellowship with the heavenlies and his relationship with his brethren. “For if (Christ’s resurrection) opened the gates of hell, and threw wide the archways of Heaven, and made a new entrance into Paradise, and cut away the nerves of the devil; what marvel, if it prevailed over poisonous drugs, and venomous beasts, and all other such things.”<sup>986</sup>

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<sup>981</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians 5* (NPNF I/13:74).

<sup>982</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily to Those Who Had Not Attended the Assembly* (NPNF I/9:227)

<sup>983</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “*Homily on Christmas Morning*,” in *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Church Fathers. Volume One: From the First Sunday of Advent to Quinquagesima*, ed. M. F. Toal (Chicago: Henry Regery Co., 1957): p. 113.

<sup>984</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians 7* (NPNF I/13:289, 290).

<sup>985</sup> St. John Chrysostom, PG 52:402.

<sup>986</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St Matthew 54.7* (NPNF I/10:322).

#### 495. Do we use the language of “the heavenly bride”?

An ecclesiastical person is not only the person who is familiar with the Church’s communal prayers, law, and history, but also knows and practices the Church’s heavenly language as well as her life and gospel. Love is heaven’s language as **St. John Chrysostom** says; the love of God and of the neighbor are the passports by which one can cross the gates of heaven without any hindrance. It is the royal heavenly garment by which the believer enters into heaven, as a heavenly bride, to the divine throne to find the King, holding out the golden scepter, as in the case of Queen Esther, that she may sit at the right hand of the heavenly King.

Love is the rule of heaven, and its language. Whoever walks with love, imitates the heavenly God, “for God is love” (1 John 4:8). Speaking about love, especially that of the enemies, as the highest level of heavenly virtue, St. John Chrysostom says, “Can you not see how the Lord raises us up step by step to the gates of heaven? (Matt. 5:46).”<sup>987</sup> Speaking of almsgiving, He raises our eyes to heaven and to the heavenly saying, “Invite Christ to your supper”<sup>988</sup> “we are able to resemble God, in showing mercy and pity.”<sup>989</sup>

“By how much the brother may be least, so much more does Christ come to you through him. For he that receives the great, often does it from vainglory also ... I wish we do not seek those who are able to reward us, but to follow the saying: ‘You will have the blessing, as they do not have what to reward you with.’ Do not be disturbed when we are not rewarded with compassion in return for our compassion for if we receive it from men, we will not receive a greater reward. But if we did not receive it from men, God Himself will reward us. For you ought indeed to receive the poor in the upper part of your house; but if you will not do this, then though it be below, though but where your mules are housed, and your servants, there receive Christ. Let the poor man be (your inmate) a guard to your house: let him be to you a wall and a fence, a shield and a spear. Where alms are, the devil dares not approach, nor any other evil thing. Let us not overlook so great a gain. But now a place is set apart for a chariot, and for litters another; but for Christ Who is wandering, not even one!”<sup>990</sup>

“If we are ashamed of these, whom Christ is not ashamed of, we are then ashamed of Christ Himself since we are ashamed of His friends. Fill your banquets with the lame and disfigured for through them, Christ will come to you and not through the rich.”<sup>991</sup>

“Almsgiving is greater than any sacrifice. It opens the heavens for it was said, ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God’ (Acts 10:4). It is more

<sup>987</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St Matthew* 18.8 (NPNF I/10:125).

<sup>988</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 27.7 (NPNF I/12:163).

<sup>989</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle to Timothy* 6.5 (NPNF I/13:498).

<sup>990</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 45 (NPNF I/11:277).

<sup>991</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 11 (NPNF I/13:374).

important than virginity for some virgins have been driven out of the quarters of the Bridegroom because of their lack of almsgiving while other virgins were let in.”<sup>992</sup>

#### **496. What is the heavenly treasure of the Church?**

Though Christ is rich, for our sake He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich and He may become our treasure. Oftentimes, our hearts are attached to our money and wealth and ignore the Giver of these blessings, so that we become like children who became attached to their toys rather than to the parents who gave them the toys. For this reason, parents sometimes take away these toys; not forever, but only to help them pay more attention to those who truly love them.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “As if a child possessing a toy, should prefer it to things necessary, and his father, to lead him against his will to what was better for him, should deprive him of his toy; so God takes these things from us, that He may lead us to heaven.”<sup>993</sup> “This wealth is not a possession, it is not property, it is a loan for use. For when you die, willingly or unwillingly, all that you have goes to others, and they again give it up to others, and they again to others.”<sup>994</sup>

#### **497. What are the riches the heavenly bride wishes to acquire?**

**St. John Chrysostom** presents us with an amazing image of the unique riches, given by God to the believer. For the heavenly Father, in His love for humanity, provides us with exalted works that make us worthy of the heavenly life. So, what riches did the Heavenly Bridegroom grant to His bride?

He made for us a body from dust, and by His Holy Spirit He grants us the grace to raise it up to heaven.

He created for us a beautiful body, and entrusted it to us that by His Holy Spirit, we can make for ourselves, a beautiful soul.

He allowed the existence of Satan, yet He granted us authority over him as if he is a helpless bird.

He lighted the lamps of heaven, and entrusted us to offer the light of His knowledge to our brethren.

He created the glorious heavenly hosts, and granted us the grace to be partakers in His nature – something that astonishes the heavenlies.

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<sup>992</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Luc Ser.* 81.

<sup>993</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to Timothy* 1 (NPNF I/13:412).

<sup>994</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to Timothy* 11 (NPNF I/13:443).

He granted us the grace to have communion in His Body and Blood, that we may be one with Him.

#### **498. How did St. John the Baptist rejoice over the Church, the bride of Christ?**

Some disciples of St. John the Baptist came to him and said, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified — behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him” (John 3:26). John was not disturbed, but joyfully proclaimed that what Christ is doing, is from heaven. He then seized the opportunity to confirm and clarify his testimony to Christ and to His bride — the Church. St. John answered them, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled” (John 3:29). St. John proclaimed his joy at the coming of the divine Bridegroom and for His bride who is united with Him. In that, he expressed what the holy men of God from the Old Testament felt towards this wedding feast.

In his commentary on Song of Songs, **St. Gregory of Nyssa** talks about this saying, “For the virgin’s good matchmakers — the patriarchs and prophets and lawgivers — brought the divine gifts of grace to the betrothed virgin. Custom calls these ‘wedding gifts,’ meaning by this expression presents that are given before the marriage (which are remission of transgressions, forgetfulness of misdeeds, removal of sin, transformation of nature, change of the corruptible into the incorruptible, the delight of paradise, the honor of a kingdom, joy without end). The virgin, then, when she has received these divine gifts from their good bearers, who have brought them to her through the prophetic teaching, both confesses her desire and calls upon grace to hasten, since she is already eager to savor the splendor of the One she desires.”<sup>995</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “It is as though John the Baptist is saying, ‘I would have been in so much pain if this did not happen, namely, if the bride was not presented to her Groom. I would have been in pain and distress, but I will not be distressed since my wish was fulfilled and the bride knew her Groom and you all witnessed that. So when I see my wish being fulfilled, I am gladdened and I rejoice.’”

#### **499. What are the unique features of the heavenly bride?**

**First: Heavenly Joy:** The church’s virtuous life is an icon of the heavenly life, into which no disturbance nor anxiety can crawl, but the believer lives in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding and rejoices with the heavenly joy that springs from the Holy Spirit. The soul thus enjoys this joy as she prepares herself for the heavenly wedding. As for

<sup>995</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 1: pp. 25–27.

evildoers, they cannot have fellowship with the heavenly Bridegroom, but hear that prophetic voice saying, “There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked” (Isa. 48:22).

When the believer contemplates heaven, he will never find a distressed angel or an angel quarreling with another, since they all live together in perfect peace. The believer then imitates them and this is how he prepares himself for the eternal heavenly wedding. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “I should say that true happiness is when the soul is not affected by passion, not agitated nor overpowered by the body.”<sup>996</sup> “We, who do have the first fruit of the Spirit, we, as well, ‘groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body’ (Rom 8:23); For he who has this fondness, can neither be puffed up by the good things of this life, nor abashed by its sorrows; but as though dwelling in the very heavens, is freed from each sort of irregularity.”<sup>997</sup>

**Second: Humility as the ladder to heaven:** True believers ascend to heaven day by day with humility to meet their humble Bridegroom who says, “Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). **St. Jerome** encourages us to strive that we may attain greater glory in heaven; the matrimonial heavenly house: “If we are all going to be equal in heaven, in vain do we humble ourselves here that we may be greater there.”<sup>998</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** also says, “For this is the summary of our salvation. He who has acquired this virtue, although still entangled in the flesh, will be able to vie with immaterial powers and to be free from any connection with his present life ... e he has come under the yoke of Christ and has learned to be meek and humble of heart, he will follow in the steps of the Master and manifest every virtue in every way”<sup>999</sup> He also says, “If the sin of haughtiness by the Hebrew women was punished under the old law (Isa. 3:16), what can we say about women under the law of grace, the household of the city of heaven, who are supposed to imitate the angelic life?”

**Third: Commitment to the sense of responsibility** in everything we are entrusted with. Our life is a divine school in which we learn and are trained on the heavenly life in all aspects of our life, as a heavenly bride. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “And another thing too we learn, the self-restraint of the disciples which they practised in necessary things, and how little they accounted of food. For being twelve, they had five loaves only and two fishes; so secondary to them were the things of the body: so did they cling to the things spiritual only.”<sup>1000</sup> And he says, “I want you to set your minds on these things all the time (1 Cor. 3:1), for when we

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<sup>996</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to Timothy* 2 (NPNF I/13:415).

<sup>997</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.7 (NPNF I/10:131).

<sup>998</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.33 (NPNF II/6:412).

<sup>999</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 1.30, 31 (31:36).

<sup>1000</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 49.4 (NPNF I/10:296).



focus on them, we become liberated from earth and are raised to heaven.”<sup>1001</sup> “It is possible even while abiding here, to do all, as though already placed on high.”<sup>1002</sup>

**Fourth: To know both sides of the spiritual warfare.** Since we are invited to the heavenly wedding feast, let us remember what was said about our heavenly Bridegroom: “Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one, with your glory & your majesty” (Ps. 45:3). Our warfare against the devil is actually between God and Satan. In His love for man, God desires humanity to be lifted up to His heavens, granting them victory as good soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3). On the other hand, the devil in his envy, does his best to destroy man so that he may not desire heaven, destroying every hope in it and using every possible way to enslave him and draw him down to the flames of the eternal hell. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “See how the devil on the other hand set himself in array against God or rather not against God unveiled, but God hidden in man's nature.”<sup>1003</sup>

**Fifth: Commitment to the life of prayer and praise:** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Even if you are in the market-place, you can collect yourself, and sing unto God, no one hearing you. For Moses also in this way prayed, and was heard, for He says, Why do you cry unto Me? (Ex. 14:15) although he said nothing, but cried in thought — wherefore also God alone heard him — with a contrite heart. For it is not forbidden one even when walking to pray in his heart, and to dwell above.”<sup>1004</sup> “Nothing helps the soul soar in the heavens, detaches it from the world, snatches it from the bonds of flesh, teaches her to despise worldly matters, like praising with harmonious melodies.”

**Sixth: Observing Feasts with a spiritual mind.** We observe the day of the Lord as a weekly feast that we may strongly be attached to our Bridegroom and complete all the days of our lives in a constant feast that never ends. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, the Sabbath, for many of the Jews, was a day when they abstain from work to help them remember how they were set free from slavery in Egypt or from making bricks like they used to in Egypt as slaves. In their minds, it was also a way for them to continually go out from slavery to the promise land. As for the new Sabbath in the Christian understanding, it is our entrance into the promise land that we may enjoy the eternal wedding feast and God’s promises. It is not just freedom from slavery, but also a way of enjoying the power of Christ’s resurrection and the joyful spiritual work in the heavenly land of Canaan. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For we must not only be delivered out of Egypt [symbolically], but we must also enter into the [land of] promise.”<sup>1005</sup> Life for us, Christians, is a continuous feast. “For it is a festival, even the whole of our time.”<sup>1006</sup>

<sup>1001</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 7.14 (ACW 31:109).

<sup>1002</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.7 (NPNF I/10:132).

<sup>1003</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 2.1 (NPNF I/10:9).

<sup>1004</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 9 (NPNF I/13:302).

<sup>1005</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 39.4 (NPNF I/10:252).

<sup>1006</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 15.6 (NPNF I/12:86).

**Seventh: Worshiping in the Church with a spiritual mind.** A true ecclesiastical person's partaking in the communal worship of the Church helps him to experience the heavenly life. **St. John Chrysostom** says, "God has set over all one and the same Head, Christ according to the flesh, alike over Angels and men. That is to say, He has given to Angels and men one and the same government; to the one the Incarnate, to the other God the Word ... Let us then exemplify the life of Angels and the virtue of Angels."<sup>1007</sup>

**Eighth: Endurance of the current sorrows for the sake of Christ.** St. Paul the apostle says, "Therefore. Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). **St. John Chrysostom** says, "And see how he brings to nothing the sorrows of this present life. St. Paul sets side by side the things present with the things to come, the momentary with the eternal, the light with the weighty, the affliction with the glory. And neither is he content with this, but he adds another expression, doubling it and saying, more and more exceedingly. Next, he also shows the mode how so great afflictions are light. How are they light? While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. So will both this present be light and that future great, if we withdraw ourselves from the things that are seen."<sup>1008</sup>

Again he says, "Beloved, contemplate the hardships of this life. Even though they could be severe, they are only for a short term. As for the good things that we will receive in the life to come, are eternal. For this reason, may we endure whatever we go through without complaining and let us never stop striving for virtue until we enjoy the eternal goods that will continue forever."<sup>1009</sup>

**Ninth: Preserving the virginity of the heart.** According to **St. Caesarius of Arles**, "the souls, not only of religious, but of all men and women do not doubt that they are spouses of Christ if they are willing to preserve both bodily chastity and virginity of heart in those aforementioned five senses. For Christ is to be understood as the spouse of souls, not of bodies."<sup>1010</sup>

## **500. How is Jacob's marriage a symbol of the Church, the bride?**

According to St. Jacob of Sarug, the saints prophesied about the Incarnate Son of God by their works. Jacob loved Rachel and they were engaged. Rachel symbolizes the Church, the beautiful bride. He also married Leah who represents the Jewish nation, who took Rachel's position after Laban tricked him (Gen. 29). St. Jacob of Sarug says the following:

**First:** "Rachel the daughter of the heathens was sanctified by Jacob, her fiancé. She was betrothed, who was raised among the idols, to him who was prosperous because of the

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<sup>1007</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 1 (NPNF I/13:55).

<sup>1008</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 9 (NPNF I/12:322ff).

<sup>1009</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Genesis* 25.24 (FOTC 82:143).

<sup>1010</sup> St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 'On the Ten Virgins'* 155.4 (FOTC 47:347).

blessings and inspirations. The non-believing woman was sanctified by the holy man (1 Cor. 7:14). Rachel became a saint because of Jacob, how much more will the church be sanctified through the God of Jacob! How was Leah, whose eyes were delicate, neglected? Why then except for the mystery to be fulfilled in her? Rachel was honored more because the beauty of the church was hidden within her, and this is why her victory is great! Oh how wondrous is Jacob's mystery, who is like his Lord and for this reason, he is considered in the scriptures to be great."

**Second:** "Also look at Jacob who walked in poverty, how he was like the Son who humbled Himself ... he left his land to Haran in poverty, and the mysteries followed him and were revealed in him. He arrived at the well not of the water, but of the mysteries. If you look closely, it is full of mysteries more than water. He found it shut with no water coming out as the flock of sheep and shepherds were waiting. He found a great stone on its mouth and the flock was thirsty waiting for the stone to be rolled away (Gen. 29:2) ... Jacob stood and looked at the flocks who were burning with thirst but not capable of rolling the stone away to drink. As he stood by, Rachel came and when he saw her, he rolled the stone away so that the flocks could drink ... The mystery of the church was crystal clear in her face and Jacob longed to marry her. The church was the reason for the beauty of the daughter of the heathens, so that Jacob may see her and conquer ... All the flocks drank water because of Rachel; her beauty, her love, and her splendor."

**Third:** Jacob kissed Rachel and wept to symbolize the sufferings of the Son. "My son, do not think that he physically desired her, for when he kissed her, he wept bitterly. If this was lust, he would not have wept. Pleasure produces lust with all its heat but pain produces grief and sorrow. Wherever weeping is, there lust cannot be. So Jacob was not inflamed with lust, but with the pain of the Son's mysteries."

**Fourth:** The mystery of the Son helped Jacob roll the great stone away. "If this mystery was not with Jacob, he would not have been able to roll it away ... the shadows of the Great Shepherd overshadowed him so that all the shepherds feared him."

**Fifth:** Laban welcomed Jacob and they agreed on his wage and on his marriage to Rachel. "The idolater welcomed the just man with a good heart and he began to assign him work. Laban said: What is your wage? Make it known for it is not good for you to work for free as long as you are with me? (Gen. 29:18). Jacob said: I will serve you for Rachel. Let me marry your younger daughter for this is a good wage ... I will serve you seven years for Rachel and do not give me anything else but her ... Here we see a type of what our Lord will do, in giving Himself up to great labor for the sake of the church. The Son of God surrendered to pain because of His love that by His sufferings He may betroth to Himself the lonely church. He suffered on the cross for the sake of her who worshiped idols so that He can acquire her in holiness. He accepted to shepherd the sheep with the great rod of the cross as He suffered. He accepted to shepherd peoples and multitudes that the church may be restored to Him."

**Sixth:** Jacob married Leah instead of Rachel. “The time has come for the wage to be paid to the Shepherd. Laban however clothed himself with deception to lie to him ... It was a wedding where the groom rejoices over the bride whom he betrothed, but instead of Rachel, Leah came in because of her father’s deception ... In the morning, Laban’s trick was exposed and the unfortunate sight became manifest ... The night concealed the bride but dawn exposed her (Gen. 29:25) and the groom saw and despised her ... In his deception, he placed the name of the beautiful on the ugly so that both brides were clothed with the same beauty.”

**Seventh:** Jacob figured out Laban’s trick and asked him for Rachel. “Where is Rachel for whom I served you? I never asked for Leah and she came into my place without my knowledge. Laban said: It must not be done so in our country that the younger should be given before the firstborn. However, I will not keep Rachel from you if you would like to take both of them, but without violating our law. Jacob agreed to take both from the house of Laban ... Here, the mystery of the two nations was fulfilled through the two sisters who married the same husband. The nation and the nations were resembled by Leah and Rachel. The church and the gentiles were symbolized by the sisters. God called all the nations to a marriage with Him, since no nation on earth is not His own ... The veil that Moses used to cover his face became an image of Leah’s veil ... She looked at the calf and considered it to be a god for she was blind and had no sight to discern the truths. She who was deprived from sight came in first, and the splendid church was left out like Rachel. She was covered with Moses’ veil and no one knew that she was blind since she seemed beautiful because of the veil. The one who had sight was concealed in the nations and remained unknown, the ugly was entirely covered and entered in the house of God.”

**Eighth:** Leah was a symbol of the Jews, who knew God first, followed by Rachel who was a type of the church of the Gentiles. “The former people were the firstborn of God and even though the daughter of the nations was beautiful, she was left behind. It was not appropriate for the youngster to enter before the eldest. Laban testified of this since he gave him Leah before Rachel. Moses led her out of Egypt at midnight so that no one would see that the bride he brought out was not beautiful. She went out at night just as Leah went in at night, but the morning exposed the matter ... Rachel the youngest and the young church who were both beautiful came in at the end for the Light revealed their beauty. The beautiful, beloved, and glorious in all things was betrothed to Jacob. They gave him the one with weak sight, ugly eyes, wrinkled skin, gloomy face, and flaws. Our Lord also betrothed the great church, the daughter of kings to Himself. She is the one who knew the Father, worshiped the Son, and accepted the Spirit. He was also given the nation that worshiped the idols, that built the calf, that denied the Father and crucified the Son ... Rachel did not enter the just man’s place with deception, and the church does not stand before the Holy One with a veil. The church’s face is more beautiful than Rachel’s, and she entered in the morning so that everyone might see her beauty.”

### 501. Why is the Church called, “the sanctified daughter”?

Even though she was called the bride of Christ so that the joy of the Spirit may fill her life even in the midst of her sufferings and struggles with Satan, she was called in Psalm 45, “the daughter and the queen” who comes to the King, followed by the virgins, her companions. The Psalmist says, “Listen O daughter: Consider and incline your ear. Forget your own people also, and your father’s house. So, the King will greatly desire your beauty. Because He is your Lord, worship Him ... The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace. Her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors. The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King’s palace” (Ps. 45:10, 13–15). As a daughter, she is committed to the following:

- a. Keeping the divine commandments.
- b. Inclining her ear and seeking the gift of understanding, in the spirit of humility.
- c. Forsaking her old father, the devil.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “‘Listen O daughter, and incline your ear’ (Ps. 45:11). He summons the Church to hear and observe the precepts and addressing her as daughter, associates her with himself through this title, as if he had adopted her through love. ‘Listen O daughter, and see.’ He teaches that she has a mind trained to contemplation through the word, ‘see.’ Observe well, he says, the creation, and, aided by the order in it, thus ascend to the contemplation of the Creator. Then bending her lofty and proud neck, he says: Incline your ear. Do not run away to stories from the outside, but accept the humble voice in the evangelical account. Incline your ear to this teaching in order that you may forget those depraved customs and the lessons of your fathers. Therefore, forget thy people and thy father’s house. For, everyone who commits sin is of the devil. Cast out, I pray you, he says, the teachings of the evil spirits, forget sacrifices, nocturnal dances, tales which inflame to fornication and to every form of licentiousness. For this reason have I called you my own daughter, that you may hate the parent who previously begot you for destruction. If through such forgetfulness you erase the blemishes of your depraved learning, assuming your own proper beauty, you will appear desirable to your Spouse and King. ‘Because he is your Lord, and him they shall adore.’”<sup>1011</sup>

According to **St. Jerome**, “In this forty-fourth psalm [LXX, i.e., Ps. 45] God speaks to the human soul that, following the example of Abraham, it should go out from its own land and from its kindred, and should leave the Chaldeans, that is the demons, and should dwell in the country of the living, for which elsewhere the prophet sighs: I think to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living. But it is not enough for you to go out from your

<sup>1011</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, Exegetical Homily 17 *Unto the End! for Those Who Shall be Changed, for the Sons of Core for Understanding* (on Ps 44) (FOTC 46:291).

own land unless you forget your people and your father's house; unless you scorn the flesh and cling to the bridegroom in a close embrace."<sup>1012</sup>

**St. Caesarius of Arles** says, "We are invited by God the Father through a happy, blessed exchange to abandon our father the devil. We truly leave our father the devil, provided that, with God's help, we always endeavor to avoid and to flee from his cunning wickedness."<sup>1013</sup>

**Abba Paphnutius** says, "For the person who says Hearken, O daughter, is certainly a Father; and yet he bears witness that the one, whose house and people he urges should be forgotten, is nonetheless father of his daughter. And this happens when being dead with Christ to the rudiments of this world, we no longer as the Apostle says, regard the things which are seen, but those which are not seen, for the things which are not seen are eternal, and going forth in heart from this temporal and visible home, turn our eyes and heart towards that in which we are to remain forever. And this we shall succeed in doing when, while we walk in the flesh, we are no longer at war with the Lord according to the flesh, proclaiming in deed and actions the truth of that saying of the blessed Apostle Our citizenship is in heaven."<sup>1014</sup>

## **502. What is the matrimonial ring offered by the heavenly bridegroom?**

**St. John Chrysostom** tells us that Christ betrothed to Himself the sinful woman (who represented all the sinners who have repented, Luke 7:37). What did He offer her? The matrimonial ring. Made of what? The Holy Spirit. For, according to St. Paul, "He who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us in God, who has also sealed us and given us the spirit in our hearts as a guarantee is God" (2 Cor. 1:21–22).

"The Spirit then He gives her. Next He says Did I not plant you in a garden? She says yes. And how did you fall from there? The devil came and cast me out of the garden. You were planted in the garden and he cast you out: behold I plant you in myself, I uphold you. How? The devil dares not approach me. Neither do I take you up into Heaven; but something greater than Heaven is here: I carry you in myself who am the Lord of Heaven."<sup>1015</sup>

## **503. How will the Bridegroom wash away her defilements?**

"But, she says, I am a sinner and unclean. Let not this trouble you, I am a physician. I know my vessel, I know how it was perverted. It was formerly a vessel of clay, and it was perverted. I remodel it by means of the laver of regeneration and I submit it to the action of fire. For observe: He took dust from the earth and made the man; He formed him. The devil came, and perverted him. Then the Lord came, took him again, and remolded, and recast him

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<sup>1012</sup> St. Jerome, *Epistle* 22.1 (NPNF II/6:22).

<sup>1013</sup> St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 'On the call of Blessed Abraham'* 81.3 (FOTC 47:5).

<sup>1014</sup> St. John Cassian, *Conferences* 3.6 (NPNF II/11:321ff).

<sup>1015</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:259).

in baptism, and He suffered not his body to be of clay, but made it of a harder ware. He subjected the soft clay to the fire of the Holy Spirit. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He was baptized with water that he might be remodeled, with fire that he might be hardened. Therefore the Prophet speaking beforehand under divine guidance declared You shall dash them in pieces like vessels of the potter (Ps. 2:9).”<sup>1016</sup>

#### **504. What is her bride-price (or dowry)?**

“Contemplate! ‘He who establishes us with you in Christ, and anointed us is God, He who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee’ (2 Cor. 1:22). Someone goes to buy a house at a great price and he says give me an earnest that I may have confidence: or one goes to take a wife for himself, he arranges about dowry and property, and he says give me an earnest. Observe: in the purchase of a slave and in all covenants there is an earnest. Since then Christ made a covenant with us (for He was about to take me as a bride) he also assigned a dowry to me not of money, but of blood. But this dowry which He assigns is the bestowal of good things such as eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. He assigned them for the dowry:— immortality, praise with the angels, release from death, freedom from sin, the inheritance of a kingdom (so great are his riches), righteousness, sanctification, deliverance from present evils, discovery of future blessings. Great was my dowry.”<sup>1017</sup>

#### **505. Will He not give us here on earth a portion of the bride-price?**

“Observe, this is the reason why He speaks beforehand with reference to this dowry; He warranted to me in the dowry the resurrection of the body — immortality. For immortality does not always follow resurrection, but the two are distinct. For many have risen, and been again laid low, like Lazarus and the bodies of the saints. But in this case it is not so, but the promise is of resurrection, immortality, a place in the joyful company of angels, the meeting of the Son of Man in the clouds, and the fulfillment of the saying so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17), the release from death, the freedom from sin, the complete overthrow of destruction.

“Why do you not give me the dowry here? It will be given when you have come to my Father, when you have entered the royal palace. Did you come to me! No, I (Jesus) came to you. I came not that you should abide here but that I might take you and return. Seek not the dowry here: all depends on hope, and faith.

“And do you give me nothing in this world? He answers. Receive an earnest that you may trust me concerning that which is to come: receive pledges and betrothal gifts. Therefore

<sup>1016</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:259).

<sup>1017</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:260).

Paul says, ‘I have betrothed you’ (2 Cor. 11:2). As gifts of betrothal God has given us present blessings: they are an earnest of the future; but the full dowry abides in the other world.”<sup>1018</sup>

**506. What is the garment worn by the bride and queen?**

“The prophet says concerning her: The queen stood upon your right hand in a vesture woven with gold. He does not mean a real vesture, but virtue. Therefore the Scripture elsewhere says How did you get in here without a wedding garment? so that here he does not mean a garment, but fornication, and foul and unclean living. As then foul raiment signifies sin, so does golden raiment signify virtue. But this raiment belonged to the king. He Himself bestowed the raiment upon her: for she was naked, naked and disfigured.”<sup>1019</sup>

**507. Is the Church His daughter or His bride?**

“Listen O daughter” (Ps. 45:10), For He espoused her as a wife, He loves her as a daughter, He provides for her as a handmaid, He guards her as a virgin, He fences her round like a garden, and cherishes her like a member: as a head He provides for her, as a root he causes her to grow, as a shepherd He feeds her, as a bridegroom He weds her, as a propitiation He pardons her, as a sheep He is sacrificed, as a bridegroom He preserves her in beauty, as a husband He provides for her support.”<sup>1020</sup>

**508. How will the bride contribute?**

“What have I to contribute? What? Do you say? Your will and your faith. Hearken O daughter and behold. And what will you have me do? Forget your own people. What kind of people? The devils, the idols, the sacrificial smoke, and steam, and blood. Forget your own people, and your father's house. Leave your father and come after me. I left my Father, and came to you, and will you not leave your father? But when the word leave is used in reference to the Son do not understand by it an actual leaving. What He means is I condescended, I accommodated myself to you, I assumed human flesh. This is the duty of the bridegroom, and of the bride...

“The king shall desire your beauty. You have the Lord for your lover. If you have Him for your lover, you have also the things which are His ... Let us turn inwards to the soul: Look upon that beauty, or rather listen to it: for you cannot see it since it is invisible — Listen to that beauty. What then is the beauty of the soul? Temperance, mildness, almsgiving, love, brotherly kindness, tender affection, obedience to God, the fulfillment of the law, righteousness, contrition of heart. These things are the beauty of the soul. These things then are not the results of nature and he who does not possess these things is able to receive them,

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<sup>1018</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:261).

<sup>1019</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:262).

<sup>1020</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:263).



and he who has them, if he becomes careless, loses them ... For what was more graceless than the soul of Paul when he was a blasphemer and insulter: what more full of grace when he said I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). What was more graceless than the soul of the robber? What more full of grace when he heard the words Verily I say unto you today shall you be with me in paradise? (Luke 23:43). What was more graceless than the publican when he practiced extortion? But what more full of grace when he declared his resolution (Luke 19:8). Do you see that you cannot alter the grace of the body, for it is the result not of moral disposition, but of nature. But the grace of soul is supplied out of our own moral choice. You have now received the definition. Of what kind are they? That the beauty of the soul proceeds from obedience to God. For if the graceless soul obeys God it puts off its ungracefulness, and becomes full of grace.”<sup>1021</sup>

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<sup>1021</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:264).



## 4

**The Unique Work of the Church****509. What is the most important work of the Church?**

The Church offers love as her most important work. According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, says the Lord, fixing his regards here on the holy assembly of **love**, the heavenly Church. **Love**, then, is something pure and worthy of God, **and its work is fellowship.**”<sup>1022</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** gave two homilies on “Eutropius” — whom the emperor trusted and consulted in all that concerned the empire, and who took advantage of this to use every means to persecute the Church. When the emperor discovered that Eutropius planned to assassinate him, Eutropius fled and took refuge in a church. He held onto the horns of the altar and sought the intervention of the Archbishop, St. John Chrysostom. Many people gathered and asked Chrysostom to deliver Eutropius to the authorities to be tried, so what did the saint do? He addressed Eutropius saying:

“The Church which you treated as an enemy has opened her bosom and received you into it; whereas the theaters which you courted, and about which you were oftentimes indignant with me have betrayed and ruined you. And now the hippodromes (i.e., theaters), having exhausted your wealth, have whetted the sword against you, but the Church which experienced your untimely wrath is hurrying in every direction, in her desire to pluck you out of the net ...

“For who was more exalted than this man? Did he not surpass the whole world in wealth? Did he not climb to the very pinnacle of distinction? Did not all tremble and fear before him? Yet lo! He has become more wretched than a prisoner, more pitiable than a menial slave, more indigent than a beggar wasting away with hunger, having every day a vision of sharpened swords and of the criminal's grave, and the public executioner leading him out to his death ... But even if I try my best, I shall not be able to present to you in language the suffering which he must naturally undergo, in the hourly expectation of death ...

“When all have despised him in his desolation, she alone like an affectionate mother has concealed him under her cloak, opposing both the wrath of the king, and the rage of the people, and their overwhelming hatred. This is an ornament for the altar. A strange kind of ornament, you say, when the accused sinner, the extortioner, the robber is permitted to lay hold of the altar (that the church loves her enemies) ... Grudge not then, O man. We are the servants of the crucified one who said: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ (Luke 23:34).”<sup>1023</sup>

<sup>1022</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:238).

<sup>1023</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:251).

**Origen** spoke about the love that unites heaven and earth saying, “One of the most supreme virtues according to the divine Word is the love of neighbor. And we must suppose that it is far more present in the saints who have already fallen asleep toward those struggling in life than in those who are still in human weakness and struggle alongside their inferiors. For it is not only here below that there applies to those who love the brethren the saying, ‘if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together’ (1 Cor. 12:26).”<sup>1024</sup>

### **510. What is the Church’s understanding of the heavenly powers?**

Origen describes the Church as the assembly of the believers, the Christian congregation, whom God serves through the priests<sup>1025</sup> and who are joined with the heavenly powers: “a place of prayer, the spot where believers assemble together, is likely to have something gracious to help us, since angelic powers are placed near the throngs of believers, as well as the powers of our Lord and Savior Himself, and the spirits of the saints — I think both of those who have already fallen asleep and clearly of those who are still alive, even though it is not easy to say how.”<sup>1026</sup>

### **511. What is the Church’s role towards the powers of evil?**

In his second homily on Eutropius after he fled the church and refused to take refuge in it, **St. John Chrysostom** began to explain to his congregation the concept of the Church’s love for her children. The Church is a refuge for her children, as she seeks first the salvation of the soul and guides her to the kingdom of heaven. “When you take refuge in a Church, do not seek shelter merely in the place but in the spirit of the place. For the Church is not wall and roof but faith and life ... Do not tell me that the man having been surrendered was surrendered by the Church; if he had not abandoned the Church he would not have been surrendered. Do not say that he fled here for refuge and then was given up; the Church did not abandon him but he abandoned the Church. He was not surrendered from within the Church but outside its walls ... Do you desire to save yourself? Hold fast to the altar. There are no walls here, but there is the guarding providence of God. Are you a sinner? God will not reject you, “for He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). The harlot was saved when she clung to His feet ...

“Talk not to me of walls and arms: for walls wax old with time, but the Church has no old age. Walls are shattered by barbarians, **but over the Church even demons do not**

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<sup>1024</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily XXVII on Numbers, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 11.2: p.102.

<sup>1025</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.75 (ANF 4:669).

<sup>1026</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily XXVII on Numbers, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 31.5: p. 166.

**prevail.** My words are no mere vaunt for there is evidence of these facts. How many have assailed the Church, **and yet the assailants have perished while the Church herself has soared beyond the sky?**<sup>1027</sup>

### 512. How can the believer view the Church as his place of refuge?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do not distance yourself from the Church; for nothing is stronger than the Church. The Church is your hope, your salvation, your refuge. It is higher than heaven, it is wider than earth. It never waxes old but is always in full vigor. Wherefore as significant of its solidity and stability Holy Scripture calls it **a mountain**; or of its purity **a virgin**, or of its magnificence **a queen**; or of its relationship to God **a daughter**; and to express its productiveness it calls her **barren who has borne seven**: in fact it employs countless names to represent its nobleness. For as the Master of the Church has many names: being called the Father, the way, the life (John 14:6), the light, the arm, the propitiation (1 John 2:2), the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), the door (John 10:7), the sinless one, and the treasure ... so is it with the Church itself, does one name suffice to present the whole truth? By no means.”<sup>1028</sup>

### 513. How can the Church make the believer a “firstborn whose name is registered in heaven”?

St. Paul says in his epistle to the Hebrews, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and **church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven**, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:22–23). Many Church Fathers comment on this verse; especially his use of the words, “**church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.**” We became firstborn in Christ Jesus, the Firstborn. Christ’s birthright is different from the worldly birthright in which the one who receives it, deprives those who are born after him from it. Instead, Christ’s birthright grants others to partake of it. This birthright is different from the world’s concept of birthrights.

According to **Origen**, “This teaches us that with God they are not considered to be firstborn who come first in terms of physical birth, but rather it is those whom God himself who has examined the purpose of their mind, indicates are to be received into the order of the firstborn? For thus Jacob, who was born later, was adjudged by God to be the firstborn, and he received the blessings of the birthright (Gen. 27:11).”<sup>1029</sup>

Origen also comments on St. Paul’s words in Hebrews 12:22–23 saying that there are four categories in heaven: Mount Zion; the heavenly Jerusalem the city of God; the

<sup>1027</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:253).

<sup>1028</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Eutropius* (NPNF I/9:256).

<sup>1029</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, ed., Christopher A. Hall, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Downer Groves, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) 3.2.3: p. 10.

multitudes of angels; and the Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. The highest of these ranks belongs to one's membership in the church of the firstborn where the person enjoys communion with Christ the firstborn.

“So if you have understood from these things what is the order of the firstborn ones and what is the mystery of that term, prepare yourself and strive as hard as you can to make progress in actions, life, character, faithfulness and principles, in the hope that perhaps you may be able to come to the ‘church of the firstborn ones, which is written in heaven.’ But if you are not that strong, but are a little weaker, then come to the ‘multitude of praising angels.’ But if you cannot reach that order, strive at least to hasten to the ‘city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.’ But if you are not suitable for that, at least strive for ‘Mount Zion,’ that ‘you may be saved on the mountain.’ All that matters is that you do not reside on earth, that you do not remain in the valleys, that you do not continue in the submerged lower places.”<sup>1030</sup>

The Levites were the Jews' spiritual firstborn. God accepted them on behalf of the entire holy nation, instead of their firstborns according to the flesh. But now, all the faithful became the Church of the firstborn, through their unity with the Son, the true Firstborn.

#### **514. How can the church make the believer “a high mountain” that soars in the heavens above all worldly matters?**

**St. Augustine** says “The mountain resembles the soul that elevates herself above that which is temporal, to soar in the heavens. The holy city of God that cannot be hidden is set on this mountain, so that the holy church is adorned in the lives of the saints. On this holy mountain, the Lord Himself ascends to converse with His people, so that the mountain can be a true witness to Him, through one's holy life.”

#### **515. How can someone fulfill his role as an active living member of the Church?**

A believer ought to ask himself if he likes to steal (or take away) from others like a raven or to do God's work in helping others. **St. Augustine** says, “That ark contained both kinds; and if the ark was a figure of the Church, you see indeed that in the present deluge of the world, the Church must out of necessity contain both kinds, the raven as well as the dove. Who are the ravens? Those who seek their own. Who are the doves? Those who seek the things that are Christ's.”<sup>1031</sup> **St. Ambrose** adds, “The Church has gold, not to store up, but to lay out, and to spend on those who need.”<sup>1032</sup>

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<sup>1030</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, ed., Christopher A. Hall, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Downer Groves, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) 3.3.4: p. 11.

<sup>1031</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Gospel of St. John* 6.2 (NPNF I/7:40).

<sup>1032</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 2.28 (137) (NPNF II/10:64).

**516. What is the meaning of “the Church is the Gate of Zion”?**

**Origen** considers the Church to be the gate of righteousness through which Jesus Christ enters. The gates of the Church are situated in opposition to the gates of death. **Origen** says, “Now the gates of Zion may be conceived as opposed to the gates of death, so that there is one gate of death and sin, but the gate of Zion is self-control; which the prophet shows forth saying, ‘This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter into it’ (Ps. 118:21). And again, there is cowardice which is the gate of death, but manly courage which is the gate of Zion; want of prudence is the gate of death, but its opposite, prudence, is the gate of Zion. But to all the gates of knowledge which are falsely so called (1 Tim 6:20) one gate is opposed, the gate of knowledge which is free from falsehood. But consider if, because of the saying, ‘our wrestling is not against flesh and blood’ (Eph. 6:12) you can say that each power and world-ruler of this darkness, and each one of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places is a gate of Hades and a gate of death.”<sup>1033</sup>

**517. What is the meaning of “the Church is the New Israel”?**

Origen explains that “the historical Israelites cease to be Israelites, while the believers from the Gentiles become the New Israel. This involves a redefinition of Israel.”<sup>1034</sup>

**518. What is the role of Church as an interpreter of Scripture?**

According to **Origen**, “For this reason, as far as our modest perception admits, we shall address those who believe the sacred Scriptures were not composed by any human words but were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were also delivered and entrusted to us by the will of God the Father through His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ. And we shall try to make clear to them what seems to us the right way of understanding Scripture, observing that rule and discipline which was delivered by Jesus Christ to the apostles and which they delivered in succession to their followers who teach the heavenly Church.”<sup>1035</sup>

Origen believes that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is present among His people in the Church to enlighten their inner eyes: “Now too, if you want it, your eyes can be fixed on the Savior in this gathering, here in this assembly. For, when you direct the principal power of seeing in your heart to wisdom and truth, and to contemplating God's Only-Begotten, your eyes gaze on Jesus. Blessed is that congregation of which Scripture testifies that “the eyes of all were fixed on him”! How much would I wish that this assembly gave such testimony. I

<sup>1033</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 12.13 (ANF 10:457ff).

<sup>1034</sup> N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): p. 80.

<sup>1035</sup> Origen, *De Principiis in Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 4.2.2: p. 180.

wish that the eyes of all (of catechumens and faithful, of women, men, and children)-not the eyes of the body, but the eyes of the soul-would gaze upon Jesus.”<sup>1036</sup>

He also says, “Now, the adornment of the world is the Church, Christ being her adornment, who is the first light of the world.”<sup>1037</sup> He adds, “For the end will come if the salt loses its flavor, and ceases to salt and preserve the earth, since it is clear that if iniquity is multiplied and love waxes cold upon the earth (Matt. 24:12) as the Savior Himself uttered an expression of doubt as to those who would witness His coming, saying, When the Son of man comes, shall He find faith upon the earth? (Luke 18:8) then the end of the age will come.”<sup>1038</sup>

Origen invites his opponents to compare the pagan cities with the Christian churches established therein: “When the Churches of God which are instructed by Christ, are carefully contrasted with the assemblies of the districts in which they are situated, they are as beacons in the world; for who would not admit that even the inferior members of the Church, and those who in comparison with the better are less worthy, are nevertheless more excellent than many of those who belong to the assemblies in the different districts? For the Church of God, like that which is at Athens, is a meek and stable body, as being one which desires to please God, who is over all things; whereas the assembly of the Athenians is given to sedition, and is not at all to be compared to the Church of God in that city.”<sup>1039</sup>

After contrasting in the same way the churches of Corinth and Alexandria with these cities, he says, “In like manner, also, in comparing the council of the Church of God with the council in any city, you would find that certain councilors of the Church are worthy to rule in the city of God, if there be any such city in the whole world; whereas the councilors in all other places exhibit in their characters no quality worthy of the conventional superiority which they appear to enjoy over their fellow citizens. And so, too, you must compare the ruler of the Church in each city with the ruler of the people of the city, in order to observe that even among those councilors and rulers of the Church of God who come very far short of their duty, and who lead more indolent lives than others who are more energetic, it is nevertheless possible to discover a general superiority in what relates to the progress of virtue over the characters of the councilors and rulers in the various cities.”<sup>1040</sup>

### **519. What are the limits of preaching the Gospel of Christ?**

The Church never ceases to preach the Gospel of Christ all over the world. The believer’s work of preaching God’s salvation is not limited to a specific region.

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<sup>1036</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 32.6 (FOTC 94:132ff).

<sup>1037</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of St John* 6:38 (ANF 9:380).

<sup>1038</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of St John* 6:38 (ANF 9:380).

<sup>1039</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.30 (ANF 4:476).

<sup>1040</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.30 (ANF 4:476).



“The Church which Origen sees and loves is ever the ensemble of Christ’s disciples scattered over the face of the earth. That great society can never be confused with the rest of the human race, although it never ceases to attract those who have need of belief and although the anxious crowds of those who are hearkening to its call surround it as with a radiance.”<sup>1041</sup>

From the very beginning of the church, the gospel message was proclaimed by the faithful wherever they lived or traveled. In his treatise against Celsus, **Origen** writes, “Christians do not neglect, as far as in them lies, to take measures to disseminate their doctrine throughout the whole world. Some of them, accordingly, have made it their business to itinerate not only through cities, but even villages and country houses, that they might make converts to God.”<sup>1042</sup>

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<sup>1041</sup> R. Cadiou, *Origen* (Herder Book Co., 1944): p. 313.

<sup>1042</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.9 (ANF 4:468).



## 5

**The Church: House of Salvation****520. What is the purpose of building God’s house in the midst of His people?**

St. John the beloved says, “I heard a loud voice from heaven saying: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

Heaven could not find any more appropriate a name for the new earth, the new heaven, and the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3) other than “the tabernacle of God with men.” Not, “the tabernacle of men with God,” but, “the tabernacle of God with men,” for the desire of humans to dwell with God can never be compared with God’s desire to dwell amongst us. Great is the exalted love of God! It is as though God is anticipating eternity that He may be comforted with His dwelling in our midst even though we know for sure that God is not in need of our servitude, but we are in need of His Lordship.<sup>1043</sup> Because God wants the believers to get a taste of heaven, He allowed His house to be built among His people that we may enjoy the sweetness of the divine presence, and His continuous salvific work for our sake.

King Solomon lifted his heart toward heaven and offered a prayer during the ceremony of the dedication of the temple, in which he asked, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today, that Your eyes may be open toward this temple, night and day, toward the place of which You said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.” (1 Kings 8:26–27)

This was what preoccupied the heart of king Solomon: the presence of the Lord and the forgiveness of the sins.

**521. Why did Jeremiah the prophet warn the people against saying: “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these”?**

In His love for humanity, God humbled Himself and allowed us to build a house for Him and open His gates to embrace those who come to Him in the spirit of repentance. He forgives their trespasses, makes them into a one holy Church, and considers them to be His daughter, bride, and queen that sits at His right hand. Our understanding of the Church does not stop at the building, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Hence, Jeremiah the prophet warned the priests, the Levites, the people, the king, and the leaders against their

<sup>1043</sup> Cf. The Liturgy of St. Gregory.

dependence on the physical presence of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, without any regard for the life of holiness, the obedience of the divine commandment, and the love for God and the neighbor by just repeating the empty words, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these" (Jer. 7:4).

While Hilkiyah the high priest cooperated with Shaphan, the king's counsel and scribe, in collecting donations and offerings for the temple's maintenance, Jeremiah the prophet, in contrast, emphasized the need for offering the heart rather than money to God. While the builders, the carpenters, and all the workers were enjoying hearing words of compliment from everyone, Jeremiah the prophet kept blaming and rebuking. While the majority spoke about the progress of the building and repair with pride, Jeremiah the prophet sought true repentance, wailing, and crying, lest they be driven out of the place of which they were not worthy. He said, "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place" (Jer. 7:3). They assumed that they had brought pleasure to the Lord by repairing the temple as though they held the Lord in their debt by such a great achievement that had not been done by any previous generation. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was threatening them of being expelled from the temple and even from the entire Holy Land, being unworthy to dwell there because of their wickedness. He was calling them to inner repair, by turning the praise of uttered words to a praise exemplified in life and behavior and an inner life of joy, by savoring the divine commandment.

The temple represents the presence of God amidst His people. Yet, if they hold fast to this concept without sanctifying their own lives, the house will lose its purpose and will even turn into "a den of thieves" (Jer. 7:11) — the same expression used by Christ when He drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers, and the seats of those who sold doves (Matt. 21:13).

**St. Jerome** speaks about the inner temple of the Lord, that the believer bears wherever he is, while many of those who dwell in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land are denied thereof, saying, "'You are the living temple of God' (2 Cor. 6:16); and 'The Holy Spirit dwells in you' (Rom 8:11). Hence, the access to the heavenly Court from anywhere is easy, because 'The kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21). St. Anthony and all the monks in Egypt, and everywhere else in the world did not see Jerusalem; yet the gate of paradise was opened before them. The blessed Hilarion, though a native of and a dweller in Palestine, only set eyes on Jerusalem for a single day, not wishing on the one hand when he was so near to neglect the holy places, nor yet on the other to appear to confine God within local limits."<sup>1044</sup>

The prophet made it clear that in order for the people to enjoy the blessings of the house of the Lord, they must be committed to "amend the way they walk ... to thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor" (Jer. 7:5), not to oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and not to shed innocent blood (Jer. 7:6), and finally not to waiver

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<sup>1044</sup> St. Jerome, *Epistle* 58.3 (NPNF II/6:120).

between two ways, saying: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, falsely swear, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods, whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name, and say ‘we are delivered’?” (Jer. 7:9–10).

God’s house is the royal palace, the center of God’s kingdom — the refuge of the widows, the fatherless, and the strangers and a refuge for every soul in need and discarded. If the people practice violence and cruelty, they are counted as being outside the temple, even if they enter into it in the flesh, and offered gifts, offerings, and sacrifices.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “This Temple, thus beautiful and marvelous and sacred, when those who used it were corrupted, was so dishonored, despised, and profaned, that even before the captivity it was called, ‘a den of robbers’ (Jer. 7:11) and afterwards it was delivered over to hands that were barbarous, polluted, and profane!”<sup>1045</sup>

The Lord emphasized to His people: “I, even I, am the Lord, and beside Me, there is no Savior” (Isa. 43:11; 45:21; Hos 13:4). Hence, the goal of the house of the Lord is for the people to meet God, their Savior. This is the main and only mission of the Church. Every worship and activity, done in the Church, must have the salvation of humanity as its main goal.

On the other hand, anyone who separates himself from the Church denies himself the Savior’s bosom. This is what drove the psalmist to say, “One thing I have desired of the Lord; that I will seek; that I will dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:4; 23:6).

According to **Origen**, “Rahab means ‘breadth.’<sup>42</sup> What is breadth, therefore, if not this Church of Christ, ... No other sign would have been accepted, except the scarlet-colored one that carried the sign of blood. For she knew there was no salvation for anyone except in the blood of Christ ... Let him come to this house in which the blood of Christ is the sign of redemption ... Let no one persuade himself, let no one deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved”<sup>1046</sup>

According to **St. Cyprian**, “We also see this expressed concerning Rahab, who herself also signified a type of the Church, to whom it was entrusted and said: ‘Gather your father and your mother and your brothers and all the house of your father to yourself into your house. And whosoever shall go out of the door of your house, he will be responsible for himself.’ In this mystery it is declared that in one house alone, that is, in the Church, there ought to be assembled together those who will live and escape from the destruction of the world. But whoever will go out from the elect gathered together, that is, if anyone whoever, having found grace in the Church, has withdrawn and departed from the Church, he will be

<sup>1045</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 17.11 (NPNF I/9:456).

<sup>1046</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 3 (FOTC 105:47–50).

responsible, that is, the fact that he may perish will be imputed to him. The Apostle Paul explains this, teaching and instructing that a heretic must be avoided...”<sup>1047</sup>

He also says, “how can he who is not with the Spouse of Christ and in His Church be with Christ?”<sup>1048</sup> “He who is not in the Church of Christ is not a Christian.”<sup>1049</sup> “How can someone be with Christ, if he is not inside His Church?”<sup>1050</sup>

So also says **St. Ignatius the Theophorus**: “Let no one be deceived. Anyone who is not inside the sanctuary lacks the bread of God... Therefore the one who does not join the entire congregation is already haughty and passes judgement on himself.”<sup>1051</sup> “The one inside the sanctuary is pure but the one outside the sanctuary is not pure.”<sup>1052</sup>

## **522. What is the relationship between the Church and Christ the Savior?**

The Church is the body of Christ, and it lives because of Him just as the natural body lives because of the soul.<sup>1053</sup> The believer, belonging to it, is a member of this body. **Origen** says, “The holy Scriptures declare the body of Christ, animated by the Son of God to be the whole Church of God, and the members of this body — considered as a whole — to consist of those who are believers; since, as a soul vivifies and moves the body, which of itself has not the natural power of motion like a living being, so the Word, arousing and moving the whole body, the Church, to befitting action, awakens, moreover, each individual member belonging to the Church, so that they do nothing apart from the Word.”<sup>1054</sup>

## **523. Why does St. Ignatius the Theophorus say, “The Church is the place of the sacrifice (Thysiasterion Θυσιαστήριον)”?**

The main goal of the Church is the salvation of humanity which was accomplished in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. In addition, the goal of the believer is to be crucified together with Christ so that he may be resurrected together with Him and sing, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

You should not, therefore, be astonished to hear **St. Ignatius** dare to tell Emperor Trajan, that “he desires to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sake of his faith in Christ” and hear him also say, “I wish you give these gifts to those who desire them. I am a priest of My Master

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<sup>1047</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 69* to Magnus (FOTC 51:246ff).

<sup>1048</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 52* to Cornelius (FOTC 51:128).

<sup>1049</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 55* to Antonian (FOTC 51:149).

<sup>1050</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 52* to Cornelius (FOTC 51:).

<sup>1051</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 5 (LCL 24:225).

<sup>1052</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians* 7 (LCL 24:263).

<sup>1053</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.48 (ANF 4:596); *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 14.17 (ANF 4:506).

<sup>1054</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.48 (ANF 4:596).

Jesus Christ and to Him, I offer a sacrifice every day. I desire to offer myself a sacrifice; the way He offered His life sacrifice out of love for me.”

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For that is the true life, which a man lives in Christ; for although they are dead to the world, yet they dwell as it were in heaven, minding those things which are above, as he who was a lover of such a habitation said, ‘While we walk on earth, our dwelling is in heaven’.”<sup>1055</sup>

#### 524. Is it our duty to pray for the salvation of others?

Christ was once in a certain house where He was surrounded by Pharisees and teachers of the law that came from every village in Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem, and He was teaching them. When He saw a paralytic man being brought down through the roof by four men, He interrupted His talk to grant the paralytic forgiveness and healing. It is as though, in His friendship with us, He does not care about teaching in and of itself — like some teachers — as much as He seeks humanity’s comfort and salvation, which concerns their body and spirit.

What drew the attention of the Church Fathers to this miracle was the interest of the evangelist in revealing the life of spiritual fellowship in which the believer is supported by his brethren in Christ Jesus, while also supporting others so that everyone lives in perfect unity that is based on Christ, the cornerstone (Luke 5:17–22).

The four men carried the paralytic, and the Lord healed him because of their faith. St. Matthew the Evangelist says, “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic ... Son! Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you” (Matt. 9:2). How much are we in need to be carried by others and to carry others by our faith!

**St. Ambrose** says, “‘When He saw their faith’ [St. Luke 5:17], it says. Great is the Lord, Who through the merit of some forgives others, and while He proves some, excuses the faults of others. Why, O man, has your companion no power with you, when with the Lord a slave has the merit of intervention and the right of obtainment? O ye who judge, learn to excuse; O ye who are sick, learn to accomplish. If ye do not trust in the forgiveness of grave sinners, summon intercessors, summon the Church Who will pray for you, through regard for Whom the Lord forgives what He may refuse you..”<sup>1056</sup>

#### 525. What does Origen say about the Church, the house of salvation?

There is no salvation outside the Church; it is the ark of salvation which receives light from Christ and is capable of interpreting the Holy Scriptures. **Origen** says, “If anyone wishes to be saved ... let him come to this house where the blood of Christ is for a sign of

<sup>1055</sup> St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters* 7.3 (NPNF II/4:524).

<sup>1056</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998): p. 150.

redemption. For that blood was for condemnation amongst those who said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children’ (Matt. 27:25). Jesus was ‘for the fall and resurrection of many’ (Luke 2:34); and therefore in respect of those who ‘speak against His sign’ His blood is effective for punishment, but effective for salvation in the case of believers. Let no one therefore persuade himself or deceive himself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved ... The sign of salvation (the scarlet cord) was given through the window because Christ by His incarnation gave us the sight of the light of godhead as it were through a window; that all may attain salvation by that sign which shall be found in the house of her who once was a harlot, being made clean by water and the Holy Spirit, and by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and power for ever and ever.”<sup>1057</sup>

### **526. How does Origen interpret the ark of Noah and its dimensions as a symbol of the Church, the house of salvation?**

**Origen** interprets the ark of Noah and its dimensions in a symbolic way that refers to the Church of Christ. He says, “The width has the number fifty which has been consecrated as the number of forgiveness and remission. For according to the law there was a remission in the fiftieth year ... Therefore Christ, the spiritual Noah, in his ark in which he frees the human race from destruction, that is, in his Church, has established in its breadth the number fifty, the number of forgiveness. For if he had not given forgiveness of sins to those who believe, the breadth of the Church would not have been spread around the world”<sup>1058</sup>

Here, forgiveness was symbolized by the number “fifty” but without any reference to the Pentecostal liturgy, which we can find in a different place: “the order of the fifty—the number which embraces the remission of sins, in accordance with the mystery of the Jubilee which took place every fifty years, and of the feast at Pentecost (Lev. 25:11).”<sup>1059</sup>

This symbolism of Pentecost as signifying forgiveness has a particular importance for Origen for in the seven liturgical weeks he sees the figure of the age-long weeks of weeks through which is achieved the complete forgiveness of all sins and the restoration of all humanity in its perfection through successive existences: “We must also inquire whether the words written about feasts or public festivals that take place according to days or months or seasons or years may be given a higher reference to ages [*aeons*] (cf. Gal. 4:10). For if the Law has a shadow of things to come (cf. Heb. 10:1), it is necessary that the many sabbaths are a ‘shadow’ of many days of some kind and that new moons are fixed at intervals of time and accomplished by the conjunction of I do not know what moon and sun.”<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> Origen, *In Lib. Issu Nave* 3.5 (Battenson, p. 3360–7).

<sup>1058</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.5 (FOTC 71:83).

<sup>1059</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 11.3 (ANF 10:433; PG 13:908A).

<sup>1060</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily XXVII on Numbers, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 27.14: p. 145.



It is interesting to notice that Origen, in his *Homilies on Numbers*, found in Scripture the implication that Pentecost is a symbol of forgiveness: “We have often and abundantly shown in many passages of the Scriptures that the number fifty contains the mystery of forgiveness and pardon. For there is both the fiftieth year which is called Jubilee by the Hebrews, in which there is remission of property, slavery and debt. There is also the tradition in the law that the fiftieth day after Passover is a feast day. Moreover, in the Gospel, when the Lord was teaching the parable of forgiveness and pardon, he introduces some debtors, ‘one who owed fifty denarii and the other five hundred’ (Luke 7:41).”<sup>1061</sup>

### **527. Does the Church have the authority to forgive sins?**

The early Church considered herself a “congregation of saints” and attributed the authority to forgive the sin to God alone.<sup>1062</sup> **Origen** says, “Moreover, just as the sun and the moon enlighten our bodies so also our minds are enlightened by Christ and the Church.”<sup>1063</sup>

### **528. What is the role of the Church as “the mother of the believers”?**

About the motherhood of the Church, **Origen** says, “According to the Spirit, your Father is God; your mother is ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ [See Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22]. Learn this from prophetic and apostolic witnesses. This Moses himself writes in a song, ‘Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?’ (Deut. 32:6).”<sup>1064</sup>

He also says, “But the Apostle says about ‘the heavenly Jerusalem,’ ‘She is free who is the mother of us all’ (Gal. 4:26). Therefore, first, your Father is God who begot your spirit and who says, ‘I have begotten sons and exalted them’ (Isa. 1:2). But the Apostle Paul also says, ‘Let us submit to the Father of spirits and we shall live’ (Heb. 12:9).”<sup>1065</sup>

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** also says, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.”<sup>1066</sup>

### **529. Does the Church grieve over sinners?**

The Church together with her Head, our Lord Jesus Christ, will remain in a state of grief over sinners until they return to God and submit to the Father. Christ said, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine, from now on, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom” (Matt. 26:29). **Origen** commenting on these words says that wine in

<sup>1061</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, ed. Christopher A. Hall, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Downer Groves, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) 5.2.2: p. 18.

<sup>1062</sup> A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (4 ed. rev.) (Tubingen: J. Mohr, 1909): p. 439ff; and Ernest Latko, *Origen’s Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 69.

<sup>1063</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.7 (FOTC 71:55).

<sup>1064</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 11.3 (FOTC 83:215).

<sup>1065</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 11.3 (FOTC 83:215).

<sup>1066</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 6 (ANF 5:423).

Scripture symbolizes spiritual joy. God promised His people that He would bless their wine, namely, He will grant them an abundance of spiritual joy. This is why priests were forbidden to drink wine before they entered the temple, for they were supposed to be in a state of grief while offering sacrifices for the sinners. However, once there is reconciliation between God and sinners, their joy will be perfected. According to Origen, Christ Himself, together with His saints, are constantly waiting for the repentance of sinners. Their joy, therefore, is not yet perfect.

According to Origen, “For we must not think that Paul is mourning for sinners and weeping for those who transgress, but Jesus my Lord abstains from weeping when he approaches the Father, when he stands at the altar and offers a propitiatory sacrifice for us. This is not to drink the wine of joy ‘when he ascends to the altar’ because he is still bearing the bitterness of our sins. He, therefore, does not want to be the only one to drink wine ‘in the kingdom’ of God. He waits for us, just as he said, ‘Until I shall drink it with you.’ Thus, we are those who, neglecting our life, delay his joy.”<sup>1067</sup>

Again he says, “Let us see what it is, however, that it meant ‘in part.’ Now, for example, I am ‘subjected’ (1 Cor. 15:8) to God according to the spirit, that is, by intention and free will. But as long as within me ‘the flesh strives against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and I have not yet been able to subject the flesh to the spirit, certainly I am “subjected” to God, not in whole but “in part.” But if I could draw my flesh and all my other members into harmony with the spirit, then I will seem to be perfectly “subjected.”

“If you have understood what it is to be “subjected in part” and in whole, return now also to that which we set forth concerning the subjection of the Lord. See that, although we are all said to be his body and members, he is said not to be “subjected” as long as there are some among us who have not yet been subjected by the perfect subjection. But when “he shall have completed” his “work” and brought his whole creation to the height of perfection, then he is said to be “subjected” in these whom he subjected to the Father. In these, “he finished the work that God had given him that God may be all in all.” But what is the purpose of all this? That we may understand what we treated above, how he does not drink wine or how he drinks it. He drinks before “he entered the Tent, before he approached the altar.”

“But he does not drink now because he stands at the altar and mourns for my sins. On the other hand, he will drink later, when “all things will have been subjected to him” and after the salvation of all and the death of sin is destroyed. Then it will no longer be necessary to offer “sacrifices for sin.” For then there will be joy and delight. Then “the humble bones will rejoice,” and what was written will be fulfilled: “Pain, sorrow and sighing flee away.” But let us not omit that it is said not only about Aaron that “he should not drink wine,” but also about his sons when they enter the sanctuary. For indeed even the apostles have not yet received

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<sup>1067</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 7.2 (FOTC 83:135).

their joy, but they also await that I may be a partaker of their joy. For the saints, when they leave this place, do not immediately obtain the whole rewards of their merits.

“They also wait for us though we delay, even though we remain. For they do not have perfect delight as long as they grieve for our errors and mourn for our sins. Perhaps you do not believe me when I say this. For who am I that I am so bold to confirm the meaning of such a doctrine? But I produce their witness about whom you cannot doubt. For the Apostle Paul is "the teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." Therefore, in writing to the Hebrews, after he had enumerated all the holy fathers who were justified by faith, he adds after all that, "But those who had every witness through the faith did not yet obtain the new promise since God was looking forward toward something better for us that they might not obtain perfection without us." You see, therefore, that Abraham is still waiting to obtain the perfect things. Isaac waits, and Jacob and all the Prophets wait for us, that they may lay hold of the perfect blessedness with us.

“For this reason therefore, that mystery of the delayed judgment is also kept until the last-day. For there is "one body" which is waiting to be justified. There is "one body" that is said to rise from the dead in judgment. "For although there are many members, there is only one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, you are not necessary to me." Likewise, if the eye is healthy and is not troubled in what pertains to seeing, if the rest of the members are absent, what delight will there be for the eye? Or how can it seem to be perfect if it does not have a hand, if the feet are absent, or the other members are not present? For is there is some excellent glory of the eye, it is particularly in this: that either it is the leader of the body or it is not abandoned by the functions of the other members. I think this is what is taught to us through that vision of the prophet Ezekiel when he says that "bone must be joined to bone, joint to joint, and nerves and veins and skin, and each must be restored to its place. Next, see what the prophet adds: "These bones" - he did not say, all men are, but he said, "these bones" - "are the house of Israel."

“Therefore, you will have delight when you depart this life if you are holy. But then the delight will be full when you lack none of the members of the body. For you will wait for others just as you also are waited for. Because if the delight does not seem to be complete for you who are a member, if another member is missing, how much more does our Lord and Savior, who is the head, and the originator of the whole body, consider his delight to be incomplete as long as he sees one of the members to be missing from his body. And for this reason, perhaps, he poured out this prayer to the Father: “Holy Father, glorify me with that glory that I had with you before the world was.” Thus, he does not want to receive his complete glory without us, that is, without his people who are his body and his members. For he himself wants to live in this body of his Church and in these members of his people as in their soul that he can have all impulses and all works according to his own will, so that that saying of the prophet may be truly fulfilled in us, “I will live in them and walk [among them]”. Now, however, as long as we are not all "perfected," and are still in [our] sins he is in us "in part." For this reason, "we know in part and we prophesy in part, until each one is

worthy to come to that measure which the Apostle says, “I live, but it is no longer, for Christ lives in me.” Therefore, “in part,” as the Apostle says, now “we are his members and “in part we are his bones.””<sup>1068</sup>

**530. How are we going to drink from the new cup together with Christ in heaven (Matt. 26:29)?**

Continuing his previous discourse, **Origen** says, “You see, therefore, that it is impossible for him to drink the new cup of the new life who still ‘is clothed by the old person with his deeds.’ ‘For no one,’ it says, ‘puts new wine into old wine skins.’ Therefore, if you want to drink from this ‘new wine,’ renew yourself and say, ‘If our outer person is destroyed, the inner person is renewed from day to day’”<sup>1069</sup>

**531. Should all the faithful care for the salvation of their souls?**

On many occasions, **Origen** expressed his concern for the church (in Caesarea), rebuking his listeners with love. He expected that all the believers and the new converts would be present in the daily morning gatherings and liturgies, but instead he found that many had been too lazy to attend, others were inattentive and left directly after the reading of the Gospel.

Origen says, “Many come to the banquet, but few recline at the table (Luke 14:24).”<sup>1070</sup> And he says, “Does it not cause her[the Church] sadness and sorrow when you do not gather to hear the word of God? And scarcely on feast days do you proceed to the Church, and you do this not so much from a desire for the word as from a fondness for the festival and to obtain, in a certain manner, common relaxation.”<sup>1071</sup>

“Tell me, you who come to church only on festal days, are the other days not festal days? ... Christians eat the flesh of the lamb every day, that is, they consume daily the flesh of the Word.”<sup>1072</sup>

Origen’s annoyance grew as his congregation became even more impatient with his homilies on the book of Exodus: “But what would it profit should [other things] be discussed by our vast toil indeed, but be despised by hearers who are preoccupied and can scarcely stand in the presence of the word of God a fraction of an hour, and come to nothing? ... there are some who understand in heart what is read; there are others who do not at all understand what is said, but their mind and heart are on business dealings or on acts of the world or on counting their profit. And especially, how do you think women understand in heart, who

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<sup>1068</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 7.2 (FOTC 83:138).

<sup>1069</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 7.2 (FOTC 83:139).

<sup>1070</sup> Origen, PG 13:1524.

<sup>1071</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.1 (FOTC 71:157).

<sup>1072</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.3 (FOTC 71:162-63).

chatter so much, who disturb with their stories so much that they do not allow any silence? Now what shall I say about their mind, what shall I say about their heart, if they are thinking about their infants or wool or the needs of their household?”<sup>1073</sup>

“Some of you leave immediately as soon as you have heard the texts which are selected readings ... Some do not even patiently wait while the texts are being read in church. Others do not even know if they are read, but are occupied with mundane stories in the furthest corners of the Lord's house.”<sup>1074</sup>

### **532. Is there a need for literal interpretation and moral interpretation while ignoring allegorical and spiritual styles of interpretation?**

**Origen** expressed his frustration, because some members of the congregation resisted his method of interpreting Scripture and in particular his allegorical interpretation method, at a time when the moral and literal interpretation styles were prevalent. In one of his homilies, he says, “If I shall wish to dig deeply and open the hidden veins ‘of living water,’ immediately the Philistines will be present and will strive with me. They will stir up disputes and malicious charges against me and will begin to refill my wells with their earth and mud.”<sup>1075</sup>

He also said, “For if, according to some people, who are even among our own, I should follow the plain sense [of Scripture] and understand the voice of the lawgiver without any verbal trick or clouded allegory thus they usually ridicule us then I, a man of the church who lives under faith in Christ and stand in the midst of the church, am compelled by the authority of God’s law to sacrifice calves and lambs and to offer flour, along with incense and oil. For they who force us to spend our time on the narrative and to keep the letter of the law do this. But it is time for us to use the words of the blessed Susanna against the unprincipled presbyters, words that they themselves indeed repudiate when they lop the story of Susanna off from the catalogue of inspired books. But we accept this story [as scripture] and conveniently bring its words against them and say: ‘I am hemmed in on all sides, for if I do this thing, it is death for me; yet if I do not, I will not escape your hands. But it is better for me not to do it and to fall into your hands, than to sin against the Lord’ (Dan. 13:22–23).”<sup>1076</sup>

“Then there were believers, when there were noble martyrdoms. As soon as we returned from conveying the martyrs to the cemetery, we gathered together in assembly. The whole church was there, not the least bit anguished, and the catechumens were instructed in the midst of the confessors, and in the midst of the dead who had confessed the truth unto death, nor were they anxious or perturbed, because they believed in the living God. Then we saw great and marvelous signs. Then there were few believers, but they really did believe, and they traveled the strait and narrow way that leads to life. But now we have become numerous

<sup>1073</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.3 (FOTC 71:162-63).

<sup>1074</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 12.2 (FOTC 71:369).

<sup>1075</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 12.4 (FOTC 71:180ff).

<sup>1076</sup> Origen, *Homily on 1 Samuel* 28.1.

... and there are few indeed among the many who profess Christian piety who will actually attain divine election and blessedness.”<sup>1077</sup>

“But I fear that the Church is still bearing sons in sadness and sorrow. Or does it not cause her sadness and sorrow when you do not gather to hear the word of God? And scarcely on feast days do you proceed to the Church, and you do this not so much from a desire for the word as from a fondness for the festival and to obtain, in a certain manner, common relaxation.”<sup>1078</sup>

**533. Is it fitting for the shepherd to compliment the people at the expense of their salvation?**

**Origen** absolutely opposes this principle. He says, “Can I throw the pearls’ of the word of God to your deaf and averted ears?”<sup>1079</sup> Again he says, “Perhaps I seem rather harsh to you, but I cannot ‘whitewash’ a falling ‘wall.’?”<sup>1080</sup>

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<sup>1077</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 4:3 (FOTC 97:34); Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 2002): pp. 177–178.

<sup>1078</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10.1 (FOTC 71:157); Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990): p. 115.

<sup>1079</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10:1 (FOTC 71:158).

<sup>1080</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 10:1 (FOTC 71:158).

## 6

## The Eminence of the Church

## 534. What do the Fathers say about the sublimity of the Church?

**St. Irenaeus** says, “Wherever the church is, there is also the Spirit of God, and wherever the Spirit of God is, there the church and every grace is. The Spirit is the Truth.”<sup>1081</sup>

**Pope Alexander of Alexandria** says, “The one only Catholic and Apostolic Church can never be destroyed, though all the world should seek to make war with it, but it is victorious over every most impious revolt of the heretics who rise up against it.”<sup>1082</sup>

**St Cyprian of Carthage** says, “As there are many rays of the sun, but one light...thus also the Church, shines over with the light of the Lord, shedding forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere diffused.”<sup>1083</sup>

It was also written in the **Didascalia Apostolorum** (the teachings of the twelve apostles): “Hear, therefore, these things, you laymen, the Church chosen of God, because that even the first people was called the Church. You then, Holy and perfect Catholic Church, royal priesthood, holy assembly, people of inheritance, great Church, Bride adorned for the Lord God.”<sup>1084</sup>

**St. Hippolytus of Rome** says, “The sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed for she has with her the skilled Pilot, Christ.”<sup>1085</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Whoever seeks the church, seeks Christ.”

And **St. Augustine** says, “Who can claim that the great church is nothing but a small part of the world? The great church is the entire world!” Again he says, “Honor, love and praise the holy Church, your mother, the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy City of God. It is she who, in this faith which you have received, bears fruit and spreads throughout the world, She is the ‘Church of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth,’ who, in dispensing the sacraments, tolerates the wicked who are eventually to be separated and whom, meanwhile, disparity of customs keeps at a distance.”<sup>1086</sup>

<sup>1081</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

<sup>1082</sup> St. Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistles on the Arian Heresy and the Deposition of Arius* 1.12 (ANF 6:296).

<sup>1083</sup> St Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 1.5 (ANF 5:423).

<sup>1084</sup> Margaret Dunlop Gibson, trans., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903) Ch. 9: p. 47.

<sup>1085</sup> St. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 59 (ANF 5:218).

<sup>1086</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 214.11 (FOTC 38:141).

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Oh, the amazing mystery! One is the Father of all, One is the Word for all, and One the Holy Spirit present everywhere. Likewise, there is one virgin mother whom I like to call, the Church.”

### **535. How can the Church be called a mother and virgin at the same time?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Surpassing all the sons of men in beauty (cf. Ps. 44:3), He, the Son of holy Mary and the Spouse of holy Church, has made the Church like to His Mother, since He made it a mother for us and He kept it a virgin for Himself.”<sup>1087</sup> Again he says, “Your Father is God; the Church is your Mother. Far otherwise will you be generated by them than when you were begotten by your physical parents.”<sup>1088</sup>

### **536. How can the Church be a virgin?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Do you want to know how the church could be a virgin? Listen to Paul the apostle, listen to the zealous friend of the Bridegroom when he says: ‘But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ’ (2 Cor. 11:3). As though the serpent, namely Satan, has defiled Eve’s purity and destroyed the virginity of her heart. So it is that we should not accept the devil’s deception and fall into evil desires and lose the virginity of our hearts.”

He again says, “If you would ask: ‘if the church is Virgin, how could she beget children?’ I will respond that she is a virgin but also begets children. She is likened to Mary who gave birth to Christ. Did Saint Mary not give birth to a child while remaining a virgin? So it is that the church begets children while remaining a virgin. She gives birth to Christ for whoever is baptized becomes His members.”<sup>1089</sup>

“The church is like Mary; her perfection was never defiled, and her fertility was never corrupted. What Mary was made worthy of in the flesh, the church received it spiritually. The only exception to that is that Mary gave birth to one son (Jesus Christ) but the church gave birth to many children for them to be gathered together in the one body in the one (Christ).”<sup>1090</sup>

### **537. What does her heavenly Bridegroom call her?**

Her heavenly Bridegroom calls her “the dove with gentle voice, and beautiful face.” **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “When the Word has called out to her in this way through the windows, the dove answers appropriately—the dove who had been illumined by the beam of

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<sup>1087</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 195.2 (FOTC 38:42).

<sup>1088</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 216.5 (FOTC 38:157ff).

<sup>1089</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 213.7 (FOTC 38:127).

<sup>1090</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 195:5 (FOTC 38:42).



these thoughts and had understood the meaning of the rock, which is Christ. For she says: ‘Show me your face, and let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is glorious’ ... And those who hear his sweet voice know the grace of the gospel—the ones who say, ‘You have the words of eternal life’ (John 6:68).”<sup>1091</sup>

**538. Why does St. Ignatius, the Theophorus, call the Church “a congregation of love”?**

**St. Ignatius the Theophorus** says, “All these things are good together, if you believe in love.”<sup>1092</sup> He also says that Christ is eternal life for He grants us life through His divine love, “for the drink of God is His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.”<sup>1093</sup>

**539. Why does St. Ignatius the Theophorus call the Church “a congregation of thanksgiving and praise”?**

Because in the Eucharist, the Church is manifested in two ways. The first way is through love, purity, unity, fellowship in immortality, along with joy and praise. The second way is by resisting the devil and conquering him. **St. Ignatius the Theophorus** says, “Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when you assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith.”<sup>1094</sup>

**540. How does Christ work in the members of His Church?**

**Origen** says, “When the Churches of God which are instructed by Christ, are carefully contrasted with the assemblies of the districts in which they are situated, they are as beacons in the world.”<sup>1095</sup>

**541. What is the Church’s role in the hearts of believers?**

According to a Syrian author, the role played by the Church, here on earth, is to inflame our hearts with longing to the heavenly Church: “It is befitting for us not to despise the seen church, which begets every one of us as children. Let us also not despise the church of the heart, which strengthens those who are sick. We must long to the higher (heavenly) church which perfects all the saints.”<sup>1096</sup>

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<sup>1091</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 5: pp. 175–177.

<sup>1092</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 9 (LCL 24:293).

<sup>1093</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 7 (LCL 24:279).

<sup>1094</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 13 (LCL 24:233).

<sup>1095</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.29 (ANF 4:476).

<sup>1096</sup> *Book of Steps* 1.3.

**542. How can the believer know the will of God?**

The believer sings together with the Psalmist, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:4), and hence he knows God’s will. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “It is befitting for us to admit that the will of the divine nature is best heard in the holy places.”

**543. How does the Church urge the believer to work?**

**Maximus the Confessor** says, “The church is the laboratory in which man is transformed to transform the world.”

**544. Why were the elect believers, or the holy Church, called “the little flock” (Luke 12:32)?**

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “He calls these on earth a ‘little flock.’ For we are inferior to the multitude of the angels, who are innumerable, and incomparably surpass in might our mortal things. And this too the Savior has Himself taught us, in that parable in the Gospels so excellently framed for our instruction: for He said, ‘What man of you, that has a hundred sheep, and one of them go astray, will not leave the ninety and nine upon the mountains, and go to seek that which has strayed? And if he chance to find it, verily I say unto you, that he will rejoice in it more than in the ninety and nine which went not astray’ (Matt. 18:12–13). Observe therefore, that while the number of rational created beings extends to ten times ten, the flock that is upon earth is but as one out of a hundred. But though it is little, both by nature and number and dignity, compared with the countless troops of the spirits that are above, yet has the goodness of the Father, which surpasses all description, given also to it the portion of those transcendent spirits, I mean the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1097</sup>

**545. Why is the Church likened to the infirmed woman who was healed (Luke 13:10–11)?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “Then, so to speak, the infirm woman prefigures the Church, which, when it has fulfilled the measure of the Law and of the Resurrection, straightened to an uplifted dignity in that eternal rest, will not be able to experience the bowed state of our infirmity. Nor could this woman be healed in any other way than by fulfilling the law and Grace, the Law in precepts and the Grace in Baptism, whereby we die to the world and rise again in Christ;.”<sup>1098</sup>

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<sup>1097</sup> St Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel of St Luke Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 90: p. 421.

<sup>1098</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998): p. 301.

**546. Why is the Church called the “inn” that is open for all humanity (Luke 10:34)?**

**Origen** says, “He carries the half-dead man, and brings him to the *pandochium* (inn) that is, the Church, which accepts everyone<sup>24</sup> and denies its help to no one. Jesus calls everyone to the Church when he says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I shall refresh you (Matt. 11:28).”<sup>1099</sup>

**St. Severus of Antioch** also says, “The ‘inn’ is the church, which receives and accommodates all men, for we no more hear according to the shadows of the law and the allegorical worship: ‘An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord forever’ (Deut. 23:3; Neh. 13:1). Instead we now hear, ‘Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28:19); and ‘In every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ (Acts 10:35). After the Samaritan brought him to the inn, he ‘took care of him’ (Luke 10:34). So after the church was formed from the Gentiles who used to be dead on account of their worship of many gods, Christ Himself now dwells within her and grants her every spiritual grace as it is written, ‘you are the temple of the living God ... I will dwell in them, and walk among them; I will be their God; and they shall be My people’ (2 Cor. 6:16).”

**547. Can someone be saved while being separated from the Church?**

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous; she is uncorrupted and pure. She knows one home; she guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If anyone could escape who was outside the Ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church. The Lord warns, saying, ‘He who is not with me is against me, and he who gathers not with me scatters’ (Matt. 12:30). He who breaks the peace and the concord of Christ, does so in opposition to Christ; he who gathers elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ ... He who does not hold this unity does not hold God’s law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation.”<sup>1100</sup> He also says, “I entreat all to return into the Church. I beg all our fellow-soldiers to be included within the camp of Christ.”<sup>1101</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “He who departs from the Church squanders his patrimony”<sup>1102</sup>

<sup>1099</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 34.7 (FOTC 94:140).

<sup>1100</sup> St Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 1.6 (ANF 5:423).

<sup>1101</sup> St Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 54.16 To Cornelius (ANF 5:345).

<sup>1102</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998): p. 318.

**548. What does it mean to be separated from the Church?**

Commenting on the prodigal son’s travel to a far country, **St. Ambrose** says, “What is more remote than to leave one’s self, to be separated not by space, but by manners, from differing in tastes, not by countries, and the excesses of the world? For whoever separates himself from Christ is exiled from his country, is a citizen of the world. But we, ‘we are not strangers and passing, but we are citizens of the sanctuary, and of the house of God’ (Eph. 2:19); for ‘far removed as we were, we were brought together in the blood of Christ’ (Eph. 2:13). Let us not be evil toward those who come back from far off, since we too have been in a far country ... in the shadow of death but were made alive in the shadow of Christ.”<sup>1103</sup>

**549. What does it mean to return back to the Church?**

Commenting on the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), **St. Ambrose** says, “Moreover the woman did not idly rejoice to find her coin. This is no ordinary coin, on which is the image of the Emperor. And, therefore, the image of the King is the register of the Church. We are sheep: let us pray that He deign to place us beside the water of rest (Ps. 22:2). We are sheep, I say: let us seek pastures; we are coins: let us have a price. We are sons: let us hasten to the Father”<sup>1104</sup>

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<sup>1103</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998): p. 318.

<sup>1104</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998): p. 317.

## 7

**The Church and Daily Renewal****550. How can the Church be continuously renewed from glory to glory?**

The apostle says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18): namely, continuous spiritual renewal. The Word of God came down to us that He may elevate us above the literality of the law to the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Such elevation will never cease as long as we are guided by His Holy Spirit.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The Church says: I do not seek the things of old that I may be honored by them, but I seek the new things that pertain to the mysteries of the Son of God. I do not seek the Jordan where the leper was cleansed, for Baptism grants life (2 Kings 5:14). I do not need Siloam to heal sicknesses (John 9:7), for I have within me an open spring of life that heals wounds. I do not seek the manna that rots if left overnight (Ex. 16:20), for I eat the Son’s Body all my days. Through it, the new life is hidden within me ... It heals my wounds and cleanses me from defilement. I do not seek the pillar of cloud nor the bronze serpent made by Moses, because I have instead the life-giving Cross that gives light to my darkness and protects me from harm. I do not seek the tabernacle of the covenant, whose mysteries were interpreted as being Mary’s embrace. I am not like the daughter of Zion who oppressed her Lord and after all the blessings she received, she hanged Him on the tree. She forsook Him and committed adultery so that He drove her out of His house and granted me, I the lost one, all His riches. Come forth, O Church and inherit the Son’s treasures for the old one was freed from her idols. Come, O you the adulterous one, whom He sanctified by the Cross and baptism and whom He set free, that you may rejoice with Him in His Kingdom.”

**551. Are there always going to be victories without end?**

**Origen** used to commend the true believers for their victory over Satan and sin. The Church “men” crush all the powers of darkness by the divine grace and “the gates of Hades shall not prevail on them” (Matt. 16:18).

Origen says, “Having torn and trampled the nets, He so emboldens His Church that she too dares to trample now upon the snares and to pass over the nets and with all joy to say, ‘Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we have escaped’ (Ps. 124:7). Who rent the snare except He who alone could not be held by it? For, although He suffered death, He did so willingly and not as we do, by necessity of sin, for He alone was free among the dead. And because He was free among the dead, when He had conquered him who had the empire of death, he brought forth the captives that were being held by death. And He did not raise only Himself from the dead, He also raised together

with Himself, those who were held by death and made them to sit with Him in the heavenly places. For ascending on high, He led captivity captive, not only bringing forth the souls, but also raising their bodies as the Gospel testifies, ‘The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves, after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many’ (Matt. 27:52).”<sup>1105</sup>

He also says, “The church, as a building of Christ who built His own house wisely upon the rock (Matt. 7:24), is incapable of admitting the gates of Hades which prevail against every man who is outside the rock and the church, but have no power against it.”<sup>1106</sup>

### **552. Do we cherish the Church because she is ancient or because she is new?**

**Origen** says, “But do not think that these words are spoken only to that ‘Israel’ which is ‘according to the flesh’ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:18). These words are addressed much more to you who were made Israel spiritually by living for God, who were circumcised, not in flesh, but in heart.”<sup>1107</sup>

The Church of the New Testament inherited all that the Church of the Old Testament had enjoyed, not literally but spiritually. In his description of the Church of the Old Testament, Paul the apostle said, “to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). Confirming that all these privileges were inherited by the Church of the New Testament, because of her faith in the Lord Christ, he says, “They have all those promises ...”<sup>1108</sup> The Church is new because of her life in Christ, receiving the work of the Holy Spirit, who unceasingly renews our minds and lives. The Church is also very ancient because she existed in God’s mind who planned our salvation from before the foundation of the world.

Origen says, “I would not have you suppose that ‘the bride of Christ’ (Rev. 21:2) or the Church is spoken of only after the coming of the Savior in the flesh, but rather from the beginning of the human race, from the very foundation of the world; I may follow Paul in tracing the origin of this mystery even further, before the foundation of the world. For Paul says, ‘He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy ...’ (Eph. 1:4–5). The Apostle also says that the Church is built on the foundation not only of the apostles but also of prophets (Eph. 2:20). Now Adam is numbered among the prophets, and he prophesied the ‘great mystery in respect of Christ and the Church’ when he said; ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall be in one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24). For the apostle is clearly speaking of these words when he

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<sup>1105</sup> Origen, Origen: *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* 3.13 (ACW 26:237).

<sup>1106</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 12:11 (Cf. ANF 4:457).

<sup>1107</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 8.1 (FOTC 71:130).

<sup>1108</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Church, the House of God*, rev., Nabieh Fanous, Riad Habib, Nermine Morcos, Mary Hanna, and Lilian Hanna (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1994): pp. 7–8.

says: ‘This mystery is great; but I am speaking in respect of Christ and the Church’ (Eph. 5:32). Further the apostle also says: ‘For He so loved the Church that He gave Himself for Her, sanctifying her with the washing of water’ (Eph. 5:25–26) ... And in this He shows that it is not the case that she did not exist before. For how could He love her if she did not exist? Without doubt she existed in all the saints who had been from the beginning of time. Thus loving the Church, He came to her. And as His ‘children share in flesh and blood, so He also was made partaker of these’ (Heb. 2:14) and gave Himself for them. For these saints were the Church, which He loved so as to increase it in number, to improve it with virtues, and by the ‘Charity of perfection’ (Col. 4:6), transfer it from earth to heaven.”<sup>1109</sup>

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<sup>1109</sup> Origen, Origen: *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* 2.8 (ACW 26:149f.).





## 8

### The Church and Society

Origen was the first to declare that the Church is the city of God here on Earth;<sup>1110</sup> here for a time, existing alongside the civil state.<sup>1111</sup>

#### **553. How can the Church practice her motherhood while staying committed to her spiritual and social life?**

The Church does not intervene in the affairs of political, civil, military, economic, or social organizations, but has **sincere motherhood** towards every human, towards every family, and loves all society. The Church wishes for earth to become a joyful heaven that does not lack anything, and so she cannot bear seeing someone oppressed or in grief. The Church wishes to see every human being in the world bearing in his heart faith in the Lord, playing an important role in society, demonstrating the spirit of leadership accompanied with humility, without negativity or a sense of inferiority. **The Christian societal life is a biblical and ecclesiastical life that is experienced in the depths of the mind, heart, and senses and is translated into one's daily conduct.**

#### **554. What is the Old Testament's view of social life?**

God's Law is not interested in anything more than a life of righteousness and justice, and both of these are often confused together. In God's Law, justice has to do with one's relationship with God and others, with animals and birds, and even with objects. These detailed laws were presented to humanity at the beginning of their spiritual lives to guide them, that they should not deviate from them. Without obeying the law, their sacrifices, prayers, fasting, charity, and all their worship will not be accepted.

#### **555. What is the New Testament's view of social life?**

**First:** In the New Testament, God addresses the believer as one who is mature, granting him an adaptable mentality and a pure inner life in order to **carry out his social work based on the needs of the contemporary age in a faithful, practical, and realistic spirit.** And it is from here that we find in the writings of the early Church Fathers (since the era of the Apostolic Fathers) an evolution in social work, but within the same unchangeable faith as their mentality was alive and firm, but constantly adapted to the needs of the current age.

**Second:** St. John Chrysostom defined the Church as **“the new life,”** where the believer experiences the work of God, the loving Father, for all humankind through the salvation

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<sup>1110</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 9.2 (FOTC 97:87).

<sup>1111</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume II* (Christian Classics, 1983): p. 82.

offered by the incarnate Word of God on the Cross, and the work of the Holy Spirit that transforms us into living icons of Christ.

It is difficult for us to define the social life of the early Church as if it were isolated from the spiritual, cultural, or other areas of life; it is a single integrated line and a unified life experience. There is no separation between a Christian's relationship with God and his relationship with humankind. There is no separation between the believer's spiritual growth and his academic growth, or between sanctifying his soul and mind and sanctifying the body, senses, and emotions.

### **556. What was the approach of the early Church to social life?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** is known for his famous trilogy of works: the "*Protrepticus*" or an *Exhortation to the Greeks*; the "*Paedagogus*" on Christian life and manners; and the eight Books of "*Stromata*" or "*Miscellanies*."

Osborn says that the difficulty linking these three major works has attracted attention for the last 50 years.<sup>1112</sup> In addition, Swete says, "Perhaps nothing in the whole range of early patristic literature is more stimulating to the modern reader than this great trilogy of graduated instruction in the Christian life ... Clement's conception of Christianity, in its relation to the whole field of human thought, is one which has an especial value for our own times, and promises to be increasingly useful in the present century."<sup>1113</sup>

St. Clement says that God's plan for humankind was executed in three stages which corresponds to his three books.<sup>1114</sup> He distinguishes between the Divine Logos as a Guide (as *Protrepticus*) calling people to salvation; as an Instructor (as *Paedagogus*) who urges the believers live a better life while healing them from their sufferings by conducting His spiritual work within them; and as a Teacher (*Didaskalos*<sup>1115</sup>) as He teaches general principles and explains the symbolic meanings in the *Miscellanies*.

St. Clement says, "When the heavenly guide, the Word, invites humanity to salvation, He is called, 'the Guide' ... And as a physician or an instructor, He is called, 'the Tutor' ... since the sick person needs a tutor to be healed and then needs a teacher to be granted knowledge of the Logos. As the Logos desires gradual salvation, He uses a perfect method for He first exhorts, then trains, and finally teaches."<sup>1116</sup>

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<sup>1112</sup> E. F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge University Press, 1957): p. 5.

<sup>1113</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *Patristic Study* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902): p. 48.

<sup>1114</sup> Cf. August Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. 2* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1871): pp. 11–12.

<sup>1115</sup> E. F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge University Press, 1957): p. 5.

<sup>1116</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.1 (ANF 2:209).

**557. What were the principles of social work in the early Church?**

Social work in the early Church was based on scripture. Its principles of social work were:

- a. Loving God and others, along with social justice.
- b. Caring for the common interest of all humankind, without ignoring the individual interests of everyone, as much as possible.
- c. Working equally with everyone, without favoritism to a particular sex, social class, or talent.
- d. Each member honors the other, and respect is given to all with dignity, without allowing the humiliation of any person.
- e. Respecting human freedom for people to express themselves as ambassadors of Christ and heavenly stewards.
- f. Dedicating one's talents and sanctifying them, no matter what they are.
- g. Having every member of the Church positively contributing to the society and the Church so that every member of the Church may be fully utilized. This is achieved by inspiring the spirit of true leadership in every member accompanied by humility and the sense of responsibility and commitment.

**558. What was the role of the early Church in society?**

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke the Evangelist describes the Church in the era of the Apostles as having unity and communion in their worship as well as in their own possessions. The Church was based on the unity of its members together in one body, with each member caring for others.

Towards the end of the second century in Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, and the East, the Church began to offer the Agape meals (Love meals) after celebrating the Eucharistic Liturgy. These meals were either offered at the expense of the church or one of the wealthy members.

As hospitals had not yet come to being, the Church started treating patients.<sup>1117</sup> Also, the duty of giving alms was not exclusively for the wealthy people, but the poor also were committed to give to their fellow poor members.

**St. Polycarp** talks about the priest, Valens, and his wife, who because of greed deviated from the faith saying, "I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be then moderate in regard to this

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<sup>1117</sup> St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 6 (ANF 1:34).

matter, and do not count such as enemies, but call them back as suffering and straying members, that you may save your whole body. For by so acting you shall edify yourselves.”<sup>1118</sup>

**Minucius** says that “they love one another almost before they know each another.”<sup>1119</sup> Moreover, **Aristides** says, “Falsehood is not found among them (the Christians); and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother . . . And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free.”<sup>1120</sup>

The **Pachomian monasteries** cared for hosting strangers and serving the poor and sick in the surrounding villages of every monastery. **St. Basil the Great** dedicated a number of buildings in the suburbs of the city of Caesarea of Cappadocia, to host strangers and sick people, especially the outcasts. He also equipped these institutions with qualified people to work there.<sup>1121</sup> In Antioch, the Church built a huge hospital and an inn for strangers. Also, many bishops took an interest in social work to assist everyone — not only Christians — such as St. Ambrose, Maximus of Turin, Paulinus of Nola, Martin of Tours, Nicetius of Lyon, and others.

### **559. What is the stance of the Christian faith towards human culture?**

The essence of the Christian faith is that God is not in isolation in heaven, but that He created the world and cares about it. God loves all humanity as it occupies a special place in His heart as said in Zephaniah, “The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). It is like a mother who embraces her only child and expresses her joy by cheering and singing.

Christ’s incarnation and coming into the world as one of us, sanctified our land, actions, minds, emotions, talents, and capabilities. This is seen in many monasteries and seminaries that strive eagerly for constant advancement without expecting a reward for their work. Indeed, many universities in the West are originally based on the work of monastic groups.

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<sup>1118</sup> St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 11 (ANF 1:35).

<sup>1119</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius of Minucius Felix* 9.2 (ANF 4:177).

<sup>1120</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15 (ANF 10:227).

<sup>1121</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.34 (NPNF II/2:371).

Our Christ came to sanctify the mind as well as the emotions, and so humanity has not ceased to research and learn to the point that it was able to reach space and achieve much technological advancement. This progress will continue since the Word of God Himself came down to sanctify and develop, without despising the human life and human mind. Even if there are a few with narrow minds who take a counter-position (towards technological advancement), the Church, with its flourishing biblical thought, has never ceased to support the world in what is right for the sake of the edification of all!

### 560. What is the Christian faith's view of the human mind?

In a remarkable phrase, Origen tells us about the role of reason in the life of the believer: "As the eye naturally seeks light and sight, and the body with its natural desires seeks food and drink, so the mind has a natural desire to know the Divine Truth, and to examine the causes of things; this desire is from God."<sup>1122</sup>

### 561. Is "learning" a human right?

Christ came to offer salvation to the world, and to elevate believers to the eternal heavenly glory. He, even without attending any philosophical or scientific school, presented a new vision to humanity, honored them above all the world, and sanctified everything for them to work in the spirit of strength and progress, and to enjoy the fullness of life.

The Church came to proclaim that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), offering blessings to the poor, the mourning, and the distressed (Matt. 5:3–10). The Christian faith came to invite the whole world to enjoy knowledge, and to be formed and renewed in the Holy Spirit, who is poured on everyone without favoritism, in order for man to be in the image of his Creator. **Origen** says that every episcopate has become a school.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** wrote in his famous book, *Paedagogus*, that it is Christ who continues teaching and training His disciples to become His icon: "Who is the teacher? He is called Jesus, and sometimes He calls Himself the shepherd, saying, 'I am the good shepherd' (John 10:11) ... The Word, then, who leads the children to salvation, is appropriately called the Instructor (*Paedagogue*) ... Now piety is instruction, being the learning of the service of God, and training in the knowledge of the truth, and right guidance which leads to heaven."<sup>1123</sup> "the Word, from whom we learn frugality and humility, and all that pertains to love of truth, love of man, and love of excellence"<sup>1124</sup>

<sup>1122</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.11.4 (ANF 4:298).

<sup>1123</sup> St Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.7 (ANF 2:223).

<sup>1124</sup> St Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.12 (ANF 2:235).

## 562. How did Christianity open the door to scientific advancement?

**Opening the door to learning for all:** Most Christian writers were interested in defending human rights and freedoms, or what is known as “free will,” as **Origen** says, “Every rational soul is given freewill and the ability to choose.”<sup>1125</sup>

**Spreading the spirit of inner joy that enables learning:** The Fathers focused on the importance of being joyful, since the world needs to experience heavenly joy. This has an active role in the continuous advancement of humankind, scientifically and practically.

**Improving one’s psychological state and encouraging people to be proud of their talents in the Lord:** The believer longs for the development of humanity and therefore needs help raising himself up, and to believe that the truth is not far from him but is within his reach. The Truth Himself came for him, to his land and to his house, and even to his heart, so that he may enjoy knowledge in this world and the world to come. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Now the instruction which is of God is the right direction of truth to the contemplation of God, and the exhibition of holy deeds in everlasting perseverance.”<sup>1126</sup>

**Spreading the spirit of hope, and challenging illness, aging, and death:** St. Clement of Alexandria says, “Prepare yourself to be strong in the face of illness. Be courageous as a strong warrior in the wrestling arena, so you can defeat your opponent invincibly. Do not allow yourself to be upset because of sickness or because of any disaster that may befall you.”<sup>1127</sup>

**Moderation in everything:** St. Clement of Alexandria says, “As moderation and distance from extravagance are usually the results of self-satisfaction. If this was adopted by man, he would give up everything that is luxurious or unnecessary, and so there would be no deviation nor falling in temptations.”<sup>1128</sup>

## 563. Is there a link between the Christian faith and social and familial relationships?

**The believer bears his brothers and sisters in his heart and in all his dealings.** As someone who loves everyone, the believer cannot isolate himself from others, even if not physically, but he keeps them in his mind and heart at all times.

Our pure Christian faith is an invitation to enjoy what we have lost because of sin, that is to be an icon of God, the Lover of humankind. The believer bears all humanity in his heart, even if he is alone in a cave in the wilderness or a hermit who does not see anyone for years. Even those believers translate their love for all humanity by their continuous prayers for the salvation of all. In addition, they pray for everyone to enjoy the eternal heavenly peace and

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<sup>1125</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1, Praef., 5 (ANF 4:240)

<sup>1126</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.7 (ANF 2:223).

<sup>1127</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Id. Fragments* 5 (44).

<sup>1128</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.11.

therefore they never cease fasting and doing their prostrations (*metanoias*) for everyone, as they announce this love through their behavior as much as they can.

This overview of our faith has revealed the relationship between the Church and the state in the early ages. **St. Polycarp of Smyrna** says, “Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, (1 Tim. 2:2), rulers, and princes, and for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that you may be perfect in Him.”<sup>1129</sup>

#### 564. What is the Christian stance on companionship and friendship?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “we would never attribute so much to ourselves as to think that we, single-handed, could succeed in our difficulties, knowing well that we need the help of each one of our brethren more than one hand needs the other. Then, too, the Lord has taught us the necessity of unity of action from the very construction of our bodies. For, when I reflect upon these our limbs, that not one of them is sufficient in itself for activity, how shall I consider that I alone am strong enough to combat the troubles of life? In fact, neither could one foot move safely forward unless the other helped to support it, nor could the eye see clearly if it did not have the other as its partner, and if it did not, in harmony with it, cast its glance upon the objects to be seen. The hearing is more accurate when it receives the sound through both channels; the grasp is stronger through the co-operation of the fingers. And, in general, I see that none of the actions performed either naturally or by inclination is accomplished without the agreement of kindred forces, since even prayer itself which does not come from persons praying together is much feebler, the Lord having declared that He will be in the midst if two or three call upon Him with oneness of mind (cf. Matt. 18:20).”<sup>1130</sup>

Anyone who looks closely at the Church’s reaction to oppression and persecution realizes that Christians love others, even those who oppress them, and so they have done everything they could to serve both their fellow believers and non-believers alike. We can say that the Church’s positivity, both on the individual and collective level, in serving everyone has not only helped her to survive, but to also to win non-believers to the faith and spur many to accept death (martyrdom) — even catechumens who had not yet been baptized.

**St. Justin Martyr** says, “We who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and share with everyone in need.”<sup>1131</sup>

Tertullian says, “On Sundays, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he is able to: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety’s deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-

<sup>1129</sup> St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 12 (ANF 1:36).

<sup>1130</sup> St Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 97 To the Senate of Tyana (FOTC 13:215).

<sup>1131</sup> St Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14 (ANF 1:167).

bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death."<sup>1132</sup>

### 565. What is Christianity's view on ethics and morals?

Christian ethics are unique. They are not abstract laws that govern the behavior of an individual or a community, but a relationship of deep love between the soul and its Savior, who is preparing for it to partake of heavenly glories.

Through this relationship, the faithful learn how to deal with their brothers and sisters, even those who persecute and oppress them, as well as how to deal with heavenly beings, animals, birds, and even inanimate objects. This is why **St. Augustine** says, "Love, and do what you will."<sup>1133</sup>

Christ set the foundation of Christian behavioral law thus: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35).

The Apostle Paul says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8–10). He tells the church to walk according to the spiritual law which is founded on the bible, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

The same idea was presented in the **Didache**<sup>1134</sup> which presents to us the right to choose between the way of life and the way of death. It does not present a very detailed list of the virtues and the vices that lead to death: "There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall

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<sup>1132</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46).

<sup>1133</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John* 7.8 (NPNF I/7:504) amended.

<sup>1134</sup> The *Didache*, also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, is one of the most important works after the writings of the Apostles, as it talks about the life of the early Church from all perspectives: liturgical; organizational; and behavioral.



love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and **you shall be perfect.**”<sup>1135</sup>

In every generation and in every place, shepherds are always interested in talking about specific virtues to address certain things in their communities, but they present these virtues on the basis of a living biblical thought that highlights the importance of love, righteousness, and justice. This is achieved through free divine grace and also through one’s spiritual struggle by his holy will in the Lord.

**St. Ambrose** says, “Justice, then, has to do with the society of the human race, and the community at large. For that which holds society together is divided into two parts — justice and good-will, which also is called liberality and kindness. Justice seems to me the loftier, liberality the more pleasing, of the two. The one gives judgment, the other shows goodness.”<sup>1136</sup>

**St. Augustine** tells the catechumens getting ready for their baptism, “Love is the only thing that distinguishes the children of God from the children of Satan. Let us engrave on our foreheads the cross of Jesus Christ ... Let us all be baptized and let everyone come into the church that we may build the gates of the church, for there is nothing that distinguishes the children of God from the children of Satan except for love.”

He also says, “The Apostle Paul in a certain place has brought me a great collection of excellent things; he has laid them open before me, and I have said to him, ‘Show me, if so be you have found among them that “wedding garment”.’ He begins to unfold them one by one, and to say, ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels ...’ Precious garments! Nevertheless, there is not yet here that wedding garment. Now bring out to us the wedding garment. Why do you keep us in suspense, O Apostle? ... ‘If I’ says He, ‘have no love, nothing profits me!’ See the wedding garment; put it on, you guests, that you may sit down securely!”<sup>1137</sup>

## **566. What is Christianity’s stance on defending oneself, family, and homeland?**

True believers believe in the unity of life; their faith is not separate from their actions, so they do not have different personalities, one for church and another in public. In order for the Christian to be successful and compliant to society’s laws, he must be familiar with these

<sup>1135</sup> *Didache* 1.1–4 (LCL 24:417–419).

<sup>1136</sup> St Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 1.28.130. (NPNF II/10:22).

<sup>1137</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 45.7 (NPNF I/6:408).

laws and obedient to them as he is obedient to God’s commandment, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17).

Also, we often find that the secular laws that govern us are in line with the teachings of the Bible and of our Church, as Paul the Apostle says: “the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom. 13:1). Christianity calls for love and forgiveness, but also calls for the rule of law, urging the Christian to resort to the law in administering his affairs. If someone is a victim of injustice, it is his right to ask for justice through secular legal channels.

In ancient times, initiating legal action was stipulated in Jewish Law (Deut. 17:8–9). The Roman law also allowed its citizens to raise their claims to the emperor if they were not satisfied with the rulings of their districts and provinces, and thus did St. Paul raised his plea to Caesar (Acts 11:25).

In other cases, we find the Christian in a position of defending himself or his relatives or his country, confronting danger, and not being able to wait for the state’s authorities, so as not to lose his life or the life of his relatives. In such cases, the person is not to blame, whether legally or from the perspective of faith.

### **567. How did the Mosaic Law prepare humanity for perfection in Christ Jesus?**

The Law of Moses was in place as a tutor for humanity because of the sin into which they fell. This law was moderate, somewhere between other primitive systems which allowed for people to take revenge by causing greater harm than they had suffered, and the system taught by Christ whereby He taught His disciples not to resist evil.

Over the course of time, there was a transformation in great human desire for revenge and for being recompensed more than one had suffered. Instead, revenge came about by agreement according to the law and in the same measure as the suffering that had been endured.

A primitive person begins by assaulting his brother.

A person who does not start the evil but responds to it with a greater evil has not yet reached the level of the Mosaic Law.

In the Mosaic Law, a person is asked not to take revenge by committing an evil that exceeds the evil he suffered, and thus he gives up a part of his rights, since justice requires punishment of the initiator more than the initial victim. Therefore, this law did not use force against those who did evil but used justice along with mercy. This law was perfected by the One who came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it.

There are still two intermediate levels left (the fourth and fifth), before we can speak of the perfection of the highest level of mercy (the sixth level). There are some people who have

not yet reached the greatness of Christ's commandment and so they go by the following intermediary levels:

Not returning evil with a greater or equal evil, but with a lesser evil and so one responds to two strikes with one strike.

Whoever exceeds the previous level does not return evil for evil, making him even closer to the next commandment of the Lord.

This is the degree of Christian perfection, in which the Lord of glory commands us not to resist evil saying, "I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matt. 5:39), which means that if he wants to slap you a second time, allow him to do so. Those who serve their children, dear friends, infants, or people who are sick, realize the value of bearing other people's weaknesses joyfully, despite the harm they may be causing. If they are to benefit those whom they serve, they will surely increase their service and tolerance towards them until their weaknesses are healed. So, what does the Physician of our souls, our Lord Jesus command us to do with our relatives? He asks us to tolerate their weaknesses for the sake of their salvation.

#### **568. What are the limits of discipline in the New Testament?**

Rulers are committed to disciplining the wicked and criminals, as Paul the Apostle says: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:1–5).

It is clear that the New Testament gave rulers the right to discipline the wicked even to the point of using violence if necessary. Legislators were allowed to set the limits of punishment or discipline according to the circumstances of their time, of the person who committed the crime, or to the specific circumstances of the case. From the perspective of those who fall under punishment or discipline, the person should not fear other people's wrath but his own conscience as he is subject to a just judgment against him so that this chastisement may be for his benefit.

As for the disciplining of children, the Apostle Paul says, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Heb. 12:7). The purpose of this discipline is to present the image of God's strict love to His

children, “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6).

The New Testament offers us a fundamental principle, and that is to deal with children the same way God deals with us: for example, declaring our great love to our children along with the necessary strictness for their benefit. This must be accompanied by allowing them to have their own freedom and by respecting their own personalities, no matter how young they may be.

**St. Augustine** says, “Nor are we thus precluded from inflicting such punishment [requital] as avails for correction, and as compassion itself dictates; nor does it stand in the way of that course proposed, where one is prepared to endure more at the hand of him whom he wishes to set right. But no one is fit for inflicting this punishment except the man who, by the greatness of his love, has overcome that hatred wherewith those are wont to be inflamed who wish to avenge themselves. For it is not to be feared that parents would seem to hate a little son when, on committing an offense, he is beaten by them that he may not go on offending. And certainly the perfection of love is set before us by the imitation of God the Father Himself when it is said in what follows: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which persecute you; and yet it is said of Him by the prophet, For whom the Lord loves He corrects; yea, He scourges every son whom He receives. The Lord also says, The servant that knows not his Lord’s will, and does things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but the servant that knows his Lord’s will, and does things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with many stripes. No more, therefore, is sought for, except that he should punish to whom, in the natural order of things, the power is given; and that he should punish with the same goodwill which a father has towards his little son, whom by reason of his youth he cannot yet hate. For from this source the most suitable example is drawn, in order that it may be sufficiently manifest that sin can be punished in love rather than be left unpunished; so that one may wish him on whom he inflicts it not to be miserable by means of punishment, but to be happy by means of correction, yet be prepared, if need be, to endure with equanimity more injuries inflicted by him whom he wishes to be corrected, whether he may have the power of putting restraint upon him or not.

“But great and holy men, although they at the time knew excellently well that that death which separates the soul from the body is not to be dreaded, yet, in accordance with the sentiment of those who might fear it, punished some sins with death, both because the living were struck with a salutary fear, and because it was not death itself that would injure those who were being punished with death, but sin, which might be increased if they continued to live. They did not judge rashly on whom God had bestowed such a power of judging. Hence it is that Elijah inflicted death on many, both with his own hand and by calling down fire from heaven; as was done also without rashness by many other great and godlike men, in the same spirit of concern for the good of humanity. And when the disciples had quoted an example from this Elijah, mentioning to the Lord what had been done by him, in order that He might give to themselves also the power of calling down fire from heaven to consume

those who would not show Him hospitality, the Lord reproved in them, not the example of the holy prophet, but their ignorance in respect to taking vengeance, their knowledge being as yet elementary; perceiving that they did not in love desire correction, but in hate desired revenge.

“Accordingly, after He had taught them what it was to love one’s neighbor as oneself, and when the Holy Spirit had been poured out, whom, at the end of ten days after His ascension, He sent from above, as He had promised, there were not wanting such acts of vengeance, although much more rarely than in the Old Testament. For there, for the most part, as servants they were kept down by fear; but here mostly as free they were nourished by love. For at the words of the Apostle Peter also, Ananias and his wife, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, fell down dead, and were not raised to life again, but buried.

“The relationship between God and man in the Old Testament was much like the relationship between master and servant (based on fear), while in the New Testament, we are no longer slaves but sons (Gal. 4:1–7), since our souls have been liberated from the bondage of fear with divine love.”<sup>1138</sup>

Discipline must be more stringent and strict in accordance with the responsibility and role of the servant in the Church, without exception. As **Origen** says, “All those who are sinners within the Church ... deserve punishments, but each one will suffer pain in keeping with the kind of rank [he holds]. One who presides over the Church, and then transgresses, has a greater punishment. Or does the catechumen not deserve mercy more, by comparison with one of the faithful? Is not the layperson more worthy of forbearance, when compared with the deacon; and again, does not the deacon merit forbearance more, by comparison with the presbyter? Now, you know what follows, even if I keep silent about it. Therefore, fearing the judgment of God, and placing before my eyes that order of judgment which is contained in the Scriptures, I recall this statement: ‘Do not lift a weight too heavy for you’ (Sir. 13:2) ... What good is it to me that I sit back in a teacher’s chair in front [of the congregation], and receive the honor due to a more important person, but am not able to carry out 36 deeds worthy of my rank? Shall I not be made to suffer with a greater punishment, because the honor of a righteous person is attributed to me by everyone, when [in reality] I am a sinner?”<sup>1139</sup>

Origen again tells us not to publicly chastise someone too quickly: “God does not want you, if you see your brother’s sin, to rush to a public place and to cry out, exposing his secret. Such action does not come from those who intend to correct, but rather from those aiming at defamation. This is why he says, ‘Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother’ (Matt.

<sup>1138</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.20.63 (NPNF I/6:28).

<sup>1139</sup> Origen, *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel: the Fourteen Homilies and the Greek Fragments of the Homilies, Commentaries, and Scholia. Text and Translation*, trans., Mischa Hooker, ed., Roger Pearse (Ipswich: Chieftain Publishing, 2014) 5.4.1: p. 167.

15:18). When the person who sinned sees that his secret has been kept, he will fix the situation in humility.”<sup>1140</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “It is not fitting for physicians to be angry with the sick, as their obligation is to fight diseases to heal the sick.”

**St. Ambrose** distinguishes between hating the sin and hating the sinner: “It is necessary to interpret the words of Psalm 119:113 to mean that he hated sin itself not the sinners, who can always change through the ministry of the Gospel.”<sup>1141</sup>

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<sup>1140</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 3.2.3 (FOTC 83:54).

<sup>1141</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Ps.* 15:22.

## The Role of Women in Society and Church

### 569. What is the role of women as leaders in society and in the early Church?

Women in the early Church were given special status because of their purity, courage, and leadership skills. For example, there were female saints who were more courageous than some men accompanying them in martyrdom, such as Saints Perpetua, Blandina the slave, Felicitas, Symphorosa, Dionysia, and Mercuria. We must also mention some deaconesses such as St. Olympias the disciple of St. John Chrysostom, as well as the desert mothers such as Amma Melania the Elder, who accompanied St. Jerome in his work administering the monasteries. It is also important to mention that many fathers and leading priests used to come for guidance to certain mothers such as Amma Sarah and Amma Syncletica.

The Church Fathers often talked about the important role women play in shaping society as a whole. **Origen** says, “We have witnessed with our own eyes, girls and women bearing the overwhelming tortures of martyrdom in their early youth.”<sup>1142</sup>

### 570. What did St. Clement of Rome say about the capabilities of believing women?

“Many women also, being strengthened by the grace of God, have performed numerous manly exploits. The blessed Judith, when her city was besieged, asked of the elders permission to go forth into the camp of the strangers; and, exposing herself to danger, she went out for the love which she bare to her country and people then besieged; and the Lord delivered Holofernes into the hands of a woman (Jth. 8). Esther also, being perfect in faith, exposed herself to no less danger, in order to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from impending destruction. For with fasting and humiliation she entreated the everlasting God, who sees all things; and He, perceiving the humility of her spirit, delivered the people for whose sake she had encountered peril.”<sup>1143</sup>

### 571. What was the role of Olympias the Deaconess?

**Olympias** received great fame and was associated with St. John Chrysostom, who was impressed by her love for God and her generosity in giving with dedication and humility. He gave her special attention and relied on her in service such that all of Constantinople realized her important role. And when the archbishop was exiled, she was severely persecuted, but she received comforting letters from her suffering father. St. Gregory of Nyssa gave her his commentary on the Song of Songs, to provide him with feedback.

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<sup>1142</sup> Origen, *In Iudic.* Hom 9.1.

<sup>1143</sup> St Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 55:3–6 (ANF 1:19ff).

The historian Palladius also mentions the influence **Amma Melania the Elder** had on him and he greatly praised her in his book *The Lausiatic History*.<sup>1144</sup> She had great love for celibacy, monasticism, asceticism, and research. He says of her: “Being very learned and loving literature she turned night into day by perusing every writing of the ancient commentators, including 3,000,000 (lines) of Origen and 2,500,000 (lines) of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius, Basil, and other standard writers. Nor did she read them once only and casually, but she laboriously went through each book seven or eight times. Wherefore also she was enabled to be freed from knowledge falsely so called and to fly on wings, thanks to the grace of these books; elevated by kindly hopes she made herself a spiritual bird and journeyed to Christ.”<sup>1145</sup>

The life of deaconess Olympias was full of love as she opened her heart to the poor in a way that surprised many people. It was said in her praise, “Empress Eudoxia hears the words of praise and honor from all over the world. As for Olympias, she hears the sighs and prayers of the whole world.”

She was loved by the people and honored by the Patriarch. Palladius<sup>1146</sup> tells us that Nectarius of Constantinople used to consult her regarding many affairs of the Church, despite her young age. He summed up her life by saying, “She dispersed all her goods and gave to the poor. She engaged in no mean combats for truth’s sake, instructed many women, addressed priests reverently, and honored bishops; she was accounted worthy to be a confessor for truth’s sake. The inhabitants of Constantinople reckon her life among the confessors, for she died thus and went away to the Lord in the midst of her struggles for God’s honor.”<sup>1147</sup>

## **572. How did Amma Sarah become a spiritual guide?**

**Amma Sarah** was a wise, meek, loving mother who was beloved by all. The Desert Fathers say of her that she spent three years in a battle against evil thoughts and did not once ask God to take away these wars but insisted on her claim that He may give her the strength to be victorious. She once said, “If I prayed to God that all men should approve of my conduct, I should find myself penitent at the door of each one, but I shall rather pray that my heart may be pure towards all.” She also said, “It is good to give alms for men’s sake. Even if it is only done to please men, through it one can begin to seek to please God.”

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<sup>1144</sup> Palladius, *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, trans., W. K. Lowther Clarke (London: MacMillan, 1918) 46, 54.

<sup>1145</sup> Palladius, *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, trans., W. K. Lowther Clarke (London: MacMillan, 1918) 55.3: p. 161.

<sup>1146</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom* 17 (ACW 45:115).

<sup>1147</sup> Palladius, *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, trans., W. K. Lowther Clarke (London: MacMillan, 1918) 56: pp. 161–162.



**573. Why did St. Athanasius the Apostolic consider St. Syncletica to be an angel?**

The fragrance of her life began to spread throughout Alexandria, to the extent that many young women came to visit her. Some wanted to just see her and take her blessing, while others came seeking solutions to their problems. It was normal for some of them to be influenced by her example and end up staying with her and sharing her life of meditation and asceticism.

Syncletica lived her life of fasting, asceticism, and prayer while still living in her parents' house until they departed to heaven. Then, she distributed her money on the poor, and took her blind sister and went to the family's cemetery where she lived for a few years, during which she increased her fasts, prayers, and meditations.

She left the family's cemetery, taking her peers with her to go and live together in a building outside the city. She devoted her life to serving them as a role model and as a bright image of the teachings she preached, so much so that her peers loved her and gave her their loyalty and devotion.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic wanted to make known the greatness of the holiness of this devoted nun, so he personally wrote her biography. Thus, he wrote the biography of St. Anthony as the father of the monks and the biography of St. Syncletica as the mother of nuns.

**574. What was the role of women in the early Church for the Eastern Fathers?<sup>1148</sup>**

The Eastern Church was characterized by a philosophical, theological way of thinking — especially the Fathers of the School of Alexandria — so women and marriage were respected.

The School of Alexandria included students of both genders, without distinction.

Convents for virgins appeared if not before the organized monastic movement, at least in the same era.

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “To be rich in sorrow, then, as by way of a penalty, was the fate of woman. It was, therefore, necessary that by the mouth of Him That had passed sentence of condemnation, the burden of that ancient curse should be removed, our Savior Christ now wiping away the tears from the eyes of the woman, or rather of all womankind, as in Mary the firstfruits ... extending also to the whole race of women, if indeed they be pained by the outrages against Christ.”<sup>1149</sup>

Again he says, “As the first woman, the mother of all mankind, was condemned for listening to the devil's voice, and through her the whole race of women, so also this woman,

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<sup>1148</sup> David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (St. Tikhon Seminary Press, 1996).

<sup>1149</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, “Commentary on John Book XII,” in *Commentary on the Gospel of St John Vol. 2*, trans. Walter Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885) on John 20:16: p. 657.

in that she had hearkened to our Savior’s words, and announced tidings fraught with life eternal, might deliver the entire race of women from the charge of old.”<sup>1150</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The nature is the same in everyone and so everyone is capable of having the same virtues. Women do not have a different nature than men. They both have the same nature and the same virtue.”<sup>1151</sup>

### **575. What is the stance of the School of Alexandria on Abortion?**

In the Apology of **Athenagoras** in the second century, he makes it clear to the Empire that the Church forbids abortion.<sup>1152</sup> In **St. Clement of Alexandria’s** view, it is necessary not to use any means to kill the fetus for the purposes of stopping the reproduction of the human race. However, we still see some women using poisonous drugs that kill the infants in their wombs, depriving themselves of all humaneness.<sup>1153</sup>

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<sup>1150</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, “Commentary on John Book XII,” in *Commentary on the Gospel of St John Vol. 2*, trans. Walter Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885) on John 20:16: p. 657.

<sup>1151</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.8 (ANF 2:420).

<sup>1152</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 35 (ANF 2:147).

<sup>1153</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 2.10.97 (FOTC 23:174).

## 9

## The Person of the Church

## 576. Who is a person of the Church?

The writings of **St. Clement of Alexandria** reveal how the early Church viewed the person of the Church who views the Church as a place of teaching and the place where God shepherds His people. He says, “Feed us, the children, as sheep. Yea, Master, fill us with righteousness, Your own pasture; yea, O Instructor, feed us on Your holy mountain the Church, which towers aloft, which is above the clouds, which touches heaven.”<sup>1154</sup> St. Clement truly loved the Church and was very much loyal to her traditions and canons. He says, “We are bound in no way to transgress the canon of the Church.”<sup>1155</sup>

**Origen** was a churchman, in the fullest sense of the term; his proudest boast was to be a man of the Church. It may even be said that scripture and the Church were the most important and essential things about him.<sup>1156</sup> Jean Daniélou says, “We have seen from his life that he had been catechist, lector, priest, doctor and martyr by turns: the whole of his life was spent in the discharge of ecclesiastical functions.”<sup>1157</sup>

He was careful to preserve the deposit of Christian teaching and the authority of the Church. Origen says, “I, myself a man of the Church, living under the faith of Christ and placed in the midst of the Church, am compelled by the authority of the divine precept to sacrifice calves and lambs and to offer fine wheat flour with incense and oil (in the spiritual sense).”<sup>1158</sup> Again he says, “If I am in the Church, no matter how very little I am, my angel enjoys the liberty and the trust always to see ‘the face of the Father, who is in heaven.’ But, if I am an outsider, and not a member of that Church ‘that has neither spot nor wrinkle, nor anything of that sort’ (Eph. 5:27), and the facts prove that I am not a member of such a congregation, then my angel does not enjoy the trust of beholding ‘the face of the Father, who is in heaven.’”<sup>1159</sup>

<sup>1154</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.9 (ANF 2:231).

<sup>1155</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.15 (ANF 2:549).

<sup>1156</sup> Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 21.

<sup>1157</sup> Jean Daniélou and Walter Mitchell, *Origen* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955): p. 27.

<sup>1158</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1:1:2 (FOTC 83:30).

<sup>1159</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 35:3–4 (FOTC 94:144).

### 577. What is membership of the Church?

According to **Tertullian**, being a member of the Church is manifested by good deeds. As for **St. Clement of Alexandria**, it is the spiritual knowledge or the reasonable perception of the truth, through the unceasing contemplation of God.<sup>1160</sup>

### 578. What is unity of the Church according to St. Clement?

It is a natural feature that makes the Church distinct from the heretical groups that have the spirit of division within.<sup>1161</sup> In this, the Church resembles God who is one. He says, “For the God of both [genders] is one, the master of both is also one, one church ... their food is common.”<sup>1162</sup>

“Therefore, in substance and idea, in origin, in pre-eminence, we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is one, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith the righteous according to God’s will ... But the pre-eminence of the Church, as the principle of union, is, in its oneness, in this surpassing all things else, and having nothing like or equal to itself. But of this afterwards.”<sup>1163</sup>

The secret of this unity is her oneness of faith: “The Catholic Church is one, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith — which results from the peculiar Testaments, or rather the one Testament in different times by the will of the one God, through one Lord — those already ordained, whom God predestinated, knowing before the foundation of the world that they would be righteous.”<sup>1164</sup> In this, St. Clement’s aim might have been to oppose the heresies such as Marcionism which believed in dualism.

The fruit of such oneness is for the Church to worship in one spirit: “The Church is the assembly of those who worship together in unity and offer prayers in harmony as with one voice.”<sup>1165</sup>

Thus, the symphony of true love is offered, in which Christ takes pleasure. Through this symphony, the Father sees the faithful as true children, as St. Clement says: “The union of many in one, issuing in the production of divine harmony out of a medley of sounds and division, becomes one symphony following one choir-leader and teacher, the Word, reaching and resting in the same truth, and crying Abba, Father. This, the true utterance of His children, God accepts with gracious welcome — the first-fruits He receives from them.”<sup>1166</sup>

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<sup>1160</sup> Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its changing image through twenty centuries, Volume 1* (London: SPCK, 1977): p. 60.

<sup>1161</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.17 (ANF 2:555).

<sup>1162</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.4 (ANF 2:211).

<sup>1163</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.17 (ANF 2:555).

<sup>1164</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.17 (ANF 2:555).

<sup>1165</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.6 (ANF 2:532).

<sup>1166</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 9 (ANF 2:197).

**579. What does the motherhood of the Church mean?**

**St. Clement** talks about the Church's motherhood in words that really show how attached he was to the Church: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; the mother draws the children to herself; and we seek our mother the Church."<sup>1167</sup> In St. Clement's understanding, the motherhood of the Church is directly related to God's loving fatherhood. He says, "O mystic marvel! The universal Father is one, and one the universal Word; and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere, and one is the only virgin mother. I love to call her the Church. This mother ... is pure as a virgin, loving as a mother. And calling her children to her, she nurses them with holy milk, with the Word for childhood."<sup>1168</sup>

This motherhood was spoken of by many Church Fathers in the first and second centuries, such as the **Shepherd of Hermas**. They also talked about how through His incarnation, the Logos became milk that nourishes the children of the Church. In this vein, **St. Irenaeus of Lyons** says, "He was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants. He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father."<sup>1169</sup>

**580. Why is the Church called "the assembly of the elect"?**

The Church is the assembly of the elect,<sup>1170</sup> the fertile city ruled by the Logos,<sup>1171</sup> and the bride whom the Bridegroom teaches.<sup>1172</sup>

**581. Why is the Church called "the new world"?**

The Creator's will is the salvation of all humanity through the Church: "For as His will is work, and this is named the world, so also His counsel is the salvation of men, and this has been called the church."<sup>1173</sup>

**582. What is the relationship between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven?**

The Church of the New Testament has a heavenly aspect as it partakes in the praises of the angels as **St. Clement** says: "For this is the first-born Church, composed of many good

<sup>1167</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.5 (ANF 2:214).

<sup>1168</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.6 (ANF 2:220).

<sup>1169</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1 (ANF 1:521).

<sup>1170</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.5 (ANF 2:530).

<sup>1171</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.26 (ANF 2:441).

<sup>1172</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 3.12 (ANF 2:295).

<sup>1173</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator (Paedagogus)* 1.6 (ANF 2:216).

children; these are ‘the firstborn enrolled in heaven, who hold high festival with so many myriads of angels.’”<sup>1174</sup>

In this Church, those who have the true knowledge find comfort, “Such, according to David, ‘rest in the holy hill of God’ (Ps. 15:1), in the Church far on high, in which are gathered the philosophers of God, ‘who are Israelites indeed, who are pure in heart’ ... engaged in contemplation which has everlasting remembrance.”<sup>1175</sup> As for the Church on earth, it is the icon of the heavenly Church. Thus, we pray saying, “on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>1176</sup> This Church is the ancient universal Church which received the Apostolic Tradition, which distinguishes her from the heretical assemblies.

### **583. Is it possible to find a Church that is perfectly pure?**

According to Origen, “For while the Church is on earth, it is not possible to cleanse it to such purity that neither an ungodly person nor any sinner seems to reside in it, where everyone is holy and blessed and no blot of sin is found in them.”<sup>1177</sup>

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<sup>1174</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 9 (ANF 2:195); Cf. *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.8; 5.26; 6.14, 7.2, 7.6; 7.11 (ANF 2).

<sup>1175</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.14, 7.7 (ANF 2:505, 537).

<sup>1176</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.17 (ANF 2).

<sup>1177</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 21.1 (FOTC 105:185).

## 10

# The Mystery of the House of God

### 584. Is there any need for building a house of God?

The Psalmist says, “How beloved is Your dwellings, O Lord, God of hosts! My soul longs, and faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh have exulted in the living God. For, the sparrow has found for himself a home, and the turtledove for herself a nest, where she may lay her young; Your altars, O Lord, God of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are all who dwell in Your house ... For one day in Your courts is better than thousands” (Ps. 84).

Amid the world’s violent storms and under the pressure of ceaseless temptations, the Psalmist raised his eyes to see that the sparrow has found a home to settle and the turtledove a nest to protect its young but as for him, where can he go? Where can he take shelter? The Psalmist found no other place like the altars of God the Lord of hosts, for it is the reason for his joy and comfort. There, his soul ascends to heaven in order to dwell, where the world with all its vanities vanishes from before his eyes. As if by wings of Spirit, he is lifted to the divine throne where God, his personal beloved friend, appears before him. There, he is thrown into His bosom and leaning on His chest, he casts his burdens upon Him and pours out all his hidden secrets, confidences, and remonstrations; and he hears His voice and enters His glories.

**Tertullian** expresses the greatness of this boldness with which graces the faithful who are gathered in the house of the Lord, saying, “We assemble ... that we might surround God with our prayers, as if by the power of arms. Such violence is pleasing to God.”

In the house of God, the faithful offer their worship not as a duty or a routine work but as their own right that they perform to receive the free gifts of the Holy Spirit. Their worship is their entrance into the Lord’s green pastures where they are immersed in the spring of life-giving water, fed from the heavenly banquet, are made to drink from the chalice of salvation and enjoy the mysteries of God’s everlasting love. The Spirit fills them so that they no longer seek anything but to remain in God’s presence. In their state of content, they no longer seek anything for themselves as much as for others. They pray for the rulers, ministers, councilors, bishops, priests, deacons, monks, and all servants of the Church, for the needy, the sick, the travelers, the prisoners, the distressed, and those who have fallen asleep. They even pray for animals, plants, rivers, and winds. When they are in the house of God, their hearts are raised to heaven so that their needs do not stop at just their personal daily needs but extends with love to include the need for the salvation of the world, its peace and transformation.

In the Church too, the faithful assemble together with the angels in the house of angels, where they partake in their heavenly liturgies, prayers, and praises. There, they remain in their company unceasingly and constantly singing the “new song” (Rev. 5:9) in an angelic

language. In the book **The Shepherd of Hermas**,<sup>1178</sup> he sees the angels rejoicing at the sight of the heavenly tower of God being completed in us, offering praise to God for His continued building of the spiritual Church.

There can be no doubt that the secret behind the glory of the house of God lies in the active guidance of the Holy Spirit in life of the people of God, as **St. Augustine** says, “He overflows with every gift upon the members.” This is also expressed by the words of **St. Irenaeus**: “For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every grace.”<sup>1179</sup>

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “The Holy Spirit is the odor of Christ the Life-giver, a living and effective odor. Attracting to Him all the creation in order to partake in God’s superior nature.”<sup>1180</sup> Likewise in His house, Christ the Sun of Righteousness shines on us with His Spirit, so that we also shine and become living stars that pour out love to the world. We serve Him in humility and desire His salvation. The Spirit brings us to the mentality of the Cross so that each one of us desires to die with Christ for the sake of all.

In the house of God, we are granted a new mindset towards everything, even towards non-living matter and as a result we view everything around us as holy and blessed. The wheat (bread) is transformed to the Lord’s Body by the Holy Spirit, and likewise, wine is transformed to the Lord’s Blood. The incense raises the pure prayers that the angels may offer it before the divine throne. The Holy Spirit also descends on the oil, and what else do I say? Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, paper, textiles, and even bricks and sand are all sanctified when they are used to construct and furnish the holy house of God.

Thus, physical matter can be utilized in the service of heavenly things. We study the church building, not for the sole purpose of studying rituals or church architecture, but for the purpose of highlighting our spiritual understanding of God’s house so that we can apply these principles in our daily lives.

### **585. How do we understand the church building?**

The church building indeed is an open Bible, written in a visible, tangible language that a simple child can understand, a theologian can contemplate deeply, a clergyman loaded with many congregational responsibilities can enjoy, and in which the spiritual hermit can find comfort. It is a simple, but at the same time very deep, theological message that is delivered by the Spirit to everyone. The topic of this message is “our life in Christ Jesus,” manifested in our relationship with God, the Church, society, and heaven. Indeed, it even touches our inner mystic life. We can grasp this topic by carefully studying the concept of the “house of

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<sup>1178</sup> *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 1.3.4 (ANF 2:14).

<sup>1179</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

<sup>1180</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de Sancta et Consubstantiali Trinitate* 34 (PG 75:609).



God” and its development since the first creation of the human race, as it passed through the following six phases:

**First: The First Paradise.** Adam lived in Paradise as a priest in the house of God. Every inch in Paradise declared God's love and care for him. Every now and then, he would hear the sound of the Lord walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8) attracting Adam to Him and encouraging him to meet with Him. With every breath, Adam offered love to his Creator, everywhere and without mediators. The first Paradise with all its space was the holy “house of God,” in which God planned to meet man without the need for a sanctuary, altar, offering, or incense. Before long however, our first parents were exiled from Paradise, loaded with their burden of disobedience and inability to see God and were separated from Him. At this point, it was inevitable that a divine intervention became necessary to abolish the middle wall that was set up between God and humanity, so he gave us the rituals of sacrifice and the altar as a cornerstone of God's house.

**Second: The Altar.** The introduction of the altar as God's house, even in its early and primitive stages, revealed the two fundamental facts which are necessary for establishing the house of God.

The word “altar” מזבח in Hebrew and in Arabic “*mazbeh*,” refers to the place upon which sacrifices are slaughtered, and so it is truly an introduction to the “sacrifice of the cross.” Through this sacrifice, we are reconciled with the Father through His beloved Son, who through His blood clears our sight that we may see God as our Father and sanctifies our inner depths, tearing down the handwriting of our sins.

The second fact: Elijah the Prophet built an altar for the Lord, made of twelve stones (1 Kings 18:30). Each stone represented a tribe, as if to say that God's altar derives its existence from the communal effort of the entire people as a whole through the sacrifice of reconciliation.

**Third: Bethel.** In the story of Jacob when he ran away from his brother Esau, he laid his head on a stone and saw a ladder set on earth and reaching to the top of heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, and the Lord stood above it and said, “I am with you” (Gen. 28:11–15). Jacob rose and took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it and called the place Bethel, which means “house of God.” He became aware of the presence of God with him and the opening of heaven to those on earth.

**Fourth: The Tabernacle.** The design of that tent was directly dictated to Moses by God, after he had strictly fasted forty days and forty nights with no food nor drink. He was told, “See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain” (Heb. 8:5; Ex. 25:9). The tent was made according to that which Moses saw in some detail.

**Fifth: The Temple.** When the people settled in Jerusalem, the temple was constructed by Solomon according to the pattern demonstrated to David the prophet by God. The church ought to be a “temple” that manifests God’s kingdom in peoples’ lives and is capable of preparing inner hearts to be thrones of God. Now we can understand Christ’s tremendous love for the temple, considering it “My Father’s house” (John 2:16).

**Sixth: The Church of the New Testament.** The divine incarnation took the mystery to a new level of perfection for “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14) so we no longer evaluate the church based on its size, whether it is a large cathedral or a simple small church, but instead by the transfiguration of the incarnate Lord in front of us and so we see the church as the body of Christ.<sup>1181</sup> **St. Irenaeus**<sup>1182</sup> at the end of the second century saw the Church as the “Body of the Great and Glorified Christ” who ascended to heaven. After God used to dwell among His people, the Word of God took flesh and offered us His body and blood that we may eat them and so that we may abide in Him and unite with Him as branches in the One Vine. We become members of His Body, a temple of God, as the Apostle says, “Whereas the man who unites Himself to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him ... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6:17–19).

#### **586. What is the importance of the church building in the life of the Church?**

The Church is God’s house where Christ gathers together with the members of His body to perform His divine salvific work within their lives without distorting their human qualities. Thus, a heavenly community that is on earth is formed which conducts itself in a heavenly-earthly manner. It is heavenly because it is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and the members of the body of Christ. At the same time, this community is perfectly human and is not isolated from the world, as it was formed from every nation and every tongue as holy leaven, working constantly for the renewal of the world. The Church community offers the church building as a sacrifice of love that God accepts from its hands and makes from it a holy temple for Himself, in which the community enjoys its eucharistic formation through His divine mysteries, as the living body of Christ, who works within His believers.

#### **587. Is a church built based only on architectural principles?**

R. Schwarz<sup>1183</sup> thinks of the construction of a church building as a holy act that should not be founded purely on architectural bases but also on the holy orthodox faith. For this reason, those who are working on these projects should themselves be living members of the

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<sup>1181</sup> Cf. *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 1.2.4 (ANF 2:12).

<sup>1182</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.32.2, 5.34.1 (ANF 1:561, 563).

<sup>1183</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Church, the House of God*, rev., Nabieh Fanous, Riad Habib, Nermine Morcos, Mary Hanna, and Lilian Hanna (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1994).

Church, who walk in the Spirit. It is befitting for them to be living stones, built on the foundation of the living Christ, in the true apostolic spirit, so that their project may bear the same spirit. Just as the priest is sanctified in his priestly work and the theologian in his studies, those who build God's house must sanctify themselves and be prepared for this holy project under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Himself.

### **588. What do we mean by the liturgical life or the liturgical form of a church?**

The liturgical life and ongoing praise supports, encourages, and even uncovers our understanding of worship, its mysteries, and purpose. We can further illustrate this by the following examples:

Locating the baptistery at the very west of the church building near the entrance, and the altar at the very east, both signify that the entry to our ecclesiastical fellowship can only be achieved as a result of the Liturgy of Baptism. Its effects are maintained throughout our lives so that we are continuously qualified for partaking in the Eucharistic Liturgy, where we enjoy the mystery of unity with Christ, the sacrifice.

Situating the lectern between the altar and the congregation signifies how important God's Word is in the liturgical life of the faithful so that they are unable to approach the mysteries of the altar except through the Word of God.

Placing the cross on the top of the iconostasis and carving it on the doors and on every corner of the church and its pillars expresses our practical fellowship with the crucified. For us, the cross is the reason for our worship, the subject of our hymns, and the source of our unceasing fellowship with God. Joseph Rykwert, says this about the relationship between the building and liturgy in his book "Church Building": "liturgy is the living movement around which a church building is a shell or a shelter, and so it is inevitably shaped and moulded by the movement of the liturgy."<sup>1184</sup> In the liturgy, we remember Christ's salvific work and this remembrance is emphasized by the physical features of the church building, so that the physical features act in harmony with worship, so that the altar itself is often shaped like a sarcophagus, to commemorate the Lord's sufferings, death, and burial.

### **589. How does the church structure relate to the heavenly life?**

The church building reveals the character of the heavenly assembly. **Origen** comments on the words of David, "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the House of God" (Ps. 42:4) by saying, "What then is that 'place of the wonderful tabernacle' from which one enters 'the house of God,' because of whose memory his soul has been poured out in him and, as it were, has been dissipated in a kind of intolerable desire. Are we really to believe that the prophet, desiring that tabernacle

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<sup>1184</sup> J. Rykwert, *Church Building, Faith and Fact Books* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966): p. 9.

which consisted of hides and curtains and goat-hair coverings and other common materials was poured out in soul and failed in his whole mind? It is evident that the prophet felt in a far different sense about this tabernacle ... Leave earth behind and follow the understanding of the prophets and apostles and — what is greater than all — the word of Christ, with your whole mind and understanding and ascend to heaven and there seek the magnificence of the eternal tabernacle whose form is imperfectly represented on earth by Moses.”<sup>1185</sup>

The church historian **Eusebius** says that the visible church is built according to the image of the invisible One — it is heaven on earth. Also **Origen** says, “Church is the form of that kingdom which is to come.”<sup>1186</sup> **St. John Chrysostom** says, “We have to depart from this holy place possessing what is befitting of a holy place, as if descending from heaven itself ... Show the people outside that you were in the company of the Seraphim, counted with the heavenly creatures and the angelic chorus, speaking to God and in the presence of Christ.”<sup>1187</sup>

### **590. How does the structure of the church building reflect the inner life of the believer?**

All that we see with our eyes in the church building must be accomplished by faith in our inner person. **Origen** comments on the Tabernacle of Meeting saying, “When I think for myself as I am about to study such matters, my courage fails me because of the greatness of these mysteries.”<sup>1188</sup>

Origen also says, “Nevertheless, the reason for constructing the tabernacle is found already mentioned in the words above when the Lord says to Moses, ‘You shall make for me a sanctuary and thence I will be seen by you.’ God wishes, therefore, that we make a sanctuary for him. For he promises that if we make a sanctuary for him, he can be seen by us ... This, therefore, is the sanctuary which the Lord orders to be constructed, which the Apostle also wishes to be present in virgins ‘that they may be holy in body and spirit,’ knowing without doubt that he who makes a sanctuary for the Lord by the purity of his own heart and body will himself see God ... The Tabernacle is to be made from ten courts and these ten courts, however, were constructed that they might contain the whole number of perfection and designate the Decalogue of the Law. But now the appearance of scarlet and blue and linen and purple set forth many diverse works ... But lest we linger too long on the forms of individual virtues, we can briefly say that they indicate those things by which the Church is adorned. Its faith can be compared to gold; the word of preaching to silver; bronze to patience; incorruptible wood to the knowledge which comes through the wood, or to the incorruptibility of purity which never grows old; virginity to linen; the glory of suffering to scarlet; the splendor of love to purple; the hope of the kingdom of heaven to the blue. Let those, however, be the materials from which the whole tabernacle is constructed ... In order to assemble the tabernacle, the frame (Ex. 26:8–25) of virtues has to be sought! Frames of

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<sup>1185</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.1 (FOTC 71:336ff).

<sup>1186</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*.

<sup>1187</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *St. John Chrysostom: Your Ministry in Life* (Arabic) (October 1967): p. 21.

<sup>1188</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.1 (FOTC 71:335).

silver meaning frames of patience and wisdom, supported and adorned by pillars of silver. It is also possible to extend the courts in yourself when your heart enlarges ... One can also defend himself with bars when he has bound himself with the unanimity of love. One can stand on silver bases when he stations himself upon the stability of the word of God, the prophetic and apostolic word. It is possible to have a gilded capital on the pillar if the golden capital on it is the faith of Christ.”<sup>1189</sup>

### **591. Why were the catacombs used for worship, especially in the West?**

The term “catacomb” is probably derived from the Greek words, *kata kumbas*, which mean “near the hollows.” Roman Law used to allow burials to be conducted only outside the gates of cities, and so these catacombs were built under suburban roads. They were regarded as sacrosanct, meaning that these roads must not be attacked. That is why some Christians used them in some countries, especially Rome, as places of worship during the times of persecution.

### **592. What is the role of church architecture in Egypt?**

Dr. Aziz Surial Atiya states, “Though many ancient Coptic monuments suffered greatly from hostile incursions and many more fell into disuse and were ruined, a representative number of monastic and church structures have survived in their early original forms. Consequently, the archaeologist has been able to construct a fair picture of the essentials of Coptic architecture ... Some of these are known, but unexcavated, while innumerable others are still undiscovered and untouched.”<sup>1190</sup>

It is noteworthy that church buildings in Egypt were exposed to a number of successive waves of demolition, destruction, and burning; sometimes by pagans and at other times by rulers such as the Romans, Mamelukes, Turks ... etc. to the extent that currently not a single church in the whole of Alexandria could be traced back to the first three centuries. Even the ancient churches of Old Cairo and the monuments in Upper and Lower Egypt can be traced back to sometime after the third century.

However, despite the above facts, architects confirm that Egypt must have possessed a good collection of large and valuable churches that distinctly influenced architecture in the early church and its arts. Rykwert says, “The contribution of Alexandria to the general development of church architecture is very difficult to estimate; Alexandrian churches unlike those of Constantinople were not simply altered by the modern invaders to suit their use, but were mostly destroyed or rendered unrecognizable.”<sup>1191</sup>

<sup>1189</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.1 (FOTC 71:338–341).

<sup>1190</sup> Aziz Surial Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967): p. 136.

<sup>1191</sup> J. Rykwert, *Church Building, Faith and Fact Books* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966): p. 63.

### 593. What was the very first church in Egypt?

The house of Annianus, the first man who accepted the faith at the hands of St. Mark in Alexandria, became the first church in Egypt. Afterwards they were able to build a considerable church in the suburban district of Baucalis.<sup>1192</sup> On the eve of the Resurrection Feast of 68 A. D., the pagans were greatly agitated to find that their great Temple of Serapis was deserted while the church at Baucalis was actively crowded, so they rushed into the church and seized St. Mark to kill him.

### 594. What was the style of churches built in Egypt afterwards?

Dr. Aziz Surial Atiya says that the Copts took pride in their Pharaonic culture. Thus, in spite of the fact that invaders — whether Greeks, Romans, Persians or Byzantines — left their marks on the Egyptian culture, it would be a grave error to assume that Egyptian art was established by any of these at any time. Modern architects have recently started to question the well-established idea that our architecture was only another branch or another form of the Basilica of Byzantine architecture, or that it is a mixture of the two. To that effect, Hamilton affirms as an example that “Egyptian churches could be categorized as a distinct identity, as ‘Coptic architecture.’ Their character was dictated by its liturgical and ecclesiastical traditions, and its structure bears the mark of its nationalism.”

### 595. Why did the early church choose to look towards the East in worship?

According to the **Apostolic Constitutions**, “The church must be rectangular in form and pointing to the East.”<sup>1193</sup> This tradition was mentioned in the writings of many early Fathers including **St. Clement of Alexandria**,<sup>1194</sup> **Origen**,<sup>1195</sup> and **Tertullian**,<sup>1196</sup> etc. It was almost invariably observed in all churches. Furthermore, the Liturgy of Baptism was also observed this tradition in the early Church. First, the catechumen faced the west and renounced the devil and all his works; then he would be asked to face the East to profess his faith in the Holy Trinity.<sup>1197</sup> We also read of **St. Arsenius** that he was accustomed to commence his prayer at sunset on Saturday and finish it when the sun shone opposite him on the following morning. Also, in **The Acts of the Martyrs**, we read that the martyrs used to exert every effort to face the east at the time of their martyrdom or departure from this world.

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<sup>1192</sup> Aziz Surial Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967): p. 27.

<sup>1193</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 2, 57 (ANF 7:421).

<sup>1194</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:535).

<sup>1195</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 5.1.4: p. 17.

<sup>1196</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 16 (ANF 3:31); *Ad Nationes (To the Nations)* 1.13 (ANF 3:123).

<sup>1197</sup> Cf. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* (NPNF II/7).

**596. What is the meaning of looking towards the east in our worship and our churches' structure?**

**First: Christ is our east** (Zech. 6:12), and the “Sun of Righteousness” who dawns continually to dispel the darkness (Mal. 4:2). **Origen** says, “we ought to pray towards the East in order to indicate that the soul is oriented towards the dawn of the Light who is the Sun of Righteousness and salvation, the Sun who shines upon the new world, which is the Church.”<sup>1198</sup>

**Second: Commemorating our Paradise lost. St. Basil the Great** says, “It is according to an unwritten tradition that we turn to the East to pray, but little do we know that we are thus seeking the ancient homeland, the Paradise that God planted in Eden, towards the East.”<sup>1199</sup>

**Third: Waiting for the *parousia* (coming) of Christ.** The Lord declared that His second coming will be like the lightning, coming from the east and flashing to the west (Matt. 24:27). Also at the Lord’s Ascension, the angel informed the disciples that the Son of Man will come again from the east, the same as in His ascension (Acts 1:11). The **Didascalia Apostolorum** states, “People should pray towards the East, because, as the lightning that flashes from the East, and is seen unto the West, thus shall be the coming of the Son of Man. By this let us know and understand when we pray, that He shall be seen from the East, and towards it we expect Him and we worship Him.”<sup>1200</sup>

**Fourth: As a symbol of rebirth, hope, and light. St. Clement of Alexandria** comments that every time we stand up for prayer and turn towards the east, we remember the beginning of our new life that we have received in baptism.

**Fifth: Looking towards the cross. St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “Christ was facing the west while hanging on the Cross and thus we are obligated to look towards the east, meaning towards the Crucified.”<sup>1201</sup>

**597. What is the outer shape of a church building?**

The overall plan of a church building may take any one of a number of possible shapes:

<sup>1198</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily XXVII on Numbers, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 32.1: p. 168; Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume II* (Christian Classics, 1983): p. 68; and Jean Daniélou and Walter Mitchell, *Origen* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955): p. 29.

<sup>1199</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27 (NPNF II/8:42).

<sup>1200</sup> *The Didascalia Apostolorum in English*, trans., Margaret Dunlop Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903): p. 18.

<sup>1201</sup> *Lighthouse of Melchite Holies* (Arabic): p. 19.

**First: Cruciform.** This design reveals the Church’s mystical nature as being the body of the Crucified Christ, her beloved Savior. Butler reports: “The Coptic builders seem to have have no liking for or no knowledge of the cruciform groundplan.”<sup>1202</sup>

**Second: Circular.** This design refers to the eternal nature of the Church like an endless line<sup>1203</sup> (without beginning or end), as she bears the nature of her eternal Bridegroom. Once again, this form is very scarce in Coptic architecture.

**Third: An Ark.** Drawings of various shapes have been found inscribed on Egyptian, Greek, and Roman tombs that reflect their beliefs about immortality<sup>1204</sup>; they regarded death as a journey in a ship to the other world. **St. Augustine** says, “Undoubtedly, the ark is a symbol of the city of God on its pilgrimage through history, a type of the church which was saved by the tree on which there hung ‘the Mediator between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim. 2:5).”

**St. Hippolytus** says, “The sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed; for she has with her the skilled Pilot, Christ ... her tillers are the two Testaments, and the ropes that stretch around her are the love of Christ, which binds the Church; and the net which she bears with her is the layer of the regeneration which renews the believing, whence too are these glories. As the wind the Spirit from heaven is present, by whom those who believe are sealed: she has also anchors of iron accompanying her, the holy commandments of Christ Himself, which are strong as iron. She has also mariners on the right and on the left, assessors like the holy angels, by whom the Church is always governed and defended. The ladder in her leading up to the sailyard is an emblem of the passion of Christ, which brings the faithful to the ascent of heaven. And the top-sails aloft upon the yard are the company of prophets, martyrs, and apostles, who have entered into their rest in the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>1205</sup>

In addition, **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The Word of God manages your ship rudder (your heart) and the Holy Spirit returns you to the port of heaven safely.”<sup>1206</sup>

## **598. What is our understanding of the sanctuary of the church?**

The sanctuary is related to the altar in Orthodox Churches to such a degree that the sanctuary can sometimes be referred to as “the altar.” Such a correlation reveals a vital aspect of our faith, namely, the close connection between heaven and the Cross; for the sanctuary represents heaven by which we know the sacrifice of the Cross.

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<sup>1202</sup> Alfred J. Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt, Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884): p. 6.

<sup>1203</sup> Catherine Zvegintzov, *Our Mother Church: Her Worship and Offices* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968): p. 9.

<sup>1204</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths & Christian Mystery* (London: Biblo & Tannen Booksellers & Publishers Incorporated, 1963): pp. 85ff.

<sup>1205</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 59 (ANF 5:218).

<sup>1206</sup> Cf. St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathens* 12 (ANF 2:295ff).



**599. What is the “cathedra”? And what is the “apse”?**

Behind the altar lies the “cathedra,” where the bishop was seated on his throne surrounded by the priests who performed their worship and preaching; hence the use of the term *presbyterum*<sup>1207</sup> for this part of the church. Above the cathedra lies the “apse” which resembles God’s bosom that is wide open to the whole world through the altar and the priestly ministry.

**600. What rites are performed in the sanctuary?**

Laymen were sometimes forbidden by the church from entering the sanctuary at all. This was perhaps necessary to stamp out the pagan custom of taking an oath while touching the altar, which was referred to by **St. John Chrysostom**.<sup>1208</sup> At other times, the Church was content to forbid only pagans from entering the sanctuary and touching the altar, as mentioned by **St. Gregory of Nyssa**.<sup>1209</sup>

We step into the sanctuary bare-footed, in response to the divine commandment to Moses “Take off your shoes ... for the place whereon you stand is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5). Taking off the shoes indicates the feeling of unworthiness to be present in such a holy place in which the fearful sacrifice is offered, the sacrifice which the angels long to see. Moreover, according to **Origen**, in the past shoes were made of the leather of dead animals. Subsequently, in observing this commandment of God, we put aside our dead earthly attachments in order to cling to the eternal heavens. The skin of dead animals was also used to make timbrels which signify pride.

The Church ordered that no talking should be allowed in the sanctuary, except for extremely urgent matters.

**601. What is the connection between the altar that is in the sanctuary and the inner altar of our souls?**

When the faithful receive the Eucharist (or the mystery of the altar), they are obliged to offer the sacrifice of repentance, love, prayer, fasting, alms, and so on, through the worthiness of the blood of Christ. Thus, they share in the mystery of the visible altar through their own mystical and hidden altars. This is also apparent from **Origen’s** response to Celsus when he said, “He does not perceive that we regard the spirit of every good man as an altar from which arises an incense which is truly and spiritually sweet-smelling, namely, the prayers ascending from a pure conscience. Therefore it is said by John in the Revelation, ‘The odors are the

<sup>1207</sup> John Gordon Davies, *The Origin & Development of Early Christian Church Architecture* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953): p. 36; F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1990): p. 123.

<sup>1208</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* 9.6 (NPNF I/11:60–63; PG 60:48).

<sup>1209</sup> PG 46:581.

prayers of saints;’ (Rev. 5:8) and by the Psalmist, ‘Let my prayer come up before Thee as incense.’ (Ps. 141:2)”<sup>1210</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The altar, then, that is with us here, the terrestrial one, is the congregation of those who devote themselves to prayers, having as it were one common voice and one mind.”<sup>1211</sup>

### **602. If animal sacrifices were invalidated by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, why do we still need an altar?**

Prophecies of the Old Testament clearly point out to the future establishment of the altar of the New Testament: “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering ...” (Mal. 1:11); and “In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt ... then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering” (Isa. 19:19–21).

The Lord says, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar” (Matt. 5:24).

The Apostle Paul warned, “you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:21).

### **603. What are the features of the Coptic altar?**

The Coptic altar takes the shape of approximately a cube, which resembles Christ’s tomb.

It is located right in the middle of the sanctuary, to resemble the heavenly altar: “I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar” (Rev. 9:13).

It is often made of stone, marble, or brick, but exceptions do exist.

It must be hollow so that saints’ relics can be kept inside or beneath it.

On the eastern side of the altar, there exists a small opening showing an interior recess or cavity, which was used during persecution to hide the Holy Gifts when necessary.

The altar is never raised above the sanctuary but is fitted directly on its ground, as directed by the divine commandment (Ex. 20:26).

It does not have any form of engraving, not even crosses (Ex. 20:25).

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<sup>1210</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.17 (ANF 4:646).

<sup>1211</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.6 (ANF 2:531).

Multiple altars in the same church were introduced to fulfill the needs of the ever-growing Christian congregation, since it is forbidden to pray more than one liturgy on the same altar in the course of a single day.

**604. How is an altar consecrated?**

By simply praying a liturgy on it, or placing saints' relics beneath it, or consecrating it with the Holy Myron oil (Chrism).

**605. Why do we use covers for the altar?**

According to the Coptic rite, an altar must not be left without coverings, which often consist of three layers of clean linen cloths like those used in the burial of Christ, symbolizing holiness. It is said that during the periods of persecution, priests would tear apart the altar coverings before leaving the church so that non-Christians would not use them for any other purpose.

The first covering reaches the ground from all sides and is decorated with four crosses, one at each corner, or just a big cross in the center.

The second covering is put above the first, and is made of white linen, hanging about 15 cm from every side.

The third covering is called the *prospherine*, derived from the Greek word *prosphora* (προσφορά), meaning "offering." It represents the stone that the angel rolled away from the tomb of Christ.

The early Church regarded the altar to possess a special degree of holiness. Therefore, nothing is placed on the altar apart from the Holy Gifts, the sacred vessels, and the Gospel. Even the relics of saints and martyrs must never be placed on it. Gregory Dix says, "The placing of anything whatever upon the altar except the bread and cup for the eucharist was entirely contrary to normal Christian feeling ... For centuries, precious crosses had sometimes been hung above the altar as had crowns, lamps and other ornaments...but the altar itself remained bare of such ornaments for almost the first thousand years of Christian history in the West, and perhaps to an even later date in the East."<sup>1212</sup> A cross is never used to decorate the altar because the altar itself is the Lord's Golgotha or His cross. Around the Coptic altar also, there are two candlesticks that are placed representing the two angels who were in the Lord's tomb.

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<sup>1212</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): p. 412.

**606. What is the “altar board”?**

On top of a Coptic altar, there is a rectangular slot carved out, usually about 2.5 cm deep. In this slot, a consecrated altar board is placed, made of timber, or more rarely of marble. On the slate, one or more crosses are engraved, along with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet: *alpha* and *omega* —  $\alpha$  and  $\omega$ . Sometimes a verse from the book of Psalms is engraved such as: “His foundations are in the holy mountains. The Lord loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God!” (Ps. 87:1–3).

It is highly likely that altar boards date back to the times of persecution when the faithful needed to easily carry it around. However, others believe that they were created to replace portable altars.

**607. What is the “throne”?**

On the main altar of a Coptic church, and sometimes the side altars, there is a throne made of wood or stone that is supported with four pillars. It is also called a “ciborium,” which is derived from the Greek word, *kyporion* (κυποριον): the hollow seed casing of the Egyptian water lily. More widely, this term is now commonly employed in liturgical terminology to refer to the canopy covering the bishop’s throne, or the dome shaped vessel used to carry Holy Communion to the sick as it has a lid shaped like a vault,<sup>1213</sup> or the canopy above the baptismal font as in the church of Dura, Syria.

The Coptic throne is generally rich in paintings, such as the icon of Christ surrounded by the Cherubim and the Seraphim. Icons of the four Evangelists are painted on the four pillars as though the entire world was sanctified by the word of the gospel. On top of the throne, there is a cross, or sometimes four crosses, one on each side.

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<sup>1213</sup> W. H. Freestone, *The Sacrament Reserved* (A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1917): pp. 207–208.

# 11

## The Iconostasis

The iconostasis is considered one of the main architectural features of Orthodox churches.<sup>1214</sup> It is a solid screen, made of wood or marble, bearing icons of the Lord, His angels, and His saints. It separates the sanctuary from the nave of the church. We should note that in some of the ancient Coptic churches — in particular the church in the monastery of St. Macarius the Great, which dates back to the seventh century — the sanctuary doorways take the form of big round-headed arches almost reaching the ceiling, as if the Copts wanted to stress that nothing can separate the people from the Holies or prevent them from partaking in the liturgy.

### 608. What are the different names of the iconostasis?

- a. *κιγκλίς (kygklis)*: a grating or mesh wall. **Eusebius** mentions the presence of wooden grating screens in the great church of Tyre that was “wrought with so delicate an art as to be a wonder to behold.”
- b. *διαστυλα (diastyla)*: a barrier made of a row of columns that hold some wooden or marble boards in between, on which icons are painted or verses from Scripture are engraved.
- c. *δρύφοκτα (dryfokta)*: fence.
- d. *τέκπαλον (tekpalon)*: temple. It is called a temple either because it looks like the front of the old temples or because it aims to express the Christian concept of the holy place where God is worshipped.

### 609. What is the role of the iconostasis?

- a. The iconostasis is one of the ways of showing reverence to the “Mystery of the Altar” or the “Mystery of Christ the Sacrifice,” without being separated from the concept of God’s love. The Holy Scriptures always combine fear and reverence with love, as God says: “If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?” (Mal. 1:6). This reverence for the sacrifice in the Orthodox understanding does not suggest a passive role of the lay people in the liturgical service. Rather, the divine liturgy is the work of the whole Church together, clergy and laity.
- b. The iconostasis with all its icons provides a heavenly atmosphere for worship. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “as if man is transferred to heaven itself, to stand before the

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<sup>1214</sup> Léonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982): p. 59.

King’s throne and to fly with the Seraphim.”<sup>1215</sup> Through the cross, the heavenly world and the earthly world were reconciled.

- c. The iconostasis confesses that our fathers and brethren who departed in the Lord are not far from us. The iconostasis acts as a symbol for reserving the first portion of the nave of the church for the saints who are, in fact, one with their brethren still on earth.

#### **610. What are the gates of the iconostasis?**

- a. The iconostasis has three doors: the Royal Gate or the Holy Gate, which is the entrance to the main sanctuary; and two other doors on either side for the side sanctuaries. It was called “Royal” because it is usually at this door where the offerings are offered and the priest chooses the Holy Bread which becomes sanctified and transformed into the Body of Christ, the King of kings, the Holy One.
- b. As the iconostasis declares the reconciliation between God and humanity, and the unity between heaven and earth, the three gates refer to the function of the Holy Trinity in realizing such reconciliation and achieving such unity.
- c. In some cases, the iconostasis of the main sanctuary protrudes towards the nave in relation to the iconostases of the side sanctuaries, as the case in the churches of Abu-Serga and Haret Zewela in Old Cairo. This arrangement allows access to the main sanctuary via two side doors. These are used in the rite of processions during the feasts, and through them the deacons enter the sanctuary.
- d. Upon entering the sanctuary, the priest must face the altar with his head bent forwards, as he steps inside through the right-hand side of the gate using his right foot, as if stepping into the Kingdom of heaven. A similar protocol is observed upon stepping out of the sanctuary. This time he leaves by the left side of the gate, in reverence, keeping his eyes fixed on the altar, as if affirming that his inner eyes are focused on God’s Altar or on the throne of God.
- e. In ancient churches, the archdeacon kept the keys of these gates with him.
- f. These gates are usually decorated with icons and carvings. Also verses from the Holy Scriptures may be written on them such as: “Be lifted up, you everlasting doors and the King of Glory shall come in” (Ps. 23:9), or “This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter” (Ps. 118:20). Occasionally the following words are inscribed on the top of the gate: “Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father.”

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<sup>1215</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist. 2nd ed.* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1973): pp. 440–441.

**611. What are the windows of the iconostasis?**

Sometimes there were two small windows to either side of each door of the iconostasis, cut about one and a half meters above the floor. These were used during time of persecution, through which two deacons would watch the doors of the church from inside the sanctuary. In the case of an attack, they would alert the priest, who then hid the holy sacrifice, put out the candles and tore away the altar coverings so that they would not be used for non-sacred matters.

**612. How are the icons arranged on the iconostasis?**

- a. On the right side of the Royal Gate there is the icon of our Lord Jesus holding a bible on which is written the verse, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11). This icon proclaims that Jesus Christ is the unique gate that leads to the Kingdom of God and that He is the Good Shepherd who opened the gates of heaven through His life-giving sacrifice. Next to this icon is the icon of St. John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Lord. Next comes the icon of the patron saint, in whose honor the church was built. It is usually followed by a number of select icons of martyrs, saints, archangels, or depictions of some events from the scriptures.
- b. On the opposite side is the icon of St. Mary the Theotokos, representing the Church, being the Queen who sits at the right hand of Christ the King. This is followed by the icon of the Annunciation, then Archangel Michael, St. Mark, and sometimes the apostles.
- c. Above the Royal Gate there is an icon of the Last Supper, and to its right and left there are usually icons of each of the twelve apostles, reminding us that our Church is apostolic, its faith is apostolic, that it follows apostolic thought, and is led by apostolic shepherds.
- d. On the top of the iconostasis, a holy cross stands with St. Mary and St. John the Beloved standing on each side.

**613. What hangs from the iconostasis?**

- a. **Vigil lamps:** They remind us of the light of Christ who shines through His saints. There is no lamp in front of the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the Light who illuminates the entire Church.
- b. **Ostrich eggs:** They are suspended between the icons in front of the iconostasis. It is said that when St. Mary Magdalene was asked by Pontius Pilate how Jesus rose from the dead, she responded by asking him back, “how does a chick emerge from an egg?” For this reason colored eggs have been linked to the Resurrection (as they bear a

symbolic meaning of hope and resurrection). Also marble eggs have been found in ancient tombs.

#### **614. What is the message of iconography?**

Icons have an educational role. By their colors, they teach everyone about the Bible, explain the teachings of the Church and increase the believers' sense of eternal life. They portray to us the events of the Old and New Testaments, as well as our relationship with the heavenlies, and make our souls yearn for glory. Icons are visual sermons and books. They are presented in a simple, universal language that can be interpreted in all languages. The illiterate can grasp their messages as if reading a book or listening to a sermon. Even the educated can understand what the writings are unable to explain. They have been the language of the universal Church through the ages.

One evening, while I was at church, and there was only a dim beam of light coming from the “vigil lamps” in front of the icons, a young man came in. He walked to the door of the sanctuary and stood a little while in front of the icons and then came back with tears shedding from his eyes. He had decided to commit suicide. So, he went out from his house to buy some sleeping pills, planning to swallow them all, in one of the remote dark streets at night, so that no one would see him and rescue him. But while he was sitting on the tram, he spotted a glimmer of light coming out the windows of the church, and he decided in his heart to get off and go pray inside before he moves on with his plan. Within moments and in the very quiet atmosphere of the church, in front of the holy icons, he could not hold back his tears, saying to himself, “Am I going to be prohibited from the friendship and company of these saints in the Lord?” And according to his words to me he said to the Lord: “Even if my burdens multiply, I will never give up!”

#### **615. How do we understand the commandment: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:4–5)?**

- a. **Beware of pagan worship:** The spirit of this commandment is to set a boundary between idolatry and true worship — not to prohibit the use of pictures altogether. **St. Yousab El Abah** says, “God commanded his servant Moses to build an ark from wood and overlay it with gold and put inside the two tablets of the covenant, the golden pot which contains the manna and Aaron’s rod that blossomed. He was also commanded to place the Mercy Seat on the ark and two golden cherubim covering it, who look like two persons with stretched wings as they face one another and their faces look toward the Mercy Seat. Moses and all the people would go out and bow down before the ark. And God would speak to Moses from between the two cherubim (Ex. 25:22).”



- b. In addition, the image of a cherub was embroidered on the veil between the Holy Place and the inner Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle of Meeting. There were also two massive golden Cherubim standing in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple and covering the Ark of the Covenant with their wings. Furthermore, images of Cherubim were engraved all over the walls of the temple and on the doors (1 Kings 6:27–29, 32; 2 Chron. 3:7) as a sign of the presence of God in His Holy House. God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole in the wilderness, so that it would be a source of healing to everyone who looked at it (Num. 21:8–9). The bronze serpent is a symbol of the crucified Messiah, according to the Lord's words: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 1:14–15). And when the people misused the bronze serpent and worshipped it as an idol, burning incense to it, Hezekiah broke it (2 Kings 18:4).
- c. **Distinguishing between worship and honor: John of Damascus** says, "The banning of use of images in the Old Testament was based mainly on the inability of the Jewish people to distinguish between the worship (*lateria*) of God alone, and veneration (*proskynesis*), which can be offered to someone other than God. But Christians are able discern between worshipping Christ and honoring His holy icons."
- d. **Through the divine incarnation God manifested Himself to the world** in a visible way that can be portrayed so that the events of His life on earth can be drawn in icons or written in words.<sup>1216</sup>

#### 616. Is it permissible to bow down to anyone other than God?

- a. It was mentioned in scripture that when Joshua saw the angel of the Lord standing by Jericho, he bowed his head and fell flat on his face (Num. 22:31). So also did Lot (Gen. 19:1) and Daniel (Dan. 10:9).
- b. Scripture teaches us to bow before holy places and holy things, for example: "I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Ps. 5:7) and "worship at His footstool" (Ps. 99:5).
- c. Bowing before people who are in a position of superior dignity and authority by the divine order. For example, Jacob bowed himself down to the ground seven times in front of his elder brother Esau (Gen. 33:3), and Jacob's children bowed down before their brother Joseph with their faces to the earth (Gen. 42:6). Likewise, King Solomon bowed down to his mother Bathsheba (1 Kings 2:19) and many more who bowed down before kings without any disapproval in scripture.

<sup>1216</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans., Elizabeth S. Cram; Donald A. Lowrie (ed.) (New York: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1935): p. 162.

- d. Bowing as an expression of deep feelings, such as when Abraham bowed down before the sons of Heth who were pagans (Gen. 23:12).
- e. Bowing down before the Ark of Covenant, Aaron’s rod and the pot of manna; things fashioned by the hands of men.
- f. The ground became holy because of the burning bush with its flames of fire, and Moses took off his shoes as a sign of its holiness.

### **617. What is the importance of consecrating churches and icons?**

According to the Coptic rite, the veneration of icons — in the form of kissing them or offering incense in front of them — may only be given to consecrated church icons that were anointed with the same Holy Chrism (Myron oil) used to anoint believers after their baptism, and only then do they receive the Holy Spirit and become sacred temples for Him. They become God’s possession, sacred, and with the Holy Spirit they bear the power of attracting hearts to heaven, so that church icons have an effective spiritual power in the life of the Church. This is revealed in the wording of the consecration rite. After reciting the prayer of thanksgiving and the offering of incense, the priest prays:

“O Master Lord God ... who from the beginning through His servant Moses, gave us the law to place in the Tabernacle of the Testimony the prototype of the cherubim who cover the altar with their wings. You also granted Solomon wisdom to build your house in Jerusalem, and manifested Yourself to your chosen apostles through the incarnation of Your only-begotten Son our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, to build churches and monasteries named after your saints and martyrs. Therefore, we ask you and entreat You, O Lover of Mankind to send Your Holy Spirit on these icons of the saints and martyrs (name of saints), that they may become an anchored harbor of salvation and steadfastness ...”<sup>1217</sup>

**St. Yousab El Abah** talked about the veneration of consecrated icons and its impact on the life of the Church saying, “You probably say: How can we worship colors? And how can we convince ourselves with such concepts? ... It is necessary to consecrate the sacred vessels, altars, and icons, and it has to be conducted not by a priest but by a High Priest, who anoints them with the Myron, and the Myron represents the Holy Spirit. Although the Church canons permit the deacon to touch the chalice and give communion to the believers, they forbid him from touching or even drawing near the Myron, for he does not have the authority of giving the Holy Spirit to others ...

“Behold the rites of the Church, that were ordered with great wisdom and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit for it is not allowed to bow down before or even kiss the altar, the vessels, or the icons before they are anointed by the High Priest with the Myron ...

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<sup>1217</sup> *Prayer for the Consecration of the Pictures and Icons*, Consecration Prayers, text from the Coptic Reader app.

Church canons order the icon to be placed on the altar during the liturgy and to be prayed on ... then to be anointed with the Myron oil and after communion (the bishop) to breathe over every icon three times saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

Perhaps you protest and say: How can the Holy Spirit dwell in an image? I can assure you that if you do not believe that the Holy Spirit is received by Myron and the Bishop’s breath then all our faith is in vain. In this case then the Spirit cannot dwell in the altar, the offering, or the church, and our worship before the sanctuary becomes futile, God forbid! Hear what the Holy Gospel says: ‘Therefore, he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all the things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it’ (Matt. 23:20–21). Tell me, who dwells in it but the Spirit of God? Perhaps you would further inquire: To whom do I direct my worship? Is it to the Spirit of God residing in the icon or to the saint or martyr whom the image represents? I say, worship is due to God’s Spirit alone, but we owe the relevant saints every reverence and honor, asking for their prayers and intercessions before God.”<sup>1218</sup>

### 618. Why do we revere sacred icons?

In his confession before Emperor Julian, **St. Basil the Great** expressed the following: “I honor all the figures of the saints’ icons ... that are painted in our churches. The prohibition that came in the Old Testament was not absolute. The second commandment states, ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth’ (Ex. 20:4). But God Himself commanded Moses to make images of the cherubim (Ex. 25:18–24), and another time He asked him to make the fiery serpent (Num. 21:8–9). When King Solomon made the ‘Sea,’ it was set on twelve oxen (1 Kings 7:25) and on the panels that were between the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim (1 Kings 7:29). These images of the cherubim were not for worship. They were there to remind the Israelites that this is a holy place and they should be holy themselves before entering there. This prohibition was not renewed by the law-giver—Our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God—in the New Testament but rather He renewed the Law and fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17). And He Himself gave a new law for the New Testament, speaking with authority and saying, ‘You have heard that it was said to those of old ... But I say to you ...’ (Matt. 5:21–22).”

Since the early centuries of Christianity, Christians in the catacombs were used to painting events and people with symbols like an anchor, lamb, dove, and fish. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** tells us how fast the use of holy icons spread in the fourth century. He focused on the educational benefits that one receives when looking at an icon as they teach him.<sup>1219</sup> **St.**

<sup>1218</sup> Léonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982): p. 27.

<sup>1219</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Praise of Blessed Theodore, The Great Martyr*, Online at Lectio Divina (PG. 46:737).

**John Chrysostom** talks about the sign of the cross and tells us “Everyone continuously does the sign of the cross on their bodies or their foreheads ... Everywhere, you see someone doing the sign of the cross, in houses, markets, deserts, roads, on mountains, in seas, ships, islands, in rooms, on clothes, on arms, on silver vessels, and on the walls. It shines and spreads in every place.”<sup>1220</sup>

### **619. When did the use of icons of the Lord Jesus Christ begin?**

Church tradition traces the earliest icons back to the lifetime of Christ Himself and the period immediately after Him. As is well known, the art of portraiture of famous characters was flourishing at that time in the Roman Empire.<sup>1221</sup> To mention an example, here is what **Eusebius** says in the history of the Church: “we have observed that likenesses of His Apostles, Peter and Paul, and, indeed, of Christ Himself are preserved in pictures made with colors ...”<sup>1222</sup> This phrase was preceded by a detailed description of a statue of the Savior he had seen in the city of Paneas (Caesarea Philippi) in Palestine, erected by the woman who had a flow of blood and was healed by the Savior (Matt. 9:20–23).

History is full of stories related to icons of the Savior which date back to His lifetime. We list some of them:

- a. The famous Legend of Abgar, about King Abgar V Ukkāmā of Osroene, whose capital was Edessa.<sup>1223</sup> It was said that Abgar dispatched an embassy to Sabinus, the Roman governor of Eleutheropolis in Palestine. On their way passing through Jerusalem, the messengers learned about a new prophet who healed the sick. At once they had the idea that it might be possible for that prophet to heal their leprosy-stricken king, to whom they conveyed the good tidings. As it was not feasible for the king to visit Jerusalem, he sent a special envoy to Christ with a letter, in which he declared his faith in Him, asking Him to visit his beautiful little country and heal him if He would. One of the messengers was a painter, called Ananias. He tried to paint a portrait of Christ but failed due to the splendor of His countenance. In sympathy with him, the Lord, there upon, washed His face and miraculously stamped His features upon the linen cloth with which He wiped His face. According to **Evagrius**, this miraculous picture saved the city of Edessa when it was besieged by Khosrow in the year 540 A. D. It is said that later the Arabs took it when they conquered Edessa and asked for a large sum of money from the Emperor in exchange for it. A Christian Arab writer named Abu-Nasr Yehya claims that he saw the portrait with his own eyes

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<sup>1220</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Contra Iudaeos et gentiles quod Christus sit deus* (Against the Jews and the Pagans, That Christ is God 9 (PG. 48:826).

<sup>1221</sup> See Eleazar Lipa Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (British Academy, 1934): p. 27.

<sup>1222</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 2: Books 6–10 7.18 (FOTC 29:119; PG 20:680).

<sup>1223</sup> Aziz Surial Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967): pp. 243–244; Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 1: Books 1–5 1.13 (FOTC 19:76–82); John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4.16 (NPNF II/9:88b); and Evagrius, *Illust.* 4.37.

in St. Sophia (Hagia Sophia) in 1058 A. D., where Christ was portrayed as a handsome young man.

- b. The story of **St. Veronica** who used her handkerchief (head cover) to wipe Christ's face on His way to Golgotha. The Lord rewarded her for her act of love by capturing His face miraculously on the cloth.
- c. St. Luke the Evangelist was a physician and a painter. He portrayed some icons of St. Mary and the Child Jesus.

**620. Why was the early Church cautious about the depiction of Christ?**

The early Church had reservations about portraying Christ. Instead, it used to depict Christ through symbols and events in both the Old and New Testaments, until later when His icons gradually started to spread. The reasons behind these reservations were the following:

- a. The majority of the early Fathers were uncomfortable with some types of art due to fear of returning to paganism.
- b. Some Fathers were hesitant in proclaiming the beauty of Christ in an icon, lest the Lord's divinity should wrongly be associated with physical beauty in the minds of the simple.
- c. The Church Fathers often focus on the beauty of Christ's salvific work as St. Augustine says: "God is beautiful, the Word with God (the Father). Beautiful in the Virgin's womb, where He lost not His Divinity and assumed humanity ... beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth, beautiful in His miracles, beautiful in His scourging, beautiful calling men to life, beautiful in not caring for death, beautiful in laying down His life, beautiful in taking it again, beautiful on the cross, beautiful in the tomb and beautiful in heaven."<sup>1224</sup>
- d. Some Fathers felt some sort of uneasiness in painting the Lord, believing that the humility He manifested in His incarnation is sufficient.
- e. Some Fathers were fearful that painting Christ on an icon would turn the worshippers from thinking of His divinity.
- f. The sense of the permanent presence of Christ and His adherence to the soul in whom He lives, as if they were repeating the words of the Apostle Paul: "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16).

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<sup>1224</sup> John Patterson Lundy, *Monumental Christianity* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1876): p. 233.

- g. The thoughts of the early Christians were entirely absorbed in the eternal life, awaiting the last advent of the Lord.
- h. The Christians focused on the risen Christ, who rose from the dead and ascended to the heavens.<sup>1225</sup>
- i. As a result of the successive waves of persecution and demolition of church belongings which the early Church had suffered, the Church lost interest in painting icons on the walls.

### **621. What are the physical features of Christ?**

A number of the early Fathers, such as **Justin Martyr**, **Tertullian**, and **Clement**, saw that through the divine incarnation, Christ emptied Himself and gave up even earthly beauty to some extent as a sign of His humility. **St. Jerome** says, “Surely, the very splendor and majesty of His hidden divinity, which was even shining forth in his human face, was capable from the first glance of drawing those who looked toward it.”<sup>1226</sup>

The details of the Lord’s physical qualities were given in the famous description attributed to **Publius Lentulus** which he sent to his friend Pontius Pilate: “There has appeared in our times, and there still lives, a man of great power, called Jesus Christ. The people call him prophet of truth; his disciples, Son of God. He raises the dead, and heals infirmities. He is a man of medium size; he has a venerable aspect, and his beholders can both fear and love him ... His brow is smooth and very cheerful with a face without wrinkle or spot ... His aspect is simple and mature, his eyes are changeable and bright ... He is the most beautiful among the children of men.”

### **622. Why does the Church care about the icons of saints?**

When the period of the Roman persecution against the Church passed and Christianity became the official religion, icons of martyrs and saints became widespread to emphasize the important concept that Church life continues throughout all ages, and that saints are still living and working for the Church through their continuous prayers. **St. John of Damascus** says, “The saints in their lifetimes were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they depart, His grace abides with their spirits and their bodies in their tombs, and also with their likenesses and holy icons, not by nature, but by grace and divine power.”<sup>1227</sup> This is also what scripture declares, such as when the bones of Elisha raised a dead body; not by the virtue of their material as bones, but because of God’s work through his saints even after their departure (2

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<sup>1225</sup> John Patterson Lundy, *Monumental Christianity* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1876): p. 233.

<sup>1226</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 1.9 (on 9.9) (FOTC 117:107).

<sup>1227</sup> PG 94:1249CD.

Kings 13:21). We also hear about the shadow of St. Peter the Apostle that healed the sick and the handkerchiefs and cloths of St. Paul that exorcised evil spirits (Acts 5:15; 19:11–12).

### **623. Is there a need for the icons of saints?**

**St. John of Damascus** responds, “if you make an image of Christ and not of the saints, it is evident that you do not disown images, but the honour of the saints ... you reject the saints as unworthy of honor. However, ‘I live,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will glorify those who glorify Me.’ And the divine Apostle says, ‘therefore now he is not a servant, but a son; and if a son, an heir also through God.’ Again, ‘If we suffer with Him, that we also may be glorified’ ... The Scripture says ‘God stood in the synagogue of the gods,’ so that the saints, too, are gods ... We depict Christ as our King and Lord, and do not deprive Him of His army. The saints constitute the Lord’s army ... For if the saints are heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8.17), they will be also partakers of the divine glory of sovereignty. If the friends of God have had a part in the sufferings of Christ, how shall they not receive a share of His glory even on earth? ‘I call you not servants,’ our Lord says, ‘You are my friends.’ Should we then deprive them of the honor given to them by the Church? ... I worship the image of Christ as the Incarnate God; that of Our Lady (*της θεοτοκου*), the Mother of us all, as the Mother of God’s Son; that of the saints as the friends of God. They have withstood sin unto blood, and followed Christ in shedding their blood for Him, who shed His blood for them.”<sup>1228</sup>

### **624. Where are the icons of four evangelists and the icon of the apostles placed?**

The four Evangelists are the true witnesses and interpreters of Christ’s life and His salvific work. Therefore, their icons were introduced in early Christian places of worship. Usually, they are depicted on the four corners under the main dome of the nave of the church, or on the corners of the sanctuary dome, as they represent the royal pillars upon which the Lord’s kingdom was established. The icons of the apostles are on the top of the iconostasis.

### **625. What are the forms of the glorious halo in Coptic icons?**

The Church identifies its saints and angels with a halo of light around their heads in their icons, referring to their nature as being the “light of the world.” Icons of Christ are often further distinguished by a cross inside the halo together with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, *alpha* and *omega* (Rev. 1:8), included as a sign of the Lord’s Divinity. The following are some points which characterize Coptic halos:

<sup>1228</sup> St. John of Damascus, “Apologia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images,” in *St. John Damascene: On Holy Images*, trans., Mary H. Allie (London: Thomas Baker, 1898) Part I: pp. 21–24.

- a. Halos are never used around the head of any living person, contrary to Western Church customs.
- b. No other shapes than the circular halo are known in Coptic icons; i.e., no triangular, quatrefoil, or plates above the head are used.
- c. There are icons found in the Monastery of Bawit in Southern Egypt, dating back to the sixth century, that show a halo surrounding the entire body of Christ on the throne or during His ascension as a sign of His Divinity.
- d. In the Coptic Church, the halo does not only refer to power, but it is also a sign of divinity, holiness, and beauty. Consequently, you never see it displayed around the head of Satan, as in some Greek, Saxon, and French pictures.

### **626. Why are we interested in icons of those in heaven?**

The Church is the meeting place of the faithful with God, who is not isolated from His heavenly creatures. In an old Coptic homily, the church was described as “the place of consolation, the assembly of angels and the place of the Cherubim and Seraphim.” It was also said that **St. Pachomius** of Egypt saw the church full of angels.

**Origen** says, “If the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear God and brings them deliverance (Ps. 33:8), it would seem that when a number of people duly meet together for the glory of Christ, they will each have his own angel, encamped beside him, since they all fear the Lord. Each angel will be with the man he has been commissioned to guard and guide, as happened with Tobias the son of Tobit. Thus when the saints assemble, there will be two churches, one for men and one for angels.”<sup>1229</sup>

This understanding is reflected in the architecture and art of Coptic churches. The church building, representing the life of the church, is full of icons of the heavenlies. You will never find a picture of Hades. It is seldom that you find pictures of Satan, and if any were found, he appears in the form of a serpent or dragon, defeated and falling under the feet of an angel or saint.

In Holy Scripture, the Lord’s glory is associated with heavenly creatures. For instance, Isaiah the prophet saw the six-winged Seraphim (Isa. 6) and Ezekiel the prophet saw the Cherubim full of eyes (Ezek. 1:18), while St. John the Beloved saw choirs of angels praising Him. Moreover, when the Lord appeared to Abraham, two angels accompanied Him and were sent to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18).

The Old Testament tells us about God sending angels on missions to prophets and believers as part of God’s plan for our salvation. In the New Testament you rarely find an important salvific event or an event concerning our peace with God without angels taking

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<sup>1229</sup> Jean Daniélou and Walter Mitchell. *Origen* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955).



part in it. That is why angels are portrayed in icons of the events of our salvation, such as those of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–27), the Lord’s Nativity (Luke 2:8–15), the Temptation (Matt. 4:11, Mark 1:13), Christ’s agony in the garden (Luke 22:43), His Resurrection (Matt. 28:2), Ascension (Acts 1) and the second coming (Matt. 13:4).

There are cases where angels appear holding crowns on top of saints' heads. These indicate the accessibility to heaven for believers and the resemblance between the believers and the angels. There are also icons of heavenly creatures, in particular, those who were mentioned in scripture, such as Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

### **627. How has iconography evolved over the ages?**

The history of icons may be divided into three periods or stages. These give us an idea about the development of thought concerning Church iconography:

**The period of symbols.** Symbols were used on a large scale in the first two centuries, where Christ was represented as the Good Shepherd, a fish, or was hidden under the first of two Greek letters of His Name *Khristos* (Χριστός).

**The phase of biblical icons.** These were used by the early Church for the purpose of education.

**The phase of eschatological icons.** In the fourth century, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and peace spread throughout the Church. This led to the appearance of two contradictory attitudes: the palace of the Emperor opened its doors to some churchmen who then deviated from their original spiritual mission, while others were anxiously awaiting the last coming of the Lord (Parousia). Church worship and Church icons of this period bore a strong eschatological attitude, such as icons of martyrs and saints crowned with glory, icons of angels, and icons of prophetic visions.

### **628. To what extent were Copts involved in art, especially iconography?**

The Christian faith penetrated into the life of the Copts, even in their eating, drinking, literature, and arts. The Christian symbols and images that were inscribed on their rings, painted on their walls, doors, cups, glasses, plates, and chairs bear witness to this. For instance, in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, there is a Coptic ivory comb from the fifth century, on which appears Lazarus in the shape of an Egyptian mummy on one side, while Christ bearing a cross instead of a scepter, appears on the other side. Besides that, there is another depiction of the healing of the man born blind. On the other side of the comb, there is a Coptic saint enclosed within a wreath supported by two angels.

Egypt was ruled successively by the Greeks, Romans, the Byzantines ... etc., who had their own cultures and arts. These rulers had their own districts inside the great cities of Egypt, where they left monuments, which are now mixed with the indigenous ones. In

addition to this, the surviving Coptic monuments do not represent the true quality of Coptic art, since the most prized and valuable pieces were ruined or lost in the unceasing waves of persecution,<sup>1230</sup> as the historian Al-Makrizi describes. To this effect, K. Wessel says, “At the height of the medieval period, Arab writers described magnificent paintings, those of the shrine of St. Menas for example, were especially famed, but little survives.”<sup>1231</sup> We can therefore only get a rough idea of what once was found in abundance in the Churches and Monasteries.

### **629. What are the most important characteristics of Coptic iconography?**

**They represent the life of joy.** Our icons appear joyous. None of the Lord’s or martyrs’ sufferings are depicted in icons, except the victorious cross, where the Lord was hung as King of kings. There are no pictures of hell, only of heaven, heavenly creatures, and heavenly crowns. This shows the Church’s desire to grant hope to her children.

**They are full of the spirit of victory.** Because the Church is seeking to create a spirit of confidence in her children, it does not depict paintings of demons; and if any are necessary, they appear small in size, lying down in weakness.

**They express the spirit of love and kindness.** For example, in one of the icons, St. Mary’s cheeks are depicted to be touching the cheeks of her Son in gentle tenderness as they each place their hands on each other’s shoulders, as though Christ is reconciling with humanity through His mother the saint.

**They express the strength of the spirit.** Coptic iconographers focus on the inner strength of the spirit. The heads are enlarged as a symbol of God who is our heavenly Head, and the eyes are widened as a sign of spiritual sight.

**They represent people of prayer.** Saints usually appear raising their hands in prayer to God (*orant*) as if they are declaring that prayer is the mystery of their holiness. It is the preferred position for many martyrs and saints at the time of their departure to paradise.

**They bear the cross.** The majority of the icons of Alexandria depict Christ bearing a Coptic cross.

**They depict the Lord’s providence.** The Lord is depicted hanging on the cross with His eyes open. **Eulogius of Alexandria** says, “The Lord slept on the Cross for a brief time according to the flesh but according to His divinity, His eyes remained open.”

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<sup>1230</sup> Brooklyn Museum, *Pagan and Christian Egypt; Egyptian Art from the First to the 10th Century A. D.* (Brooklyn Museum, 1941): p. 10.

<sup>1231</sup> Klaus Wessel, *Coptic Art* (UK: Thames and Hudson, 1963): pp. 160–161.

**They depict spiritual sight.** Saints are depicted with two eyes as a sign of their inner spiritual sight, while the wicked are depicted from the side in profile, so that only one eye is visible, with which they only look towards earthly things.

**They depict military saints.** For example, the martyr-saints of the Coptic Church, such as St. George, St. Mena, St. Theodore, St. Victor, and St. Mercurius.

### 630. What is the impact of Coptic art on the world?

In the early centuries, Egypt attracted many church leaders from the East and the West to study Scripture and theology in the School of Alexandria. They came to Egypt and practiced the angelic life in its deserts. Furthermore, Alexandrian teachers and monks preached in many countries. For these reasons, Coptic art was widespread in the whole world:

- a. Coptic art influenced the artistic styles of Ethiopia, Libya, Nubia, Sudan, and many other countries.
- b. Some have noticed a resemblance between Celtic designs and the Coptic style. This can be explained by the fact that monks from Egypt and Ireland were in close connection. As a matter of fact, seven monks from Egypt preached in Ireland<sup>1232</sup> and were buried there in the Desert Uilaig. On this, Wessel says, “Coptic influence penetrated Irish Art, and from thence went over once again into developing German Art. The Irish Church did not only provide its wandering monks and zealous missionaries with glad tidings but also with the artistic spirit of the native church. Everywhere they settled, these Irish envoys employed themselves in spreading their art, and with it, indirect Coptic influences.”<sup>1233</sup>
- c. Coptic Art had an influence throughout the whole Roman Empire and it even extended outside the Empire through Coptic textiles.
- d. Smith<sup>1234</sup> states that the icon of Christ the Triumphant or, “the representation of Christ trampling underfoot the lion, the dragon, the serpent and the scorpion, was known in the early French art, and may be traced back to a prototype from Egyptian origin. The same scene was found in the Alexandrian catacombs taken from the ancient Egyptian art (Horus trampling underfoot the beast which symbolized evil).” Smith adds, “This transmission of Egyptian types into Early French art is neither surprising nor peculiar to this particular scene. In the first place it was a natural continuation, if not the actual result, of the Eastern influence which entered Provence through Marseilles and spread through Gaul.”

<sup>1232</sup> Cawthra Mulock, *The Icons of Yuhanna and Ibrahim the Scribe* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1946): p. 12.

<sup>1233</sup> Klaus Wessel, *Coptic Art* (UK: Thames and Hudson, 1963): pp. 232–233.

<sup>1234</sup> Earl Baldwin Smith, *Early Christian Iconography* (U.P., 1918): pp. 146–150.



## 12

# Coptic Art and Symbolism

### 631. What is the stance of the Coptic Church on symbolism?

Although **St. Clement of Alexandria** was the first Christian author to suggest using symbols, the Church of Alexandria did not adopt many symbolic pictures or images such as the Good Shepherd and Christ knocking on the door. Rather, the church used these symbols in decorating the iconostasis, the church pillars, walls and ceilings, and in iconography.

### 632. What are the most important Coptic symbols?

- a. **The fish:** In the early Church, the fish was the most frequently used symbol. It reflects several important meanings and references, such as the fact that a fish symbolizes those who believe in God. The Lord Himself used the word to refer to His people when He told His disciples, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says of the martyrs: “They are baptized in their blood but as for the other Christians, they are like a fish that the waters of baptism suffices.”<sup>1235</sup> **Origen** also says, “Christ is metaphorically called the fish.”<sup>1236</sup> **Tertullian** says, “But we, little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ (*ichthys*, fish) Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water!”<sup>1237</sup> Christ was thus called because the Greek letters for the word fish are ΙΧΘΥΣ containing the first letters of the words Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ (*Iēsoûs Khrīstós, Theoû Huiós, Sōtér*), which means Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.
- b. **Dolphin:** The British Museum has a Coptic carving of a dolphin bearing a crucifix on its nose and a cluster of vines next to it, dating back to the sixth century. This refers to the soul as it breathes Christ’s sweet scent through His conquering cross and opens its spiritual mouth to be filled with the Eucharistic food (the vine grapes).
- c. **Birds:** Based on an ancient Egyptian belief, Coptic art frequently depicted human souls as birds.<sup>1238</sup>

<sup>1235</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Resurrection* 52.

<sup>1236</sup> Origen, *In Matt.* 5.

<sup>1237</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 1 (ANF 3:669).

<sup>1238</sup> Dorothy Colles and Heather Child, *Christian Symbols, Ancient & Modern: A Handbook for Students* (London: Bell, 1971): p. 192.

- d. **Dove:** In most of its depictions, the dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit, as depicted in the icons of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and of the Baptism of Christ. It also symbolizes the believers' virtues as gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially peace, meekness, and purity. It also reminds us of Noah's dove. **St. Augustine** says, "This dove signifies the soul that is returning to the true ark, namely the church. It will enter through Christ's wounded side."<sup>1239</sup>
- e. **Eagle:** One of the unique antiquities is a fresco painting in the Bawit Monastery in Upper Egypt, dating back to the sixth century. On the eagle's head and raised wings, there are three identical flower wreaths. Inscribed within each circular wreath are the letters  $\alpha$  (*alpha*) and  $\omega$  (*omega*), which are usually placed beside Christ.
- f. **Other symbols:** The Coptic Church uses other symbols such as a **cluster of grapes** symbolizing Christ the sacrifice (John 15:1–5). **The lamb** symbolizes Christ the lamb of God. The anchor is a symbol of hope. **The ship** represents the Church that crosses into the haven of safety. **The phoenix** is a fictional bird that **St. Clement** uses as a symbol of the resurrection.

### **633. How is the symbol of the cross related to church architecture, theology, and art?**

In the second century and the beginning of the third, **Tertullian** described the practice of making the sign of the cross: "At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign [of the cross]."<sup>1240</sup> This custom was so familiar that the pagans of the second century accused the Christians of praying to the cross. However, **Marcus Minucius Felix** explained that this veneration was meant for Christ himself and not for the wood of the cross itself.<sup>1241</sup> It is noteworthy that using the cross on a large scale in church buildings, in the fourth century, was a natural result of the appearance of a cross in the sky to the Emperor Constantine and the discovery of Christ's cross by Constantine's mother, Empress Helena. This marked the beginning of the widespread use of the cross in Church buildings.

### **634. How is the Cross incorporated into church architecture?**

A cross is placed over the altar's throne, on the iconostasis, and on top of the church belfry or tower. The priest also uses a handheld cross during liturgical services, and during preaching. A cross mounted on a pole is carried by deacons at the forefront of every church procession.

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<sup>1239</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 120 (PL 35:1935).

<sup>1240</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona (The Chaplet)* 3 (ANF 3:94; PL 2:80).

<sup>1241</sup> Eduard Syndicus, *Early Christian Art* (UK: Hawthorn Books, 1962): p. 103.

**The cross and the altar:** The Coptic Church does not decorate the altar by standing an ornamental cross upon it, because the altar itself is the cross of the Lord; but the cross can decorate the altar's throne. In the liturgy, the priest uses a hand cross as one of the holy vessels. He uses it in all his priestly ministry: in blessing the offerings, incense, baptism water, a bridal couple, to give peace to the people of God, as well as in the absolution of sins. The entire priestly ministry is based on the fact that the priest must hide in the Lord's cross. It also emphasizes that all our worship and offerings are accomplished through Christ's sacrifice and His name. Through the cross, we see the Holy Trinity, and to Him all the names of Christ in scripture are attributed.

**The cross and the iconostasis:** There is a strong relationship between the cross and the iconostasis:

- a. The iconostasis is a book of the Church written in the language of colors about the work of the Word of God in the life of the people of the Old and New Testaments. The cross is the "Word of God" expressed in the language of true perfect love.
- b. The cross declares that the unity between saints and the heavenly creatures was accomplished through Christ's cross.
- c. The cross sits above icons of events of the Old Testament, as those events prophesied about God's salvation through the cross of Jesus.
- d. The cross over the icons of the New Testament events, declares that the cross is the central focus of biblical events.
- e. On the two sides of the cross, we see the portraits of St. Mary and St. John the Disciple, as if the Lord declares that as we share in the sufferings of the crucified Christ, we also receive His mother as our mother, just like St. John (John 19:26–27).
- f. As we look up at the crucified Christ, we see Him spreading His arms like the wings of an eagle, protecting all His saints.

**The cross and the church tower:** The cross represents God's will for the Church to submit to the crucified Lord, walking according to His law, guided by His Spirit, and preaching His gospel. The elevated cross also represents the second coming of the Lord, who Himself mentioned this eschatological meaning when He said, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (Matt. 24:30). For centuries, the world has been preoccupied with its longing for unity and peace which can never be achieved without the cross. The Apostle says, "For He is the peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in His own person the hostility" (Eph. 2:14–16). By His cross, Christ took away the vertical partition or the veil that separated the Jews from the Gentiles as well as the horizontal partition or the veil which

separated humanity from God and earth from heaven. **St. Irenaeus** says that “He who was hung on the tree attracts and unites everyone together in Him.”<sup>1242</sup>

### **635. What are the various forms of the Coptic cross?**

**The tree of life:** This was well known among the pagan nations, often taking the shape of the cross (like the shape of the letter “T”). The idea of the tree of life started in the days of Adam, who knew its location in the middle of Eden (Gen. 2:9). It was a symbol of Christ the giver of life. The ancient Egyptians believed that there was a sycamore tree (sycamore means the illumination of the sun’s fire) in which the gods sit, and which is the tree of life from which the gods and the righteous feed.

**The pharaonic cross, the sign of *ankh* or life:** This is found in the most sacred hieroglyphic writings. Also known as the key of life<sup>1243</sup> or the Key of the Nile, the Copts adopted it, being the decedents of the pharaohs.

**The tau cross:** The tau cross is shaped like the Greek letter *tau*, which is the first letter of the word *Theos* meaning God.<sup>1244</sup> In fact, the letter T or tau has an Egyptian origin. Ancient Egyptians believed that the earth was created by the word of the god Thoth.<sup>1245</sup> For this reason, they called their first month of the year, Thoth.

### **636. Are there examples of Coptic crosses found in Coptic monuments and antiquities?**

- a. A carved stone from the fifth century, now in the Louvre. It contains a Coptic cross (sign of life) that closely resembles the ankh used by ancient Egyptians. As for the alpha and omega, these refer to the divinity of the crucified Lord.
- b. A Coptic cross, sign of life, that was depicted with two birds on both sides as a symbol of the people of the Old and New Testaments as they behold the cross as a source of life, under which they take refuge and find comfort.
- c. A cross with the nails as in Figure 1.
- d. Figure 2 is of Byzantine origin, found in the decorations of ancient Coptic iconostases.
- e. Figure 3 is a triangular cross, also known as *Botonnee* or *Trefflee*. The four extremities of its arms are triangular and ornamented with trefoils. This type is also used by the Byzantine Church.

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<sup>1242</sup> Reve de L'Orient Chretien, 1910: p. 209. See also Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, Vol. 1 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) ch. 19.

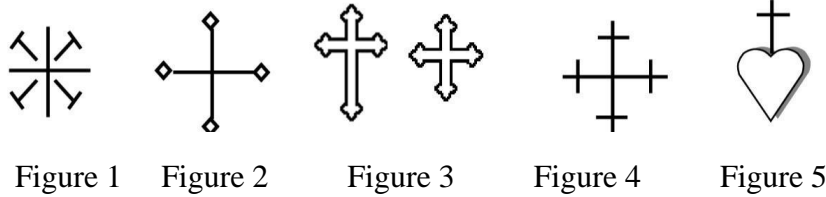
<sup>1243</sup> Goldsmith: p. 39.

<sup>1244</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1919): p. 90.

<sup>1245</sup> H. Bayley, *Lost Language of Symbolism*, Vol.2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912): p. 127.



- f. Figure 4 has three points to each point of the cross as a symbol of the Holy Trinity. The total number of edges is twelve, representing the twelve apostles and the Holy Trinity's kingdom in the four corners of the world.
- g. Figure 5 was first found in Egyptian houses and then became the sacred heart symbol of worship and adoration in the Catholic Church.<sup>1246</sup>



- h. Processional Crosses: Socrates<sup>1247</sup> the Church historian notes that Empress Eudoxia presented some crosses to the Church, and St. John Chrysostom used them in night processions during praises. These processions were intended to counteract what the Arians were doing. The Coptic Church now uses a gold-plated or silver-plated cross mounted on a long pole carried by a deacon at the front of the procession. Two deacons walk behind him carrying two fans that are plated with gold or silver, during every procession in church or when a bishop is entering the church.

It is important to note that the processional cross usually bears an icon of Christ crucified on one side and the icon of the risen Christ on the other side. In most cases, the procession is done three times around the church and in the third circuit, the deacon shows the other side of the cross to declare that the reason for the Church's joy is the cross of Christ and His resurrection. The fans are usually shaped like the Cherubim, so that the procession can show that the heavenlies partake with us in our spiritual joy.

### 637. What is the golden serpent?

If a bishop is present during the Eucharistic Liturgy, then a deacon carries the Bishop's special staff which is surmounted by a golden cross between two golden serpents. This staff is different from the pastoral staff which the bishop uses at other times to indicate his role as an apostolic shepherd.

<sup>1246</sup> Johannes Troyer, *The Cross as Symbol & Ornament Collected, Drawn and Described* (United States: Westminster, 1961): p. 60.

<sup>1247</sup> PG. 67:689.

**638. What is a chest cross?**

The words “pectoral” and “encolpion” are both used to mean “on the chest.” The custom of wearing a pendant cross on the chest, suspended by a cord or chain around the neck started around the fourth century, and was frequently worn not just by members of clergy but also devout laymen. In 350 A. D., St. Macrina, St. Gregory of Nyssa’s sister, used to wear a small cross to protect her. **St. John Chrysostom** mentioned this custom of wearing a pectoral cross, since it was very prevalent among Christians. Now, however, Orthodox bishops and priests wear a pectoral cross on the chest or a medal that has the icon of Christ and St. Mary, especially after the council of Ephesus.

## 13

### The Holy Utensils

#### 639. How are the sacred vessels consecrated to the service of the Lord?

God, as a loving Heavenly Father, created the whole world for us. He then asked Moses to offer some tools to be used in His House and asked him to anoint the Tabernacle of Meeting, the ark of covenant, the table, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense, with holy oil. He told him, “You shall consecrate them that they may be most holy, whatever touches them will become holy” (Ex. 30:29). The Church of the New Testament, as Christ's Bride, employs many special vessels to be used in God's House and dedicates them to Him. These utensils are consecrated with prayer, the word of God, and the Myron oil. Once consecrated, they are only to be used for the service of God.

#### 640. What is the chalice?

The communion chalice is the cup into which wine is mixed with water and sanctified to be the Lord's blood in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Lord Himself used a chalice (Matt. 26:26–27) and the Apostles imitated Him. St. Paul calls it “the cup of blessing” and “the cup of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:16–17). Early Christian chalices were commonly made from wood, glass, copper, or pottery.

In his homily to the priests, **St. Epiphanius** observes, “In the past, priests were golden and used wooden chalices. Today, priests are of wood and use golden chalices.”<sup>1248</sup> By the third and fourth centuries, precious metals became common, and valuable chalices of gold and silver adorned with jewels were offered to the Church by believers as a sign of their love. Many Fathers asked their congregations not to exaggerate in offering these valuable vessels while there are many people in need. **St. Clement of Alexandria** vigorously opposed using gold and precious stones.

**St. Ambrose** recalls that Lawrence sold his church vessels and distributed the proceeds to the poor, while he himself did not hesitate to sell the treasures of Milan to free those who were captives. **St. Jerome** refers to Exuperius of Toulouse as an example of someone who did the same thing to help the poor.<sup>1249</sup>

According to the Coptic rite, the believers receive communion of the Body and Blood separately. It can also be noticed that the Lord used wine mixed with water when He blessed

<sup>1248</sup> W. W. Watts, *Catalogue of Chalices & other Communion Vessels: Victoria and Albert Museum. Department of Metalwork* (United Kingdom: H.M. Stationery Office, 1922).

<sup>1249</sup> W. W. Watts, *Catalogue of Chalices & other Communion Vessels: Victoria and Albert Museum. Department of Metalwork* (United Kingdom: H.M. Stationery Office, 1922): pp. 5–6.

it, and the Church received the same tradition from Him.<sup>1250</sup> The mixture of wine and water resemble the blood and water flowing from Christ's pierced side on the cross. This mixture becomes the true blood of Christ and at the same time is a symbol of the indissoluble union between Christ (wine) and His people (water).<sup>1251</sup>

#### **641. What is the paten?**

The Coptic *ἸΔΙΣΚΟΣ* (*ti-diskos*) or *δίσκος* (*diskos*) in Greek is a small round tray, without a stand and having no engravings. It is usually made of silver or gold, resembling the Lord's manger or His tomb. Some people believe that the Lord did not use a paten, but rather blessed the bread on His hands. However, since the liturgy takes a long time, the Church preferred to use a paten.

#### **642. What is the dome?**

The English "dome" is *ἀστῆς οἱ ἀστῆχειοχος* (*astēs oi astexieochos*) in Greek. It is made of two silver arched bands, held by a screw, crossed over each other into the shape of a cross, usually surmounted by a small cross. It reminds us of the tomb or of the star that appeared to the Magi. It was said that **St. John Chrysostom** introduced this article, which is placed on the paten to keep the holy bread, and to support the coverings.

#### **643. What is the spoon?**

The spoon is *ΠΙΜΗΣΤΗΡ* (*pi-mēstēr*) in Coptic and *λαοῖς* (*laois*) in Greek. It is used in administering the Blood. In the early centuries, the priest used to place the Body in the hands of those who are taking communion or directly in their mouths. The use of the spoon started only in the sixth century.

#### **644. What are the two cruets?**

The cruets are two small bottles used to hold the wine and water for the Eucharist. They are mentioned in the list of gifts presented by Constantine to the churches of Rome.<sup>1252</sup> There are three other cruets used by the Coptic Church. One is used to hold the Chrism (Myron oil) which can only be held by a priest or bishop. It is usually preserved in the Sanctuary and sometimes on the Altar.<sup>1253</sup> The second is a cruet which contains the Ghalilaon oil (or *Hagielaion*) that is used in the Liturgy of Baptism. The third is a cruet that holds the oil that

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<sup>1250</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65 (ANF 1:185); St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.33.2 (ANF 1:507); St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 2.2 (ANF 2:242).

<sup>1251</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 63.13 (FOTC 51:211).

<sup>1252</sup> O. Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church* (Print Office of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, 1967).

<sup>1253</sup> Hallett: p. 235.

is used during the Apocalypse night on Bright Saturday when the book of Revelation (Apocalypse) is read in full. It is also used in the Liturgy of the Unction of the Sick, which is usually carried out on the last Friday of Lent. At the Coptic Church of St. Shenouda in Old Cairo, there is an ancient wooden box that is circular and has three round holes, which are probably for the three above-mentioned cruets.

**645. What is the throne or ark?**

- a. A wooden box on top of the altar, in the middle, is called in Coptic ΠΙΤΟΤΣ (*pi-tots*) which means “throne,” and is used to preserve the chalice (during the Liturgy). Usually it is cubical in shape, and the top is covered by two flaps.
- b. It is called a throne because it represents the presence of the Crucified Lord.
- c. It is also an ark because it looks like the ark of Noah in which Noah and his family were saved. Similarly, through the blood of the new covenant in the chalice which is kept in this ‘ark’ we are saved.
- d. Its name also corresponds to the Ark of Covenant in the Old Testament since the latter contained the following: the two tablets of the Law, Aaron's rod, and the golden pot of the manna, which as a symbol of the true manna, the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ (John 6).

**646. What is the ciborium or the antiphoron?**

A small vessel made of silver, circular in shape with a lid. It is used to carry the holy Body moistened with a few drops of the precious Blood to give communion to the sick and those who are unable to come to the Liturgy and take communion. It is not used to preserve the Holy Communion for the next day, since the Coptic Church forbids this custom. According to the historian Renaudt, Pope Philotheos (the sixty-second Patriarch) says that this vessel must be kept with the priest.

**647. What is the gospel?**

A copy of the New Testament, covered with silver or gold and decorated with icons, is used in liturgical rites. On one side, it is covered with the icon of the Resurrection or Crucifixion, and on the other side the icon of the patron saint of the church or St. Mary. Sometimes on the corners, there are the four Evangelists with their symbols.

**648. What are the liturgical fans?**

In Greek, they are called έθαπθου, ριπδιου, ριπιου (*hexa-pterygium*) or “six-winged.” Each fan has the figure of the Seraphim with six wings. The use of the liturgical fans is still

prevalent in the East, especially in Upper Egypt. According to the **Apostolic Constitutions** of the fifth century, two deacons use fans of linen, fine skin or peacock feathers as they stand by the altar to drive away insects and keep them from touching the sacred vessels. These fans came to have a symbolic meaning. According to the Coptic rite, these fans are used during the recitation of the Hymn of the Cherubim symbolizing the presence of the Cherubim as they partake in our praise to God.

According to a Coptic manuscript in the Vatican on the making of the Myron oil, twelve deacons carry fans in a procession. In the Greek Church, seven deacons carry liturgical fans during the Good Friday service and during the prayers for the Chrism.<sup>1254</sup> Some Orthodox Churches attach small bells to the fans so that they can make a sound when moving, symbolizing the sound of the Seraphim's flying wings. In the Coptic Church, there are now only two metal fans in the form of a circle, somewhat like the halo around a saint's head. Each fan has a long handle and in the middle of the circle, a Seraph is represented. These fans are used in the church processions.

#### **649. What is the rite of censuring?**

In the tradition of the Old Testament, the use of incense in worship was prescribed by God and controlled by the strictest regulations (Ex. 30:34–38). It was only performed in the Holy Place, and only by the priests.

In the divine Liturgy, the priest offers incense around the altar, at the door of the sanctuary, at the lectern, in front of the icons and the bishop. Then, he greets his fellow priests, goes down to the nave of church and offers incense amongst the worshippers and then finally he returns back to the altar. Our offerings and prayers are acceptable because they are offered through Christ's sacrifice. The priest's circuits gather the prayers and blessings of the word of God, bishops, priests, deacons, and the entire congregation together with those of the saints and returns them to the sanctuary to offer them on behalf of each one. The custom of censuring the bishops may have been adopted from Roman customs who used to carry torches and incense before the emperor.<sup>1255</sup>

The Fathers of the first three centuries severely criticized the use of incense in public worship<sup>1256</sup> because it was an essential sacrifice offered in pagan worship. In pagan worship, censuring had seven religious uses:<sup>1257</sup> as a sacrifice to the gods; as a sacrifice offered to the ghosts of the dead; as a way of honoring living individuals, especially the Emperor; in casting out evil spirits from the living or the dead; as a method of cleansing or healing; in processions

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<sup>1254</sup> Alfred J. Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt, Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884): p. 50.

<sup>1255</sup> Davies: p. 356.

<sup>1256</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 13 (ANF 1:166); Tertullian, *Apology* 30, 42 (ANF 3:42, 49); St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 2.8 (ANF 2:255); and Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 13.5.2 (FOTC 83:242) and *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 45 (ACW 19:188).

<sup>1257</sup> Davies: p. 197.

carried out in feasts or similar rituals; and to create an atmosphere for worship. Any Christian who refused to offer incense to the idols was condemned to death.

#### **650. Why do we use incense?**

**First:** Offering incense is a symbol of God’s presence among His people. When we smell it, we say in our hearts, “While the King is at His table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance” (Song. 1:12).

**Second:** It signifies prayer (Ex. 30:1–8) as a sacrifice of love. In the Coptic rite, the liturgies of the Eucharist, Unction of the Sick, Baptism and funerals are closely related to this sacrifice of love.

**Third:** Offering of incense symbolizes the purification of the people as God said to Moses, “Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” Moses then said to Aaron, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation” (Num. 16:44–47).

**Fourth:** The offering of incense is a way of honoring someone. In the Armenian rite in the ninth century, the priest used to carry the Eucharist to the sick, preceded by a cross and a censer.<sup>1258</sup>

#### **651. What is the censer?**

The censer is a vessel made of copper or silver in the shape of a cup, in which incense is burned. In the usual form of the censer, the container is suspended from three chains from which it can be swung. The censer symbolizes St. Mary who bore the “true live coal,” that is the incarnate Son of God. Its three chains remind us of the Holy Trinity who participated in the incarnation of the Son, for the Father sent His Son, the Son obeyed, and the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin for the incarnation of the Son.

#### **652. What other utensils are used?**

- a. A **small box for incense**, usually made of silver or carved wood.
- b. The **ewer and basin** that are used for washing the hands of the priest during liturgical services.
- c. The **basket of the oblation** is a small basket in which the holy bread is placed, one of which the priest chooses as the “Lamb” to become the Body of Christ.

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<sup>1258</sup> Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare and A. J. MacLean. *Rituale Armenorum* (United Kingdom: Clarendon Press, 1978): p. 114.

- d. **Musical instruments:** Coptic hymns, first and foremost, rely on the one natural instrument: the human voice. However, we use some primitive instruments such as the triangle and cymbals.



## 14

### The Church Nave

#### 653. What are the sections of the church nave?

The church nave is usually divided into two main sections (or khoruses), one for the deacons and the other — the church nave — for the congregation (believers). At the back or the west end of the nave, there is an area (khorus) for the catechumens and also the baptistery.

The first area is the deacon's khorus (or chancel) at the eastern end of the nave. It is separated from the altar by the iconostasis and sometimes by a fence from the rest of the nave which is reserved for the congregation. It is two or three steps higher than the rest of the nave and contains seats for the deacons, two candlestands and two lecterns on which the books of church readings (Katameros) are kept in different languages (Coptic, English, Arabic, or any other language according to the location). The lectern is a portable wooden cupboard with a slanted smooth top surface upon which the Katameros is placed. It is decorated with regular geometrical patterns, often inlaid with ivory. It is worth mentioning that the lectern has replaced the pulpit in many of the eastern and western churches.

The second area is the main nave where the congregation pray. The word nave is derived from the Latin *navis* which means a ship or ark. The altar and the nave are paired together. The former sanctifies the latter as the latter completes the former. While the altar signifies God's presence, the nave is where His people are present to meet with Him. That is why the altar is often called the "soul of the church," and the nave is its "body." **Maximus the Confessor** says, "In the same way as the two elements — body and spirit — form the human being in a way in which neither the body overtakes the spirit nor the spirit overtakes the body but instead the spirit gifts the body spirituality to express its presence, thus the same relationship exists between the altar and the nave of the church. The altar illuminates the nave and leads it so the latter becomes a visual expression of the former. This relationship restores the universe to its natural position which was corrupted by the fall of man."

#### 654. What are the sections of the congregation section of church nave?

The congregation section of the main nave is divided by pillars into two sections. To the south (i.e., to the right of the altar when you face the east) is an area or section that used to be reserved for nuns, then for widows, then for women with children, and lastly for young ladies. However nowadays, this separation does not exist anymore. To the north (i.e., to the left of the altar when you face the east) is an area or section reserved for men. This way children enjoy the Liturgy with the entire congregation. Women are on the right side of men, as the Queen sits at the right hand of the King (Ps. 45:9).

**655. Why do church buildings have domes?**

Some churches have a single dome representing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church who is enthroned in heaven. Thus, inside the dome we mostly find an icon of Our Lord, or it is painted in a heavenly blue color and decorated with icons for angels and/or stars. Other churches have three domes representing the Holy Trinity, others have five domes with the main one in the center representing our Lord surrounded by four smaller domes representing the four evangelists.

**656. Why are there pillars in church buildings?**

In Solomon’s temple, pillars had names (2 Chron. 3:17) because they represented the tribes. So in the church of the New Testament, we find twelve pillars representing the disciples as St. Paul calls them (Gal. 2:9). Our Lord promised us that if we are victorious, He will make us pillars in His Father’s temple forever and He will write on them the name of His Father and the name of the His Father’s city, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12). The pillars are decorated at the top with different “crowns” that in very rare cases resemble each other. This reflects our understanding that in heaven everyone will have his own special crown, yet all will be crowned through the blood of Jesus Christ.

**657. Why is there a pulpit in some churches?**

The Greek word ἀναβαίνω (*anabainō*) means “to ascend,” that is because the pulpit is higher above the nave so the bishop or the priest ascends to deliver the sermon. In most designs, the pulpit rests on twelve pillars representing the twelve disciples. It is made of marble, stone, or wood and decorated with icons of saints. David the prophet referred to it thus: “Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness ... Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people” (Ps. 107:31). In the fifth century B. C., Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit to address the people, then he blessed God and read from the Holy Scriptures and explained them (Neh. 8:4). The pulpit also symbolizes the stone that was on the Lord’s tomb, the mountain on which Moses was given the Law, and the mountain where Christ (the Word of God) was transfigured in front of His disciples.

**658. What is the purpose of the water font situated in the western part of the nave?**

This is a covered font embedded in the ground, made of marble or stone, and is used in the Liturgy of the Water (Lakkan prayer) on Covenant Thursday, the Feast of Epiphany, and the Apostles Feast.

**659. What is the narthex?**

The catechumens are those who are being prepared to be baptized while the penitents are those who fell into certain sins and were asked — by their father of confession — to abstain

from communion for a period of time. These two groups were designated an area in the church right by the main entrance in the very west of the church called, the narthex. There, the catechumens and the penitents would sit to participate in the Liturgy of the Catechumens or Liturgy of the Word.

### 660. Did the early church perform baptism in the open air?

Early in the apostolic era, great numbers of Jews and Gentiles were coming into the Christian faith from many parts of the world. They were baptized by immersion in water in the name of the Holy Trinity. At that time, it was not possible to build baptisteries in all cities to accommodate such numbers considering that most of them were adults and that the church was under persecution everywhere. Therefore, the Church performed baptism in the open air (i.e., in rivers,<sup>1259</sup> seas,<sup>1260</sup> springs, etc.) The Book of Acts refers to this type of open air baptism, for example, when Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch both went down into the water (river) and Philip baptized him. (Acts 8:38)

Evidence of such open air baptism can be found also from the Christian writings of the first and second centuries. **Tertullian** for example mentions that St. Peter baptized people in the Tiber River. Also, the **Didache** says, “Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in living [i.e., moving] water. But if you have not living water, baptize in other water and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>1261</sup> We can understand how this rite was performed in the early Church in the Odes of Solomon:

“And speaking waters touched my lips  
 From the spring of the Lord generously.  
 And so I drank and became intoxicated,  
 From the living water that does not die.  
 And my intoxication was not with ignorance,  
 But I abandoned vanity;  
 And turned toward the Most High, my God,  
 And was enriched by His favors.”<sup>1262</sup>

<sup>1259</sup> Pseudo-Clement, *The Recognitions of Clement* 6.15 (ANF 8:156).

<sup>1260</sup> Pseudo-Clement, *The Recognitions of Clement* 4.32, 7.38 (ANF 8:141, 165); *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle* (ANF 8:533).

<sup>1261</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 7: p. 194.

<sup>1262</sup> James H Charlesworth, *The Earliest Christian Hymnbook: The Odes of Solomon* (The Lutterworth Press, 2009) 11.6–9: pp. 31–32.

### **661. Did the early church perform baptism inside church buildings?**

In addition to the above-mentioned practice of open-air baptisms, baptisteries were also used from an early stage, as soon as Christians started to build churches or at least to dedicate certain buildings for worship. Some baptisteries were discovered in the catacombs of Rome, where worship was conducted under persecution. Thus, in brief, we can conclude that early Christians began to assign special rooms for baptisteries about the same time as they allocated certain houses for worship.

### **662. Why is the baptistery located at the western end of the church nave?**

Copts see the baptismal font as a holy altar. It is the door through which the faithful enter into heaven. The baptismal font is the womb of the Church by which she delivers children to the Father by the work of the Holy Spirit by the merits of the blood of the Son. Baptism grants the believers the right to enter into God's presence, to share in the communion of the Holy Mysteries and to unite with the those in heaven. For this reason our Lord, before His ascension, commanded his disciples to baptize: "Go ... make disciples ... baptize" (Matt. 28:19). And indeed, the early Church, in obedience to our Lord, stepped forward to preach Christ's salvation to the world, calling all to be baptized and to experience the crucified, risen life in Christ, and to accept the Messiah's Spirit. This theological understanding had an influence on the way baptisteries were built, their location, shape, structure, and icons.

With considerable spiritual wisdom, the **Didascalia** specifies that the baptistery should be built at the northwestern side of the church or at the left hand side of the entrance as one enters. The Spirit declares to those who enter the church that no one can cross over to the company of the believers and receive the Mystery of the Altar without entering first into the baptistery and being born spiritually, which enables the person to be united with the divine sacrifice. The soul that desires to enter the Holy of Holies and share in the divine life with Christ must enter first with the Lord into the waters of the Jordan.

This is what Hermas (second century) saw when he saw the Church as a tower erected on the waters.<sup>1263</sup> Bouyer says, "Thus the polarization of the church on the altar to the east was completed by a second polarization of the baptistery in the west, where the passage from the world of darkness to the world of light was accomplished."<sup>1264</sup>

Naturally, the baptistery had two doors, one towards the west through which those who will be baptized enter, leaving behind the world of darkness, and the other towards the east through which they pass on to the luminous world of the church to the Eucharist.

This reminds us of the Eve of Resurrection in early ages, when crowds of converts entered the church from the western door of the baptistery (on the left side of the church), and then

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<sup>1263</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 1.3.2 (ANF 2:13).

<sup>1264</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man* (London: Burns and Oates, 1963): p. 184.

after being baptized, they proceeded to the nave through the internal eastern door of the baptistery. They rose with Christ, bearing within them the Spirit of the risen Lord, and were anointed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. They would then continue wearing their white clothes for an entire week since they have become a new creation, resembling those in heaven. They were crowned with victorious crowns to conquer the powers of darkness and carried in their hands luminous candles to declare their inner enlightenment.

The **Odes of Solomon** has a marvelous ode which is simply a brief description of what goes on in the mind and on the tongue of the newly-baptized person upon entering the nave of the church. It says:

“And I rejected the folly cast upon the earth, and stripped it off and cast it from me. And the Lord renewed me with His garment, and possessed me by His light. And from above He gave me immortal rest, and I became like the land that blossoms and rejoices in its fruits. And the Lord is like the sun upon the face of the land. My eyes were enlightened, and my face received the dew; and my breath was refreshed by the pleasant fragrance of the Lord. And He took me to His Paradise, wherein is the wealth of the Lord’s pleasure. I beheld blooming and fruit-bearing trees, and self-grown was their crown.”<sup>1265</sup>

Returning back to the site of the baptistery, every believer will unavoidably notice the baptistery on entering the church. This will remind him of where he was born, and of the identity of his Father and Mother. More precisely, the sight of the baptistery will inflame his heart with love for his spiritual mother and heavenly Father. On this point **Tertullian** says, “The baptismal font is the Trinity’s work for the salvation of all humanity. She becomes the mother of all by the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of the psalm ‘My father and my mother have abandoned me [as Adam and Eve had failed to remain immortal], but the Lord has taken me up’ (Ps. 27:10). He has given me the baptismal font as mother, the Most High became my Father, and the Lord who was baptized for our sake is my Brother.”<sup>1266</sup>

Perhaps, the baptismal font also bears some relationship with the church’s theological concept of baptism as a vow. In it, the believer commits to renounce Satan and to enter into a covenant with Christ. Every day the Christian goes to church to participate in the Matins and Vesper services, he sees the baptismal font and is reminded of his covenant. This concept is an important theme in the writings of the Alexandrian Fathers, especially **Origen** who sees baptism as the beginning of the new life<sup>1267</sup> that must be renewed daily.<sup>1268</sup> He calls this renewal the keeping of the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>1269</sup> He explains it by saying

<sup>1265</sup> James H Charlesworth, *The Earliest Christian Hymnbook: The Odes of Solomon* (The Lutterworth Press, 2009) Odes 11.9–10; 15.8; 21.2; 25.8; 1.1–2. See also Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Vol. 1* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964): pp. 326–327.

<sup>1266</sup> PG 39:692B.

<sup>1267</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 13.4 (FOTC 71:192–195).

<sup>1268</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5* 5.8.13 (FOTC 103:359–360).

<sup>1269</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 2.3.3 (FOTC 97:27).

that the Logos is capable of acting in the baptized soul as in a vine, until its fruit ripens, and gradually reaches the fullness of its sweetness.<sup>1270</sup>

### **663. What are the different architectural designs of the baptistery?**

Early baptisteries, in general, were no more than a single room. Others, however, had a second adjacent room where Chrismation was performed by the bishop. Oftentimes, there was a third room used for changing.

Some historians<sup>1271</sup> believe that because the sacraments of chrismation and baptism are so closely related, baptisteries were built only in cities at first where the bishop's throne is located because he was the only one permitted to administer the Mystery of Chrismation.

Until the fourth century, the most commonly used shape of baptisteries was quadrilateral, often with an apse at the end. By the beginning of the fifth century, other shapes began to appear in Europe, such as the hexagonal, the octagonal, and the circular, and sometimes cruciform, i.e., in the shape of a cross (this was probably of eastern origin, introduced in North Africa from there, to Europe.<sup>1272</sup>

**The Quadrilateral Design (four-sided):** This design resembles the shape of the tombs and Martyria (the tombs of the Martyrs) of the early centuries. The philosophy behind it is that baptism is sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is evident from the words of **St. Ambrose** who speaks of the baptistery “the font, whose likeness is as a kind of sepulchre [tomb].”<sup>1273</sup> He addresses the baptized saying, “For when you dip, you take on the likeness of death and burial, you receive the sacrament of that cross.”<sup>1274</sup>

**The Hexagonal Design (six-sided):** This design symbolizes the sixth day of the week, Friday, on which our Lord was crucified and buried. Once again it stresses the Fathers' understanding of baptism as being buried and dying with Christ as the Apostle Paul says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–4).

**The Octagonal Design (eight-sided):** This design symbolizes the resurrection day of Christ, which is the eighth day of the week; the first day of the new week. The emphasis here is on baptism as resurrection with Christ.

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<sup>1270</sup> Origen, Origen: *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* Commentary 2.11 (ACW 26:166–168).

<sup>1271</sup> John Gordon Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965): p. 203.

<sup>1272</sup> John Gordon Davies, *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (NY: Macmillan, 1972), see entries for “Baptistery” and “Font.”

<sup>1273</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 3.1.1 (FOTC 44:289).

<sup>1274</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 2.7.23 (FOTC 44:287).

**The Circular Design:** This design reminds us that baptism is a new birth (John 3:3). In addition, the circular design emphasizes the fact that the baptized enters the circle of eternity in which the baptized enjoys a life beyond all boundaries in a heavenly atmosphere.

**The Cruciform Design:** This design proclaims the reality that baptism is also a cross. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “for Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross and Burial is to Christ, that Baptism is to us.”<sup>1275</sup>

#### 664. What are the features of the baptistery?

**The Dome:** On ascending from the baptismal font, the baptized person sees the dome to remind him of heaven. It expresses the Church’s belief that baptism is the beginning of a heavenly life, whereby the newly-baptized partakes of the Kingdom of God.

**The Stairs:** In most of our ancient churches, there are two sets of stairs, one at the east and the other at the west. They form part of the font structure, which demonstrates some aspects of the baptismal rite. By one of the stairs, the candidate descends and goes into the water, while the celebrant of the mystery (the priest) stands on the other side of stairs, placing his hand on the candidate’s head and immersing him thrice in the water. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** explains this rite, saying, “You descend three times into the water, and ascend again, here also is a hidden glance at the three day burial of Christ and his resurrection, since the redeeming water offers you death and life simultaneously.” And **St. John Chrysostom** gives a great analysis of this rite, saying, “The immersion of the head in the water resembles the burial of our old man, so that the new man may emerge. As it is feasible for us to dip then float, it is equally feasible for God to bury the old man and put on us the new man.”

**The Baptistery Icon:** In the majority of Coptic churches, a baptistery icon is fitted on the dome of the baptistery. It is usually the icon of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan by St. John the Baptist, which signifies an essential theological fact that was declared by the School of Alexandria. It assures us that our baptism is derived from and is an extension of Christ’s baptism; the former derives its effectiveness from the latter. As **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, the believer unites with Christ during His baptism in a unity that can never be dissolved.<sup>1276</sup>

<sup>1275</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10 (NPNF I/11:405) amended.

<sup>1276</sup> See St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.3 (ANF 2:526).





## 15

### The Church Belfry

The church represents the Lord's ship voyaging in the sea of this world towards heaven, and like the ship's watchtower, the church has a belfry where bells are normally hung. Sharing this perspective, in his book, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, **Hermas** views the Church as a tower built in the midst of water.<sup>1277</sup>

#### 665. What is the history of the usage of bells in the church?

The custom of using bells in divine services is very ancient. Little bells were mentioned in the book of Exodus, where they were enumerated among the ornaments of the high-priest's ephod, in order that their sound might be heard whenever he goes in and comes out of the sanctuary (Ex. 28:33–35). Besides these golden bells, larger ones were also used, called *Megeruphita*.<sup>1278</sup> Of these, the Mishnah<sup>1279</sup> says that when they were struck, their noise was so deafening that you could not hear a person speak in all Jerusalem. They were sounded principally for three purposes:

- a. To summon the priests to service.
- b. To summon the choir of Levites to sing.
- c. To invite the people to bring the unclean to the gate called "Nicanor."

"For the first three or four centuries of the Christian Church's existence, the faithful were compelled to assemble at divine service with as little noise as possible, for fear of attracting the attention of their pagan enemies, and thus bringing about fresh persecution; hence we must not expect to find bells in use during those days."<sup>1280</sup> They were introduced to the church by St. Paulinus of Nola (around 400 A. D.), even though his letter, which gives a detailed description of the church building, did not have any reference to bells. Thus, the claim made for him seems to be doubtful. It is worth noting that in the West, bells were originally thought of as originally pagan, so they used to baptize bells in a special ritual to renew them. Later, however, they considered this blessing of the church bells as a way of asking God to use their sounds to summon the hearts of the people to worship Him.

<sup>1277</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 1.3.2 (ANF 2:13).

<sup>1278</sup> John O'Brien, *A History of the Mass and Its Ceremonies in the Eastern and Western Church* (Catholic Publication Society, 1879): p. 146.

<sup>1279</sup> **Mishnah** is the oral law of the Hebrews, consisting of various traditions respecting the Law of Moses. The Mishnah and Gemara (a commentary on the mishanah) form the Talmud, of which there are two versions, i.e., that of Jerusalem and that of Babylon.

<sup>1280</sup> John O'Brien, *A History of the Mass and Its Ceremonies in the Eastern and Western Church* (Catholic Publication Society, 1879): pp. 146–147.

### **666. Do we use handbells in our churches?**

In the records of the early British and Irish churches, handbells were mentioned as early as the sixth century. Renaudot says that the bishops of Egypt who accompanied George, the Son of Nubia's King on his visit to Egypt around 850 A. D., used to ring bells when the holy mysteries were raised. However, this custom has no trace in our rites today since we never use handbells in the altar.<sup>1281</sup> In the Catholic Church, handbells are used to urge the worshipers to bow down.

### **667. What are the uses of bells and trumpets?**

In the church, bells replaced the trumpets of the Old Testament which were used for the following purposes:

**When receiving the divine Law.** Scripture says, “And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.” (Ex. 19:19). Now bells are rung in the church, being the new Mount Sinai, where the Lord meets His people and speaks to them.

**In wars** (Judg. 3:27). The church is the arena of spiritual warfare, where the children of God struggle against Satan and against sin by the Holy Spirit, who is their weapon.

**When celebrating feasts.** We do not cease ringing bells at every service until the last-coming of Christ when we will celebrate an eternal feast and when the sound of God's trumpet will be heard (1 Thess. 4:16).

**When ordaining kings** (2 Kings 9:13).

### **668. What is the rite of ringing church bells?**

- a. Church bells are rung during the Offering of the Lamb, announcing that Christ the King reigns in our souls through His sacrifice. They are also rung during communion, declaring the joy of the Church in this heavenly feast.
- b. They are rung during feasts with special joyful rhythms.
- c. At the passing of a church member, a special Paschal rhythm is used as a way for the whole Church to share in the mourning. Some people call this rhythm, “the mourning rhythm” while others reject this name as the rhythm rather brings peace to the heart. The Pascal rhythm is also rung at the beginning of every hour on Good Friday.

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<sup>1281</sup> Alfred J. Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt, Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884): p. 81.

- d. On the feasts of our Lord, Sundays, and during the Holy Fifty Days between the Resurrection Feast and Pentecost, a joyful rhythm is used even in funerals, since the Church is rejoicing and celebrating these occasions.

**669. What is the etiquette of attending the house of the Lord?**

**St. Basil** talks about the importance of respecting God’s house, saying, “‘The heavens show forth the glory of God’ (Ps. 18:2). The praise of God is a duty belonging to angels. This one duty, referring glory to the Creator, belongs to every army of heavenly creatures. Every creature, whether silent or uttering sound, celestial or terrestrial, gives glory to the Creator. But, wretched men, who leave their homes and run to the temple, as if to enrich themselves somewhat, do not lend their ears to the words of God. They do not possess knowledge of their nature; they are not distressed, although they have previously committed sin. They do not grieve at remembering their sins, nor do they fear the judgment; but, smiling and shaking hands with one another. They make the house of prayer a place of lengthy conversations, pretending not to hear the psalm, which solemnly protests and says, ‘In the temple of God all shall speak his glory’ (Ps. 29:1–2). You not only do not speak of His glory, but, you even become a hindrance to the other, turning his attention to yourself and drowning out the teaching of the Spirit by your own clamor. See to it that you do not at some time leave condemned along with those blaspheming the name of God instead of receiving a reward for glorifying Him ... This statement, ‘In his temple all shall speak his glory,’ was made not unfittingly in a digression, because some in the temple of God talk endlessly until their tongue aches; and these enter without profit. Would that it might be only without profit and not with harm!’”<sup>1282</sup>

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<sup>1282</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13.7 On Psalm 28 (FOTC 46:209–210).



## 16

# The Holy Sacraments

### 670. What is the meaning of the word **Mystery** in the New Testament?

Our teacher St. Paul talks about “the mystery that was kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25). He is referring to God’s work in the New Testament, who fulfilled the wondrous heavenly plan so that the believer’s loving relationship and openness with God may be restored through the crucifixion of Christ, His resurrection, and the work of His grace in His Church, to prepare her to be a heavenly bride that He will offer to His Father in His second coming.

The early Church Fathers focused on the Church sacraments which prepare God’s people and every member to enjoy adoption to God through **Baptism** and to enjoy the dwelling of the Holy Spirit being God’s temple through the **Holy Chrismation**. We are continually washed from sins through **Repentance and Confession** and are united with Christ through the **Holy Eucharist**. We receive spiritual and physical healing through the **Unction of the Sick** and the building of churches in our homes in **Holy Matrimony**. Ultimately, all these mysteries are carried out by Christ through the **Sacrament of Priesthood**.

During the first thousand years after the ascension of our Savior and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Church practiced the Holy Sacraments without paying attention to how many they are, since none of the believers doubted God’s work in them, but on the contrary they all rejoiced in God’s work through them.

These sacraments reveal the Church’s holy perspective on the flesh as it enjoys a new nature and is called to partake in the heavenly glories along with the soul. This was clearly explained by St. Paul in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. The flesh partakes of the eternal inheritance with the soul, so that the believer inherits the kingdom with all his being.

The Church Fathers emphasized that Christ Himself performs these sacraments through the priest. **St. Ambrose of Milan** says, “Damasus cleansed not, Peter cleansed not, Ambrose cleansed not, Gregory cleansed not, for ours is the ministry, but the sacraments are Yours. For it is not in man’s power to confer what is divine, but it is, O Lord, Your gift.”<sup>1283</sup> **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Till today, Christ who is attached to us prepares for us the table by Himself that He may sanctify it. Man cannot transform the oblations into the Lord’s body and blood, but only Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest utters these words but the sanctification is fulfilled through God’s power and grace. By His words, ‘This is My Body,’ the oblations are sanctified.”<sup>1284</sup>

<sup>1283</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* Book 1, Preface 18 (NPNF II/10:96) amended.

<sup>1284</sup> Cf. *Catena Aurea*.

The Holy Spirit does not cease to work, leading us as a bride who is to be united to her heavenly Bridegroom, the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, so that the perfect wedding may be consummated in the Father's bosom. Sacraments in essence are the way of preparing the bride and uniting her with the Bridegroom by the work of the Holy Spirit according to the Father's pleasure. In the sacraments, God's desire of making humans a holy bride is fulfilled, living with Him in heaven where they enjoy seeing Him and partaking of His divine glory. In this present life, the bride continuously prepares herself for this unique wedding and for seeing her Bridegroom. Sacraments are also a special invitation to every believer individually, being the subject of God's love and appreciation as a living member of the universal Church that extends from Adam and until the end of the ages.

Sacraments are a liturgical work (communal, ecclesiastical) through which the believer is continuously renewed, to explore the Kingdom of God within him (Luke 17:21) so that his inner man may be molded to be an icon of the heavenly Bridegroom. The Holy Sacraments contain readings from Scripture, prayers, supplications, thanksgivings, praises, and rituals. Together, they form the wedding song that turns everything into a harp on which the Holy Spirit plays. On these melodies, the bridal procession proceeds amid the praises of the heavenlies, so that the entire creation participates, even the non-living creation.

#### **671. Why is physical matter used in Church Sacraments?**

In the world, these sacraments are fulfilled by God's word and prayer, along with the use of physical substances: water in the baptism; holy oil in chrismation, bread and wine in the Eucharist. However, in heaven, we do not need matter to be united with God, since our flesh which was sown in corruption will be raised without corruption. God who created humanity with a body and soul does not despise matter but sanctifies it. Through the sacraments, God honors matter and the Holy Spirit uses what is seen, to deliver the unseen blessing. The Word became visible flesh, a true human. In the transfiguration, He sanctified His clothes so that they became white as the light (Matt. 17:2). In the sacraments, the physical object is like a banknote. Even though it is just a piece of paper (or plastic), its value is derived from the code or number that it carries and the fact that someone of authority issued it.

#### **672. What is the purpose of the church sacraments?**

The Church's heart is occupied with the work of the Holy Spirit within her, as He prepares her for the everlasting wedding. The apostle says, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). He shares the thoughts of John the Baptist who said, "**He who has the bride is the bridegroom**; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled" (John 3:29). Also, Christ says, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1).

Christ revealed the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church which continues even after His ascension to heaven, saying, “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). And He continues His words about the Holy Spirit saying, “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you ... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:5–7, 14).

From before the foundation of the world, God through His love for humanity was always preparing everything for us to enter His divine bosom, so that we may live in a never-ending, eternal wedding, and an uninterrupted heavenly feast. If humanity’s fall deprived us of abiding in God our source of joy, and caused us to live with a feeling of isolation from Him and even enmity with Him, the Word of God the Only Begotten Son, through His divine love, humbled Himself that He may betroth humanity to Himself after offering us His precious blood on the cross (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23).

St. Jacob of Sarug says, “Your nation rose with a sinful heart to kill You! ‘Go forth, daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him, on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart’ (Song. 3:11) ... They despised their father and hated Him in Sinai, and when His Son was incarnate for their salvation, they arrested Him and crucified Him as they danced, laughed, scorned and mocked.

“Come, Moses, see the bride whom you led out of Egypt, what she is doing with her pure Bridegroom! Come see the banquet that she has prepared for Him. She brought myrrh, mixed vinegar, and took off her sword. Instead of manna, she gave Him vinegar, instead of the sweet water He prepared for her, she placed bitterness in His sweet water (Ex. 15:25). The chosen vine brought forth wild grapes (Isa. 5:2).”

### **673. What is the relationship between all the sacraments?**

The Holy Spirit works in the life of the universal Church, as well as in the life of every member, by offering the believer suitable gifts especially through the Sacraments of the Church.

- a. In **the sacrament of baptism**, the believer enjoys the spiritual birth, becoming a child of God, and a fellow citizen of the house of God (Eph. 2:19). He speaks to God as a child saying, “Our Father who art in heaven” (Matt. 6:9) and thus he benefits from Christ’s gift to be a member of His body and awaits His second coming when He takes His bride to eternal glory.
- b. After baptism, the person is anointed with the holy Myron, **chrismation or the sacrament of confirmation**, where the Holy Spirit dwells in the person and guides

him for the rest of his life, granting him power, knowledge, and growth from glory to glory.

- c. **The sacrament of the eucharist (or of thanksgiving)**, where we partake of the body of the crucified Christ who rose from the dead, and His blood as the spiritual food for our souls.
- d. **The sacrament of repentance and confession**, where we enjoy healing from our spiritual sicknesses such as sin, breaking the commandments, our negligence in our spiritual growth and in our spiritual struggle for the salvation of our souls and that of our brethren.
- e. **In the sacrament of matrimony**, the priest or the bishop raises the eyes of the couple and the congregation to the crowning of the saints by the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. As for those who are physically and spiritually celibate, **Origen** says that celibacy is a spiritual royal path through which the soul delights in her unity with the heavenly Bridegroom, Christ Jesus. Henri Crouzel says, “Virginity makes the union of Christ and the soul more possible. It is thus a witness both to the first and the last things because it evokes the perfect marriage of Christ and Church which was present in the pre-existence and will be again at the Resurrection. The Church, Bride and Virgin, holds her virginity from the chastity of her members leading a life either of virginity or of chastity according to the state in which they find themselves. So chastity appropriate to the state of marriage is an element in the virginity of the Church.”<sup>1285</sup>
- f. **In the sacrament of unction of the sick**, the priest prays for healing from spiritual infirmities as well as physical ones, according to what God sees suitable for the sick person’s spiritual growth and salvation.
- g. **In the sacrament of priesthood**, the Holy Spirit supports those who are called to priesthood to perform the heavenly sacraments through them and leads them to raise humble and successful leaders, even children, as St. Paul did when he ordained young bishops, like Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus the fugitive slave, as well as when he raised leaders from families like Aquila and Priscilla who showed Apollos the Lord’s way (Acts 18:26).

#### **674. Why does the Orthodox Creed not mention any sacraments other than baptism?**

**First:** Baptism used to be a controversial subject. There have been controversies over situations such as those who were baptized by a priest but then denied their faith due to

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<sup>1285</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria, Book Two: Origen*, ed., Rose Mary Halim (Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995): pp. 851–852.



extreme persecution, or those who were baptized by heretics and then sought to join the Church.

**Second:** At that time, there were no controversies about the other sacraments.

**Third:** The Church wants her children to be proud of being the children of God through baptism.



# 17

## The Sacrament of Baptism

### 675. How did humanity become children of God once more?

The genealogy of Christ tell us that Christ was "... the son of Enoch, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:23–38). Since Adam lost this grace, how was it restored to us again? As Christ ascended into the heavens, He sent us His Holy Spirit who takes of what is His and declares it to us (John 16:14). What does the Holy Spirit take and declare to us? He takes Christ's salvific works and presents them to us.

In the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit buries us with Christ and raises us also together with Him, so that we may come out of baptism as members in the body of the risen Christ, which never gets old but continues to grow unceasingly in the new life.

In this way, our unity with Christ is achieved and we become children of God. Through the Only Begotten Son, we become children with Him by adoption, not by nature but by God's free grace. This is what the Apostles meant by saying, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), and "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3–4).

Christ Himself referred to this in His conversation with Nicodemus: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, could not understand, because he had not yet realized that the same Jesus, with whom he was talking was bringing believers to Himself in baptism by the Holy Spirit, so as to grant them His risen life, which is the gift of the new spiritual birth (John 3:9–21).

### 676. What is the sacrament of baptism?

**First:** This sacrament is declared by the faith of the Church in the Orthodox Creed.

**Second:** The one who being baptized is immersed in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity.

**Third:** He accepts being buried with Christ to enjoy the resurrected life and dies to the life of lustful sin. He then lives a life that is appropriate of the children of God with respect to Christ's holiness and righteousness by the power of the divine grace. Christ Himself

declared that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

### **677. How did the Old Testament prepare us for Christian baptism?**

To understand this new birth by the Holy Spirit, by whom we receive the new nature, we need first to know about the Old Testament's symbols and prophecies about baptism. Baptism plays an essential role in God's plan for our salvation. For this reason, divine revelation worked to gradually prepare us over a long period for baptism, side by side with the preparation for the divine incarnation and the sacrifice of the cross. But these divine things are interconnected as they are a single comprehensive work of salvation. So, if the incarnation suddenly appeared without any introductions by the symbols and prophecies of the Old Testament, no one could have accepted it, and likewise if baptism was announced in an unexpected way no one could have understood or accepted it.<sup>1286</sup> For example:<sup>1287</sup>

- a. **The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters:** It was said: "The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). It is the work of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of creation that He was hovering on the face of the waters to create a beautiful world from the desolate and deformed land. The Holy Spirit still descends on the water of baptism to sanctify it, to transform the human being who was corrupted by sin into a new heaven and a new earth in the place of the earth that was desolate and devoid from every goodness. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, "The new creation is made by the water and Spirit, just like the creation of the world, since the Spirit of God was hovering on the waters."<sup>1288</sup>
- b. **Noah's Ark and the Flood:** Water here is a tool of condemnation for the evil world, though the ark was a **tool of salvation for Noah** and his family as it took them to a new world. St. Peter saw the flood and the Ark as type of salvation in baptism (1 Pet. 3:18–21). **St. Jerome** says, "But as soon as the foul bird of wickedness is driven away, the dove of the Holy Spirit comes to Noah (Gen. 8:8, 11) as it came afterwards to Christ in the Jordan (Matt. 3:16), and, carrying in its beak a branch betokening restoration and light, brings tidings of peace to the whole world."<sup>1289</sup>
- c. **Crossing the Red Sea and the Cloud:** St. Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1–2); as if St. Paul the Apostle had seen the Church of the Old Testament in the

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<sup>1286</sup> Darwell Stone, *Holy Baptism* (Longmans, Green, 1899): p. 12.

<sup>1287</sup> For further examples, see Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Holy Spirit Between the New Birth and Continuous Renewal* (Arabic), second edition, 2003.

<sup>1288</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Ex Scripturis Prophetis Eclogae* 7 (PG 9:701).

<sup>1289</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 69.6 (NPNF II/6:145).

days of Moses being baptized symbolically. The sea resembles the baptismal font and the cloud that overshadowed them resembles the Holy Spirit, as Scripture says: “You blew with your wind, the sea covered them” (Ex. 15:10).

- d. **The water of Marah:** In Coptic Church rituals, the priest prays while sanctifying the water of baptism saying, “You have commanded the hard rock and it brought water for Your people (Ex. 15:25) and the bitter waters You have changed into sweet waters.” Thus, the Church views the turning of the bitter waters of Marah into sweet water as a symbol for Baptism.
- e. **Joshua crossing the River Jordan:** In both the Coptic and Ethiopian liturgies of consecrating the waters of baptism, after referring to the waters of the beginning of creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters of Marah and the rock in Horeb, both rites talk about other instances; such as when Joshua crossed the Jordan River, when Elijah’s sacrifice was accepted with water (1 Kings 18:33–36), and when Naaman the Syrian was healed in the waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 5:14). These were mentioned in the works of **Origen** and were later adopted by the Fathers from him. For this reason, Daniélou believes that these examples were first used in the liturgical tradition of the Alexandrian Church, and so they do not represent the personal opinion of Origen, but rather represent the Church’s tradition at that time.<sup>1290</sup> Origen says that after crossing the Jordan River, Jericho fell — a symbol of the destruction of the “old man” which is subject to evil.<sup>1291</sup> He also says that those who go to the Jordan do not flee in silence, but carry with them horns that proclaim the divine mysteries and preaching using the heavenly trumpet.<sup>1292</sup>
- f. **The acceptance of Elijah’s sacrifice on Mount Carmel** (1 Kings 18:33–38): **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “Elijah instructed his companions to dig a trench as an example of Baptism and to pour water on the sacrifice, and then he asked them to pour it for a second time and then a third time so that the trench was filled with water. This is like the three immersions of baptism. Then he prayed to the Lord to respond with fire, and fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the stones, and licked up the ground, assuring the Lord’s acceptance of the offering and the water, as a type for the Holy Spirit descending on the waters of baptism and the oblations of the altar.”

## 678. What are the blessings of baptism?

**First: The death of the old man.** Baptism washes away our sins and slays our physical lusts; or we can say that it ends the old man’s deeds. But as for the flesh, it is in itself good and holy. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “I want this flesh to die to sin. I do not seek that the flesh dies, but to not sin again. Just as a dead man has his body above the possibility of sin,

<sup>1290</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1956): Ch. 6.

<sup>1291</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 6.4 (FOTC 105:71–73).

<sup>1292</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.4 (FOTC 105:30).

so he who ascends from the waters of baptism will be saved from sin. Therefore, if you have died in this water, you should remain dead to sin.”<sup>1293</sup>

**Second: Crossing from the death of sin to life in God.** The effect of baptism is not limited to the negative work of washing away sins, but extends also to the positive work of living in God. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Baptism is a door that brings us back to heaven, through which man passes, to be with God. Baptism is a new vessel carrying the dead, by which they cross over into the land of the immortal. Baptism is placed in the world for the new world, in which man travels from the death to the land of life.”<sup>1294</sup>

**Third: Baptism is the seal (*sphragis*) of the spirit.** Baptism is the seal that shows that a person is a member of the Church, is united with Christ and has accepted the Kingdom of God. St. Paul says, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has **sealed us**, and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:21–22); and “In Him you also, having believed, you **were sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13). Many Fathers spoke about baptism as a seal of the soul, such as St. Clement of Rome,<sup>1295</sup> The Shepherd of Hermas,<sup>1296</sup> Tertullian,<sup>1297</sup> and St. John Chrysostom.<sup>1298</sup>

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “As the shepherd seals his herd with a unique mark to recognize them, which shows that they belong to him, so does the Holy Spirit on those who belong to Him in baptism by the ointment of the holy oil that they receive during baptism.”<sup>1299</sup> The soldier in the Roman army was marked with a sign (*signaculum*) on his hand bearing the abbreviated name of his commander.<sup>1300</sup> That is why the Church Fathers saw baptism as a mark that seals the spiritual soldiers of Christ, carrying on their hearts and bodies the stamp of their great spiritual leader Jesus Christ and His Holy Name.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Now your name is engraved, and you are called to enter the camp.” As we are immersed in the waters of baptism, we come out bearing the seal of God, the image of our Creator and His attributes in us. We are not only embodying Christ our God, but Christ’s life becomes our life, His death our death, His resurrection our resurrection, His attributes our attributes, His glories our glories, and His Father our Father.

**Fourth: Baptism is a new birth.** St. John starts his Gospel with the words, “In Him was life ... to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of

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<sup>1293</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Epis. Ad Rom Homily 2*.

<sup>1294</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *A Homily on the Baptism of Christ and Holy Baptism*.

<sup>1295</sup> St. Clement of Rome, Epistle 7.6.

<sup>1296</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* Book 3, Similitude 9.16 (ANF 2:49).

<sup>1297</sup> Tertullian, *On Modesty* 9 (ANF 4:83).

<sup>1298</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 3.7 (NPNF I/12).

<sup>1299</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Enchir. Patr.* 712.

<sup>1300</sup> F. J. Doelger, *Shragis*, Poderborn, 1911: pp. 32, 33.

God (John 1:4, 12–13). Christ spoke clearly about this new birth by saying, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). It is for this reason that Christ began his service by being baptized Himself, to assure us that no one can enter the Kingdom of God and His service except through the new birth, that is baptism. Our new status attained in baptism — that is, being the children of God — occupied the minds of the disciples, the apostles, and the whole Church, since it is the strength of any Christian in his spiritual life. That is why the apostles did not cease referring to this honor from time to time: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26–27; see also Rom. 8:15–16; 1 Pet. 1:23).

**St. Augustine** says, “Whilst there are two births, then, he understood only one. One is of the earth, the other of heaven; one of the flesh, the other of the Spirit; one of mortality, the other of eternity; one of male and female, the other of God and the Church. But these two are each single; there can be no repeating the one or the other. One makes us children of the flesh, the other makes us children of the Spirit. One makes us children of death, the other makes us children of the resurrection. One makes us children of this age, the other makes us children of God. One makes us children of the curse and wrath, the other makes us children of blessing and love. One chains us with the original sin and the other loosens us from the bonds of every sin.”<sup>1301</sup>

**Fifth: In baptism, the Lord broke the heads of Satan.** Through baptism, we receive the power to resist Satan.

**Sixth: Angels rejoice in our baptism. St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: “Angels shall dance around you, and say, Who is this in white, Leaning upon her beloved? For the soul that was formerly a slave has now adopted her Master Himself as her kinsman and He accepting the unfeigned purpose will answer: Behold, you are fair ... Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep, which have come up from the washing. Every one of which bears twins and none is barren among them.”<sup>1302</sup>

**Seventh: In baptism, we put on Christ.** St. Paul says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). We put on Christ not as an outer clothing, but we unite with Him and partake in His nature without losing our human nature. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “We do not take this in the literal sense as a work of love but as a fact. The incarnation made our unity with Christ and our communion in deification a real fact.”<sup>1303</sup>

**Eighth: We are embedded in Christ.** **Tertullian** says that through baptism, “man will be restored for God to His ‘likeness,’ who in days bygone had been conformed to ‘the image’

<sup>1301</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 11 (NPNF I/7:77) amended.

<sup>1302</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.16 (NPNF II/7:18).

<sup>1303</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *God is My Holiness* (Arabic): p. 52.

of God.”<sup>1304</sup> This likeness is achieved by the unity of the soul with her Savior, where it is embedded into Him as a branch in a tree to bear fruits in Him. The Lord used the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15) to proclaim that He is the mystery of our lives.

**Ninth: We enjoy the mystery of the true Passover and not merely the symbolic one.** We do not believe that baptism is just a symbol of Passover, but rather a true communion in the mystery of Christ’s Passover, so we accept by faith “the work of God who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). In baptism, we are brought to the risen life and are seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4–6). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For baptism is the cross. What the cross then, and burial, is to Christ, that baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For He died Himself and was buried in the flesh, but we have done both to sin ... For if you have shared in His death and burial, much more will you in resurrection and life.”<sup>1305</sup>

**Tenth: We enjoy membership in the one body of Christ.** **St. John Chrysostom** say, “Before yesterday you were captives, but now you are free citizens of the Church; lately you lived in the shame of your sins, but now you live in freedom and justice. You are not only free, but also holy; not only holy, but also righteous; not only righteous, but also sons; not only sons, but also heirs; not only heirs, but also brothers of Christ; not only brothers of Christ, but also joint heirs; not only joint heirs, but also members; not only members, but also the temple; not only the temple, but also instruments of the Spirit. Blessed be God, who alone does wonderful things! You have seen how numerous the gifts of baptism are. Although many men think that the only gift it confers is the remission of sins, we have counted its honors to the number of ten.”<sup>1306</sup>

**Eleventh: The sanctification of the life of the bride.** If in baptism we receive membership in the body of Christ, then the soul becomes the holy bride of Christ and will hear the voice of her Bridegroom telling her, “Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil ... You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you” (Ezek. 16:9–14). **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Baptism is the bride of the King who conceives and gives birth for Him. She is supported by the Only Begotten Son through the Spirit of His Father. She is the fiancée of the Sun by whom all the creation is nourished, and the world is called to light with love.”

**Twelfth: Spiritual enlightenment.** In our contemporary rites, before the celebration of the glorious Feast of the Resurrection (the Christian Passover), we read the gospel of the man born blind on the Sunday before Palm Sunday, since baptism is the way by which our inner vision is opened by Christ’s (the Light of the World) entrance into our inner Jerusalem that we may enjoy the mystery of the true Passover as a mystery for our personal enlightenment.

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<sup>1304</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 5 (ANF 3:672).

<sup>1305</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 6 (NPNF I/11:405) amended.

<sup>1306</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.5–6 (ACW 31:57).



Considering this fact, we understand the words of St. Paul in Heb 6:4–6: “For those who were once enlightened,” who were baptized and fell, can never be renewed again, meaning, they will not be baptized again, because Christ was crucified once and so baptism cannot be repeated. For this reason, the Feast of Theophany is also called “The Feast of Lights,” and for this same reason those who were baptized used to carry candles, lanterns, or torches after they emerge from the baptismal font. **St. Justin Martyr** says, “And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings.”<sup>1307</sup>

### **679. When did baptism begin? And how?**

Baptism was initiated by St. John the Baptist as a baptism of repentance. He said to those who came to be baptized, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11). Then, Christ was baptized by St. John the Baptist, and He sanctified baptism. Finally, after His resurrection, He told His apostles to go and preach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

### **680. What is required of those who wish to be baptized?**

For adults, they are asked to have true faith with sincere repentance and to be able to recite the Orthodox Creed. In the past, when people heard the word of God, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Peter said to them, “Repent and let every one of you baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37–38). The Gospel says, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

### **681. Why do we baptize infants?**

When infants are immersed in the waters of baptism, they receive the mystery of baptism which the Lord Himself instituted through His baptism, so that they are granted that free salvation that no one can earn. The infant, like any adult, becomes through baptism a member in the body of the crucified Lord and so receives the right to celebrate along with the rest of the Church the mystery of the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, are we to deprive children this opportunity of partaking in the mystery of free salvation together with Christ’s Church?

It is not possible for someone who has experienced the blessings of baptism in his life to deprive his children the healing waters of baptism. A Christian believes that it was God’s abundant grace that showered him and attracted him to the faith, and not because of his righteousness. So how could he deprive his son of relishing this enormous blessing, which

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<sup>1307</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61 (ANF 1:183).

supports him in bringing up his child in the Christian faith? The Church has practiced the baptism of infants since the apostolic era, which shows her faith in the work of abundant divine grace in people's lives, regardless of their age, circumstances, or capabilities.

St. Paul says, “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). This related to a married man or woman who accepts the faith while the spouse refuses to believe. The unbelieving spouse is holy in the believing spouse and they has no right to leave each other unless the unbelieving spouse asks for that. So how can we deprive holy children from receiving the sacrament of baptism (that renews their souls) based on the faith and responsibility of one of their parents? “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). How can we hold them responsible for obedience and deprive them of membership in the body of Christ who will support them in fulfilling His will?

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Your fear the Seal on account of the weakness of nature? O what a small-souled mother, and of how little faith! Why, Anna even before Samuel was born (1 Sam. 1:10) promised him to God, and after his birth consecrated him at once, and brought him up in the priestly habit, not fearing anything in human nature, but trusting in God. Give your child to the Trinity, that great and noble Guard.”<sup>1308</sup>

The resistance to baptism of infants originally reflects an exaggerated individualistic view. Although the child has his own personality, he is not isolated from the holy ecclesiastical congregation, but is an active member of it. In the Old Testament, the male child was circumcised on the eighth day of his birth. If baptism is the circumcision of the New Testament that makes a person a child of God, it is not up to us to deprive children of the New Testament from this grace, nor to deprive the child's parents of the commitment to provide a proper faith to their children in every possible way. The Apostle says, “and in Him, you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11).

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<sup>1308</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 40.17 (NPNF II/7:365) amended.

## On the Rites of Baptism

### 682. Is there a specific time for baptism?

In the book of Acts, the eunuch of Candace accepted baptism at the hands of Philip the Apostle while he was on his way to his country. The apostles were keen at the beginning of Christianity to offer the believers baptism at any time so that every opportunity would be seized for their salvation. What we read about the eunuch was repeated with Cornelius and the members of his household (Acts 10:48) and the jailer in Philippi and those who were with him (Acts 16:33).

In the second century, as Christianity spread in many countries, the Church committed those who seek baptism to go through a long phase of preparation with caution and reverence, and thus certain seasons for baptism began to appear. **Tertullian** tells us about the Passover (the Resurrection feast) and Pentecost as two seasons for baptism: “The Passover affords a more than usually solemn day for baptism; when, withal, the Lord’s passion, in which we are baptized, was completed. Nor will it be incongruous to interpret figuratively the fact that, when the Lord was about to celebrate the last Passover, He said to the disciples who were sent to make preparation, you will meet a man bearing water. He points out the place for celebrating the Passover by the sign of water. After that, Pentecost is a most joyous space for conferring baptisms; wherein, too, the resurrection of the Lord was repeatedly proved among the disciples, and the hope of the advent of the Lord indirectly pointed to, in that, at that time, when He had been received back into the heavens, the angels told the apostles that He would so come, as He had withal ascended into the heavens; at Pentecost, of course. But, moreover, when Jeremiah says, And I will gather them together from the extremities of the land in the feast-day, he signifies the day of the Passover and of Pentecost, which is properly a feast-day (Jer. 31:8). However, *every day is the Lord’s; every hour, every time, is apt for baptism: if there is a difference in the solemnity, distinction there is none in the grace.*”<sup>1309</sup>

Tertullian explains the habit of performing baptism on the feasts of the Resurrection and Pentecost, but in the essence of its grace, baptism can be performed at any time, not necessarily on a feast day.

Now, in our Coptic Orthodox Church, the Sunday before Palm Sunday is dedicated for baptisms and is called, the Baptism Sunday. The mystery behind the relationship between the resurrection and baptism is that the feast of the Lord’s Resurrection is the core of the Church’s life and focus. Christ’s resurrection is the rock on which the Church leans to live peacefully amidst the tribulations of this world, not afraid of its waves, storms, or evils but living in the hope of the resurrection while abiding in her Bridegroom who is immortal; and thus, she is justified and sanctified in Him. It is not possible to enjoy this hope, justification, and sanctification except through baptism in which we are buried with our Lord Jesus and

<sup>1309</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 19 (ANF 3:678).

are risen, and we accept His Passover as our personal Passover. As the Apostle says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness life” (Rom. 6:3–4).

What we wish to affirm is that the Fathers warned of the delay in receiving baptism. In fact, they recommended not to wait for feasts, even if that was the usual time to receive baptism. **St. Basil the Great** says, “There is no particular time for baptism. The whole period of man’s life is the time for baptism. All time, then, is opportune to receive salvation through baptism—night or day, hour or minute, even the least conceivable space of time.”<sup>1310</sup>

### **683. Why were the names of those who sought baptism seekers registered, and how?**

**Egeria** the Spanish pilgrim described this ritual in the fourth century, as she saw it in Jerusalem: “For those who give in their names give them in on the day before Quadragesima [the first Sunday in Lent], and a presbyter writes down the names of all, that is, before those eight weeks for which I have said Quadragesima is kept here. When the presbyter has written down the names of all, afterward on the next day of Quadragesima, that is, when the eight weeks begin, a chair is placed for the bishop in the middle of the major church, that is, at the Martyrium, the presbyters sit in chairs on each side and all the clergy stand. And then the competentes [those ready for baptism] are brought forward one by one; if they are males, they come with their ‘fathers,’ but if females, with their ‘mothers.’ And then the bishop asks the neighbors of each one who has entered, saying, ‘Is this person of a good life, obedient to their parents, not a drunkard or a liar?’ And he makes inquiry about particular vices that are more serious in people. And if they prove to be without blame in all these matters in which he has made inquiry of the witnesses present, he himself writes down their names with his own hand. But if they are accused in any matter, he orders them to go outside, saying, ‘Let them amend themselves, and when they have amended themselves, then let them come to the bath.’”<sup>1311</sup>

Thus, the registration was combined with an examination in which the person seeking baptism was carefully examined in the presence of his/her sponsors and neighbors to confirm the person’s conduct and good intentions before registering their name. Nevertheless, the bishop tested the person again before their baptism.

**St. Dionysius the Areopagite** in his book *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* calls the church register “The Book of Life.” **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says that the finger of God Himself registers their names: “Give me your names so that I may write them in ink but the Lord

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<sup>1310</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Baptism* Sermon 13.

<sup>1311</sup> Egeria, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria: A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary*, trans., Anne McGowan and Paul F. Bradshaw (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018) 45–46; pp. 112–113.

Himself engraves them on incorruptible tablets. He writes them with His finger as He did with the law of the Hebrews.”<sup>1312</sup>

The Church was first and foremost concerned with the intentions of the person seeking to be baptized, as mentioned in the **Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus**: “Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word ... let them be examined as to the reason why they have come forward to the faith. And those who bring them shall bear witness for them whether they are able to hear ... If he be the slave of a believer and his master permit him, let him hear. If his master does not bear witness to him, let him be rejected ... If a man have a wife or a woman a husband, let them be taught the man to be contented with his wife and the woman to be contented with her husband.”<sup>1313</sup>

In his homily to the catechumens, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The honesty of purpose makes you called: for if your body be here but not your mind, it profits you nothing. Even Simon the sorcerer once came to the Laver: he was baptized, but was not enlightened; and though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit: his body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him.”<sup>1314</sup>

#### **684. How long was the teaching phase of the catechumens?**

Registering the names of catechumens who wish to be baptized at the beginning of Lent and examining them did not mean that that was when their relationship with the Church began. Prior to this, they often stayed under the patronage of the Church for three years,<sup>1315</sup> during which they proceeded from one order to the next, until the Church was assured of their good intentions, sincerity in seeking salvation, dedication to the faith, and godliness. Only then could they move on to the last stage of the catechumenate which is that of the candidate for baptism. The pace of this transition varied from one person to another, according to each person’s zeal, and their level of prior knowledge of the faith. In the **Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus**, “If someone is truly zealous, he should be accepted. Time does not matter as much as the conduct.”<sup>1316</sup>

The three stages of the catechumenate were the following:

<sup>1312</sup> PG 46:417B.

<sup>1313</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise On the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 2.16.1–2, 4, 6: pp. 23–24.

<sup>1314</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* Procatechesis 1–2 (NPNF II/7:1) amended.

<sup>1315</sup> See the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 8.4.32 (ANF 7:495).

<sup>1316</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise On the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 2.17.2: p. 28.

- a. **The Hearers:** These were allowed to attend sermons and listen to some chapters from Scripture before the deacon asked them to leave.<sup>1317</sup>
- b. **The Prostrates:** These were entitled to attend the Liturgy of the Word and listen to the scripture readings, sermon, and a special prayer of the catechumens,<sup>1318</sup> which was part of the litanies prayed after the sermon; after which they received the laying on of hands for blessing while bowing down (i.e., while prostrate).
- c. **Baptism Candidates:** These were called the “enlightened” or those who are ready for baptism.

The Church was not rigid and allowed catechumens in any stage to receive the baptism if they were in mortal danger, as **St. Basil** mentions in his letter to the bereaved wife of Arintheus, the Roman general whose wife arranged for him to be baptized just before he died.<sup>1319</sup> **St. Epiphanius of Salamis** says that a catechumen who believes in the resurrection from the dead and has this hope in his heart, should be baptized if he was in danger of death so that his hope may not be lost. In any case, the Great Lent was the period in which the catechumens were taught daily. **Egeria the pilgrim** says, “It is the custom here for those who want to get baptized to come every day during the Great Lent.”

During times of fasting, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “let the men when sitting have a useful book; and let one read, and another listen: and if there be no book, let one pray, and another speak something useful. And again let the party of young women sit together in like manner, either singing or reading quietly, so that their lips speak, but others’ ears catch not the sound ... And let the married woman also follow the same example and pray; and let her lips move, but her voice be unheard, that a Samuel may come, and your barren soul give birth to the salvation of God who has heard your prayer; for this is the interpretation of the name Samuel.”<sup>1320</sup>

### 685. Who taught the catechumens?

Since its foundation, the Church has always been preoccupied with evangelism, fulfilling the words of the Lord: “He who does not gather with me scatters” (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23). Everyone felt a responsibility towards the testimony of Christ; if not by words, then by good deeds. **Origen** says, “Every disciple of Christ is a rock, by which the church currently being built by the hands of God, is completed.”<sup>1321</sup> **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** lays the responsibility of teaching catechumens — whether children or adults — on the parents and sponsors, when

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<sup>1317</sup> See the *Canons of the Council of Nicaea* Canon 11 (NPNF II/14:24–25).

<sup>1318</sup> *Apostolic Rules* 8.6.

<sup>1319</sup> **St. Basil of Caesarea**, *Letters* 269 (FOTC 28:257–259).

<sup>1320</sup> **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**, *Catechetical Lectures* Procatechesis 14 (NPNF II/7:4; PG 33:356A).

<sup>1321</sup> **John Foster**, *Why the Church?* (SCM Press, 1954): p. 22.

he says, “If you have a child according to the flesh, admonish him of this now; if you have begotten one through catechizing, put him also on his guard.”<sup>1322</sup>

When **St. Gregory the Wonderworker** entered New Caesarea, there were only seventeen Christians, but when he departed in peace, there were only seventeen pagans. In any case, no priests were excluded from the catechumens’ service that is organized in the church, but each of them had his own role in it. As for the final phase of preaching, it was more often done by the bishop or by a priest who had the talent of teaching.

#### 686. What were the catechumens taught?

- a. Special studies were taught to those who were from a Jewish background, which differed from that offered to those who were from a pagan background. Each group were taught whatever suited their culture, prior studies, and knowledge.
- b. The teacher (*didascalos*) read to them from Scripture and some important Church books. **Origen** refers to certain books which are known for their focus on the behavioral life such as Esther, Judith, Tobit, and Wisdom.<sup>1323</sup> **St. Athanasius** also refers to the same books along with some ecclesiastical books such as the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas.
- c. Theological reflections were also taught in a simplified way that include the most important Christian dogmas such as the Apostles’ Creed, which was like a constitution for the Christian faith. It also became the basis on which the Athanasian Creed was formulated in the Council of Nicaea in 325 A. D., and was then completed in the Council of Constantinople in 381 A. D. This creed is considered a comprehensive summary of the faith and hence was taught to all catechumens along with some explanation so they can memorize it and fully understand it.
- d. It is stated in the **Apostolic Constitutions**, “Let him, therefore, who is to be taught the truth regarding piety be instructed before his baptism in the knowledge of God the Father, in the understanding of His only begotten Son, in the assured acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit. Let him learn the order of the several parts of the creation, the series of providence, the different dispensations of Your laws. Let him be instructed why the world was made, and why man was appointed to be a citizen therein; let him also know his own nature, of what sort it is; let him be taught how God punished the wicked with water and fire, and did glorify the saints in every generation — I mean Seth, and Enos, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham and his posterity, and Melchizedek ... let him be instructed in the doctrines concerning our Lord's incarnation, and in those concerning His passion, and resurrection from the

<sup>1322</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.18 (NPNF II/7:109–110) amended.

<sup>1323</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 27.1.3: pp. 168.

dead, and ascension. And when it remains that the catechumen is to be baptized, let him learn what concerns the renunciation of the devil, and the joining himself with Christ.”<sup>1324</sup>

- e. The Church’s interest in teaching the Orthodox Creed is revealed in the fact that the bishop himself was the one who taught it, as was mentioned in **St. Ambrose’s** letter to his sister Marcellina: “On the following day, which was the Lord’s day, having dismissed the catechumens after the lessons and sermon, I was explaining the Creed to some candidates for baptism in the baptistery of the basilica.”<sup>1325</sup> **St. John of Jerusalem** wrote to St. Jerome, “It is our tradition to teach about the Holy Trinity in general terms within forty days to those who will be baptized.”
- f. After teaching the Orthodox Creed and explaining it, the candidate for baptism learned the Lord’s Prayer. **St. Augustine** says that after we learn who we believe in, we must pray to Him, because how can we pray to someone we do not know or believe in?
- g. In the last phase, the preachers helped them to memorize some recitations or short prayers.
- h. Finally, the Church offered them a rich banquet about the rites of baptism, chrismation, and the eucharist.

In short, we can divide the teaching material into two main sections: a behavioral study along with simplified dogmatic studies; and then a simplified study of the Church sacraments.

### **687. What was the spiritual preparation for the sacrament of baptism?**

The preparation of those seeking baptism is not limited to listening to teachings, memorizing the creed, and reciting some prayers. **Tertullian** says, “They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all by-gone sins.”<sup>1326</sup> The **Apostolic Constitutions** also state: “he who is to be initiated into [Christ’s] death ought first to fast, and then to be baptized.”<sup>1327</sup> **St. Cyril the Great** says, “Prepare your hearts to accept the teachings in order to partake of the eternal heavenly sacraments. Pray with more perseverance for God to make you worthy of the eternal holy sacraments. Pray without ceasing day and night, and when you lose sleep from your eyes, free your mind to pray. If any sinful thought gets into you, turn your mind to meditate on the judgment, and then you will remember salvation. Offer all your minds to study so that you may despise the despicable matters.”

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<sup>1324</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7.3.39 (ANF 7:475–476).

<sup>1325</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letter* 20 (NPNF II/10:423).

<sup>1326</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20 (ANF 3:678).

<sup>1327</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7.2.22 (ANF 7:469).



## The Rites of Holy Baptism

### 688. What are the rites of the holy baptism?

Since the Early Church, baptism has always been rich with rites, profound in theological concepts, and powerful in prayers and effectiveness. Consequently, I wanted to gather some of these details from the Early Church, both in the east and west; as well as referring to the contemporary Coptic rite which bears the spirit of the Early Church and its spiritual and theological depth. Indeed, there are some minor differences in the rites from one Church to another. Therefore, I put together a general framework upon which all of them are built, while also highlighting the differences. I also present the theological and spiritual concepts behind every rite from a biblical and patristic perspective.

1. Preparation of the celebrant.
2. Examination of the candidates for baptism.
3. Learning the sign of the cross.
4. Recitations for exorcising evil spirits.
5. Removal of clothes.
6. Anointment of the candidate with oil.
7. Renunciation of the devil.
8. The mystery of the opening.
9. Confession of faith.
10. Sanctification of the water.
11. Pouring Chrism into the water.
12. Three-fold immersion.
13. Washing of the feet.
14. Anointment of the candidate with the Chrism.
15. Donning white garments.
16. Instruction of the sponsor.
17. Carrying candles.
18. Eating milk mixed with honey.
19. The prayer of untying the girdle.

### **689. How does the celebrating priest prepare for baptism?**

It is befitting for the celebrant — whether a bishop or a priest — to take part in the preparations with the baptism candidate, by prayer and fasting. When he begins in performing the sacrament he should be fasting (at least nine hours in the current Coptic rite). He also prays in his priestly service garments. The latter has been neglected of late. **St. Theodore of Mopsuestia** says to the candidate for baptism: “The priest approaches you, not in his regular clothes ... but is rather clothed in a gown of pure and splendid linen. His joyful clothing signifies the joy of the world you are proceeding towards in the future. The luminous color refers to the splendor that you will receive in the life to come.”<sup>1328</sup>

### **690. Who is responsible for examining the candidates for baptism?**

The bishop himself examines them immediately before baptism. It was mentioned in the Apostolic Tradition of **St. Hippolytus**: “When those who are to receive baptism are chosen their lives should be examined; whether they lived uprightly as catechumens, whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they were thorough in performing good works.”<sup>1329</sup> The examination does not check the behavioral side only but also the sincerity of his faith. **Origen** describes the level of stringency with which a catechumen should be examined, however they may have come to accept the faith, so that no one should be baptized without confirming the sincerity of his intentions.<sup>1330</sup> **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** compares this examination of the catechumens to soldiers who are enrolled in the army ready to fight the devil.<sup>1331</sup>

### **691. Why does the priest perform the laying on of hands in the shape of the cross?**

Christ used His hand to bless the children (Matt. 19:13, 15). At His ascension, He took His disciples out of Bethany where “He lifted up His hands and blessed them” (Luke 24:50). When He opened the eyes of the blind man, He “put His hands on his eyes” (Mark 8:25). In healing the sick and exorcizing demons, He laid His hands “on every one of them” (Luke 4:40). He used both hands on each one to bless, to heal, or to free them from unclean spirits as He placed His hands on them in the shape of the cross. Otherwise, why did He need to use both hands in every situation?

In any case, the priest lays his hands on the candidate for baptism to grant him a heavenly blessing, enlightenment for his inner sight, and liberation from the devil and all his powers. This is God’s work in the Holy Baptism. In his *Confessions*, **St. Augustine** refers to the practice of making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the candidate for baptism when

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<sup>1328</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003): pp. 47–48.

<sup>1329</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, *On the Apostolic Tradition* 20 (PP 22:105–106).

<sup>1330</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.51 (ANF 4:484–485).

<sup>1331</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 1.3, 3.3, 4.36, 21.24 (NPNF II/7).

he describes his own journey towards acceptance into the Church.<sup>1332</sup> He links the signing of the cross with the Church conceiving them in her womb: “You have not yet been born again by the Holy Baptism, but by the sign of the Cross you have been already conceived in the womb of your mother, the Church.”<sup>1333</sup> He also says that they are blessed by the sign of the cross, prayers, and the laying on of hands. He says that even if they did not yet partake of Christ’s body, they are receiving something sacred. He meant by this the bread that they eat. However, Bingham argues that it was holy salt that the baptism candidates used to taste as a symbol of the believers who are the salt of the earth.

## 692. What is the purpose of the recitations that are read to exorcise unclean spirits?

In the ancient baptismal liturgies, there were two explicit concepts: exorcising unclean spirits from the baptism candidate; and bringing him into Christ’s Kingdom. This is what we see in the baptism liturgies of the Coptic, Armenian, Byzantine, and Ethiopian rites. **Egeria** the Spanish nun, tells us that the candidate for baptism was subject to an exorcism ritual throughout Lent.<sup>1334</sup> **St. Gregory the Theologian** also says, “Do not reject the medicine of exorcism, nor refuse it because of its length. This too is a touchstone of your right disposition for grace.”<sup>1335</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** and **St. Theodore of Mopsuestia** describe how the candidate for baptism stands in fear, either standing with his hands lifted up or kneeling down, barefooted, standing on sackcloth, as one entreating God to deliver him from slavery to the devil and his angels.

**St. Theodore of Mopsuestia** says, “when the words called the words of exorcism are pronounced you stand perfectly quiet, as if you had no voice and as if you were still in fear and dread of the Tyrant ... and remain in that state in order to move the judge to mercy. And you take off your outer garment and stand barefooted in order to show yourself the state of the cruel servitude in which you served the devil for a long time, according to the rules of captivity and in which you did all his work for him according to his requirements ... As to the words of exorcism they have the power to induce you after having made up your mind to acquire such a great gain, not to remain idle and without work.”<sup>1336</sup>

<sup>1332</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 1.11.17, 8.2.4 (FOTC 21:18, 200 fn 29).

<sup>1333</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *De Symbole Sermon De Catechumens*.

<sup>1334</sup> Egeria, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria: A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary*, trans., Anne McGowan and Paul F Bradshaw (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018) 46.1: p. 113.

<sup>1335</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzen, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 40.27 On Holy Baptism (NPNF II/7:369).

<sup>1336</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord’s Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, trans., Alphonse Mingana (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933): p. 31.

In the Coptic rite, the priest prays on the oil to anoint the candidate saying, “Look upon Your creation, this oil, and let it become for the casting out of demons and their magic, sorcery and all idolatry ...” When he anoints the heart, hands, and back, he says, “May this oil bring to naught all assaults of the adversary. Amen.”

### **693. Why do candidates for baptism remove their clothes?**

It is the view of Jean Daniélou that across history, the baptism rite largely began outside the baptistery. Candidates for baptism were considered as strangers to the Church; but they began their entry into the baptistery by removing their clothes and being anointed with holy oil as preparation for their entry into the water of baptism after which, they would be members of the Church and wear white garments, as those who have gained entry to paradise and become children of the Kingdom.<sup>1337</sup>

As long as the candidate is still a catechumen, he is considered a stranger to the body of Christ and has not yet tasted the heavenly life. However, once he becomes a candidate for baptism, preparing for baptism, the gates of heaven are opened before him and he sees the Savior’s life-giving tomb so that he desires to be buried with Him that he may rise as a child of God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Here you are now in the hall of the palace and will be instantly led to the King.”<sup>1338</sup> “Immediately, Paradise will be opened to every one of you.”<sup>1339</sup>

### **694. Why are candidates for baptism anointed with oil?**

**The Canons of St. Hippolytus** say that one of the priests anoints the candidates for baptism after they have renounced the devil and before their immersion and confession of faith. They are anointed by the oil of exorcism,<sup>1340</sup> to be grafted in the olive tree, the Church, instead of the wild olive tree. This was affirmed by the holy Fathers and also by the liturgy itself. **St. Serapion’s Euchologion** says, “And we anoint with this oil those who approach this divine rebirth, imploring that our Lord Christ Jesus may work in it and reveal healing and strength-producing power through this oil [or, imploring that healing and strength-producing power may work in it and reveal our Lord Christ Jesus through this oil], and may heal their soul, body, spirit from every sign of sin and lawlessness or satanic taint.”<sup>1341</sup>

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<sup>1337</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1956): pp. 35–36.

<sup>1338</sup> PG 33:333A.

<sup>1339</sup> PG 33:357A.

<sup>1340</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003) Canon 19: p. 134.

<sup>1341</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003) 15: p. 130.

### 695. Why are so many Fathers and baptism liturgies concerned with renouncing the devil?

The candidate for baptism removes his clothes while facing the west, or the mother, father, or sponsor stands carrying the child on their left arm and facing the west. The candidate for baptism or his sponsor raises his right hand as if talking to Satan, declaring their renunciation openly to him and his dark kingdom.

When baptizing infants, the mother or the sponsor takes off the child's clothes and then carry him/her on their left arm while facing the west. The sponsor then raises their right hand and repeats after the priest certain words to renounce Satan. When baptizing adults, the candidate for baptism repeats the same words after the priest saying, "I renounce you Satan and all your unclean works and all your wicked angels and all your evil demons and all your power and all your abominable service and all your evil cunning and error and all your army and all your authority and all the rest of your impieties. I renounce you. I renounce you. I renounce you."

According to **Tertullian**, this renunciation was performed inside the baptismal font.<sup>1342</sup> But according to the **Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus**, it is done before getting into the water.<sup>1343</sup> The source of this rite according to **St. Basil the Great** is tradition:

"Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? By what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And from where did the custom of baptizing thrice come from? And as to the other customs of baptism from what Scripture do we derive the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in a silence out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation? Well had they learned the lesson that the awful dignity of the mysteries is best preserved by silence. What the uninitiated are not even allowed to look at was hardly likely to be publicly paraded about in written documents."<sup>1344</sup>

This is an essential part of the baptism rite. Many of the writings of the early Church refer to it and reveal its theological and spiritual basis. **Tertullian** says, "When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president [bishop], we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels."<sup>1345</sup> J. Jungmann believes that the word, "pomp" refers to the special procession that was carried out during feasts in the past, at the time when idols used to be carried in victorious processions, so that the devil appears as if he is the conqueror of the world, and as though

<sup>1342</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona (The Chaplet)* 3 (ANF 3:94) and *The Shows* 4 (ANF 3:81).

<sup>1343</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003) p. xiii.

<sup>1344</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (PP 42:104).

<sup>1345</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona (The Chaplet)* 3 (ANF 3:94).

those who are living in sin are walking in this procession as his soldiers. So, the baptism candidate declares that he has left behind this satanic camp and has become a member of God’s army to serve His Kingdom.<sup>1346</sup>

Some scholars understand the word “pomp” to refer to luxurious living and worldly glory or vain glory. **St. John Chrysostom** explains this word thus: “if we say from the heart: ‘I renounce you, Satan, and your pomps,’ He has received all that He asks. Therefore, let us say these words: ‘I renounce thee, Satan,’ knowing that we shall be called to account for them on that Day of Judgment; let us guard them, so that we may then repay in full what has been entrusted to our care. And the pomps of the devil are the theaters, the racecourses, every sinful observance of days, presages contained in chance utterances, and omens. And what in the world are omens, you ask? Often a man leaves his own house and sees a man who has one eye or who is lame, and counts it an omen. This is a pomp of the devil. Meeting up with the man does not make it an evil day, but living in sin does. Therefore, when you leave your house, guard against one thing only: see to it that sin does not meet up with you. For it is sin which trips us up, and apart from this there is no way in which the devil can hurt us.”<sup>1347</sup> Christians abstained from all kinds of amusements. At that time, these amusements were usually performed to honor the pagan gods. Even the winners in sports were crowned by the name of the gods.

The phrase “his angels” refers to our renunciation of the devil and all his followers: “Those named “his angels” are all those humans who glean from [Satan] some malice whereby they wrong others.”<sup>1348</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** explains this rite to the newly baptized saying, “But, you are bidden to say, with arm outstretched towards him as being present, ‘I renounce you, Satan.’ I also wish to say wherefore you stand to face the West; for it is necessary. Since the West is the region of sensible darkness, and he, being in the dark, has his dominion also in darkness ... What then did each of you stand up and say? ‘I renounce you, Satan,’ — you wicked and the cruelest tyrant! Meaning, ‘I fear your might no longer; for that Christ has overthrown, having partaken with me of flesh and blood. That through these He might by death destroy death that I might not be made subject to bondage forever.’ ‘I renounce you,’ — you crafty and the most subtle serpent. ‘I renounce you,’ — plotter as you are, who under the guise of friendship did contrive all disobedience, and work apostasy in our first parents. ‘I renounce you, Satan,’ — the artificer and partner of all wickedness. Then in a second sentence, you are taught to say, ‘And all your works.’ Now the works of Satan are all sin, which also you must renounce; — just as one who has escaped a tyrant has inevitably survived his weapons also. Then you say, ‘And all his pomp.’ Now the pomp of the devil is the madness of theatres,

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<sup>1346</sup> Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy, to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans., Francis A. Brunner (University of Notre Dame Press, 1959): p. 80.

<sup>1347</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2.51–53 (ACW 31:189) amended.

<sup>1348</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 13.8 quoted in Fredrick G. MacLeod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Routledge, 2009): p. 164.

and horse races, and hunting, and all such vanity. After this, you say, ‘And all your service.’ Now the service of the devil is prayer in idol temples; things are done in honor of lifeless idols.”<sup>1349</sup>

**Theodore of Mopsuestia** says that the candidate for baptism renouncing Satan in the presence of the bishop is like an accused person who declares his innocence before the judge. Since the beginning, Satan has always been trying to find any evidence against us, claiming that it is not our right to flee from his kingdom and that we are still his possession, since we are Adam’s offspring who fell under his authority. “Thus, it is befitting for us to hasten and to stand before the judge and claim our right that we do not belong to Satan but to God who created us from the beginning in His own image.”<sup>1350</sup>

Perhaps that is why the Church reads the Gospel of Christ’s temptation on the second Sunday of the Lent (Matt. 4:1–11), which is read in the presence of the candidates for baptism in the Liturgy of the Word. This is their first lesson on baptism being a triumph over Satan and a liberation from His power.

For this reason, also, candidates for baptism are anointed with oil after renouncing Satan and before entering the waters of baptism as a sign that they are soldiers and warriors against Satan. If confessing the faith is entry into a new covenant with God, then it is necessary, first, to renounce Satan. This means, to tear apart the covenant that we have established with the devil through sin.

We should consider that our war against the devil is not concluded by renouncing him, all his pomp, soldiers, and works; but because it continues, we are given strength against him with this oil. Immediately after baptism, we are anointed with the Chrism oil (Myron) that we may bear within us the Holy Spirit; Christ’s triumphant Spirit that He may support us in our warfare against the devil for the rest of our lives.

## 696. What is the mystery of opening?

**St. Ambrose** tells us about a ritual called “the opening.” It is performed by the priest, immediately before the entry of the candidate for baptism into the font. In that ritual, the priest touches the candidate’s ear and nostrils. St. Ambrose explains what this ritual meant: “These mysteries of ‘the opening’ were celebrated when the priest touched your ears and nostrils. What does this signify? In the Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ, when the deaf and dumb man was presented to Him, touched his ears and his mouth: the ears, because he was deaf; the mouth, because he was dumb. And He said: ‘Effetha’ (Mark 7.34). This is a Hebrew word, which in Latin means *Adaperire* (Open). Therefore, the priest has touched your ears, that your ears may be opened to the sermon and exhortation of the priest. But you say to me, ‘Why the nostrils?’ ... that you may receive a sweet savor of eternal godliness, and that you

<sup>1349</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Five Catechetical Lectures* (On the Mysteries) 1.4–8 (NPNF II/7:145–146).

<sup>1350</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 12.19.

may say, ‘We are the good odor of Christ’ (2 Cor. 2:15), as the holy Apostle said; and there may be in you the full fragrance of faith and devotion.”<sup>1351</sup>

### **697. How do candidates for baptism confess their faith?**

The candidate for baptism turns his face from the west to the east, declaring his affiliation to the kingdom of light, having denounced the kingdom of darkness. In other words, he accepts Christ after rejecting Satan. As **St. Ambrose** says, “You turn to the east. For he who renounces the devil, turns to Christ, looks at him with direct gaze.”<sup>1352</sup> The west is associated with the devil since he reigns in darkness as Christ Himself says: “But this is your hour and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). St. Paul the apostle says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Hades is the place where the devil resides along with his soldiers in the outer darkness. Christ, however, is associated with the east since He is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:1; Matt. 1:16) who gives light to those who are sitting in darkness. The Lord is also called the one who covers Himself with light as with a garment (Ps. 104:2), He is the reason for our enlightenment (Ps. 27:1, 43:3), His children are called “children of light” (Luke 16:8), and the instruments of salvation are also called “the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12).

The candidate for baptism, facing the east, looks at Christ Himself who is the East (Zech. 6:12) and the Sun of righteousness and justice (Mal. 4:2). By turning to the east, we are looking towards the old Paradise, which God planted for us in Eden towards the east.<sup>1353</sup> Our hearts are also filled with longing for the second coming of Christ who ascended to the east and will return in the same way (Matt. 24:27, Acts 1:11), crying out with **St. Methodius of Olympus**: “Let us all hurry towards the east, let us be clothed in white garments and let us hold in our hands our lanterns.”<sup>1354</sup>

Note that this rite consists of two parts: facing the west to renounce Satan; and then facing the east to accept Christ. This was the clear and central principle found in all baptism liturgies in the early Church. Confessing the faith has a central theological importance in baptism.

**First:** Christian baptism was referred to as baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16; 19:5) where the candidate for baptism, or his sponsor in the case of infants, confesses their faith in our Lord Jesus the Savior. Then, the person can approach the mystery of the cross and may partake in His burial and resurrection. Therefore, the confession of the crucified Christ who rose from the dead is the cornerstone of all the creeds used in baptism since the beginning of the Church, as the apostle says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be

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<sup>1351</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 1.1.2–3 (FOTC 44:269–270).

<sup>1352</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1956): p. 31.

<sup>1353</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (PP 42:104).

<sup>1354</sup> *Mart. Polyc.* 9.3.



saved” (Rom. 10:9). The apostle considers this the cornerstone of the faith he received: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). Pagans knew this, which is why their concern was to oblige the faithful to renounce Christ.

**Second:** Since baptism is the gate by which one becomes a member of the Church, the confession of faith is the cornerstone on which the Church is built and is the reason for her existence.

**Third:** The confession of faith is an entry into a divine covenant or like a signed contract with God and is kept in a book in heaven. **St. Theodore of Mopsuestia** says of this: “We establish agreements and covenants with our Lord God by confessing the faith. By the mediation of the priest, we are prepared to enter His house, to see Him, to know Him and for Him to dwell within us that we may be counted among the citizens of that city and are counted trustworthy.”<sup>1355</sup> Again, he says, “By confessing the faith, you associate yourself with God by the bishop and you enter into a covenant in which you declare that you will be persistent in seeking the love of the divine nature.”<sup>1356</sup>

In the current Coptic rite, the baptized or the sponsor publicly repeats the main aspects of the faith after the celebrant priest before baptism. In the early Church, the candidate would declare his or her faith from inside the waters of baptism. This was done in the form of questions that the priest or bishop would ask and to which the candidate would respond, as is mentioned in the **Canons of St. Hippolytus**.<sup>1357</sup>

### 698. What are the main articles of faith in the baptismal confession of faith?

The early Church focused on faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as well as the confession of the catholic (universal) Church and the remission of sins. The **Canons of St. Hippolytus** state that candidates for baptism should face the east and say, “I believe and kneel before You and before Your greatness, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Then, they are immersed in the water and stand facing the east. Another priest lays his hands on their heads and asks them: “Do you believe in God the Father the Pantocrator?” They would then respond saying, “I believe” and are immersed for the first time.

After the first immersion, they are asked: “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, who died and rose from the dead on the third day, who ascended to the heavens and sat at the right hand of the Father and will come

<sup>1355</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003): p. 46.

<sup>1356</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 13.1.

<sup>1357</sup> E. C. Whitaker and M. E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3rd ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003) Canon 19: p. 133.

to judge the living and the dead?” And when they respond saying, “I believe,” they are immersed for the second time.

When they are asked, “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?” They would respond saying: “I believe” and are immersed for the third and last time.

With every immersion, the priest says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” After that, they are anointed with the holy Chrism (or Myron oil) and they put on their clothes and enter the church. They kiss the hands of the bishop and greet him with the holy kiss and then the eucharist is offered.

**Origen**, in his commentary on St. John’s Gospel, says that if any of these basic points are missed in the confession of faith, the whole faith is lost.<sup>1358</sup>

In the current **Coptic rite**, the candidate for baptism (or his parents and/or sponsors) repeat the following words after the priest to renounce Satan, saying: “I renounce you Satan and all your unclean works and all your wicked angels and all your evil demons and all your power and all your abominable service and all your evil cunning and error and all your army and all your authority and all the rest of your impieties. I renounce you. I renounce you. I renounce you.”

Then the priest breathes three times into the candidate’s face while saying, “Come out, O unclean spirit.” After that, the candidate looks towards the east and raises his hand to repeat after the priest: “I confess You, O Christ my God, and all Your saving laws, and all Your living service and all Your life giving works.”

Then the priest will teach him or her the faith as follows: “I believe in one God, God the Father the Pantocrator and His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Holy Spirit the Giver of Life, and the resurrection of the flesh and the one, only, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Amen.”

Then the candidate and/or sponsor are asked if they believe three times, to which they respond, “I believe” each time. All this occurs before they are baptized in the water.

### **699. How are the waters of baptism consecrated?**

Since Christ was baptized in the Jordan River, the Apostles also started baptizing in rivers or in any running waters. **Tertullian** says that St. Peter the Apostle baptized those who accepted faith in the Tiber River in Rome: “The One Spirit sanctifies the waters everywhere. The Spirit grants the waters the power of sanctification through prayer and invocation.” However, baptism in public places exposed believers and priests to many troubles. It also

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<sup>1358</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Books 13–32) 32.16 (FOTC 89:345).

exposed the holy rites to defamation by pagans, and therefore baptism was later performed only in baptisteries inside churches.

The **Didache**, which dates from the first century A. D., says, “The procedure for baptizing is as follows. After repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’. If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>1359</sup>

**St. Basil** says, “Of the dogmas and proclamations that are guarded in the Church ... we hold some from the teaching of the Scriptures, and others we have received in mystery as teachings of the tradition of the apostles ... [for example], We bless the water of baptism ...”<sup>1360</sup> The Fathers spoke of consecrating the waters of baptism by summoning the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the sign of the cross. They also explicitly revealed the efficiency of that in the baptized life. Here are some examples:

**Tertullian** says, “All waters ... attain the sacramental power of sanctification for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.”<sup>1361</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “But the water ought to be first cleansed and sanctified by the bishop that it may be able to wash away in its baptism the sins of the man who is baptized since the Lord says through Ezekiel: ‘And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be cleansed from all your impurities and from all your idols. And I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you’ (Ezek. 36:25–26).”<sup>1362</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “When going down, therefore, into the water, think not of the bare element (of the water), but look for salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit: for without both, you cannot possibly be made perfect. It is not I that say this, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power in this matter: for He says, Unless a man be born a of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Neither does he that is baptized with water, but not found worthy of the Spirit, receive the grace in perfection, nor if a man be virtuous in his deeds, but receive not the seal by water, shall he enter into the kingdom of heaven. A bold saying, but not mine, for it is Jesus who has declared it.”<sup>1363</sup>

<sup>1359</sup> The Didache in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 7: p. 194.

<sup>1360</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (PP 42:104).

<sup>1361</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 4 (ANF 3:671).

<sup>1362</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 70.1 (FOTC 51:259–260) amended.

<sup>1363</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.4 (NPNF II/7:15).

**St. Augustine** says, “Take away the word [of the consecration], and the water is neither more nor less than water. The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament.”<sup>1364</sup>

**The Euchology of St. Serapion** says, “King and Lord of all and creator of all, through the descent of your only-begotten Jesus Christ you have graciously given salvation to all created nature. Through the coming of your inexpressible word you have redeemed that which is formed, having been created by you. Look now from heaven and gaze upon these waters and fill them with holy spirit. Let your inexpressible word come to be in them. Let it change their operation and make them generative, being filled with your grace, so that the mystery now being accomplished may not be found empty in those being born again, but may fill with divine grace all those who go down and are baptized.”<sup>1365</sup>

Thus, the role of the Holy Trinity is manifested in the sanctification of the waters. We cannot forget also the role of the sign of the cross in this matter. **St. Augustine** explains that the sign of the cross is made on the waters of baptism as well as on the oil of the Chrism and on the Eucharist.<sup>1366</sup>

#### **700. What prayers are recited while pouring the Myron oil (Chrism) into the water?**

At the end of the prayers of consecrating the water, the priest pours the Myron oil three times into the water, in the form of the cross, to consecrate the water, saying, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Blessed be God the Father, the Pantocrator. Amen. Blessed be His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. Amen.”

Then he stirs the water while reciting some verses from the book of Psalms: “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, the God of glory thundered; the Lord is upon water. Alleluia. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. Alleluia” (Ps. 29:3–4); “Look to him and be radiant, so your faces shall never be ashamed. Come O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Alleluia” (Ps. 34:11); “We went through fire and water, yet You have brought us forth to a spacious place. Alleluia” (Ps. 66:12); “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Alleluia. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Alleluia” (Ps. 50:7, 9–10); “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. Alleluia” (Ps. 132:13).

These psalms were specifically chosen under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to consecrate the water by the power of the Spirit. These psalms can be applied in the life of the person

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<sup>1364</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 80.3 (NPNF I/7:344).

<sup>1365</sup> The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis, in Whitaker, E. C. and Johnson, M. E., *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (revised 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003): p. 129.

<sup>1366</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 118.5 (NPNF I/7:432).

being baptized. The waters bear the voice of the Lord that thunders in one's life, abolishing sin and establishing His Kingdom once again. In the waters, the believer receives the mystery of enlightenment, and his face is no longer ashamed. He becomes a child of God, who listens to His commandments and fears the Heavenly Father. The believer goes into the water and goes through the fire of the Spirit and the holy waters to pass over into the comfort of the new paradise. In this water, he is washed internally and is purified. Therefore, he carries a new heart and a new spirit. In this water, God declares His choice of the church "Zion," and accepts the believer to be a living member in it.

Indeed, it is a unique text that powerfully and simply brings us to all the secrets of baptism through the psalms. As for the custom of pouring the Chrism into the waters of baptism, as well as anointing the person being baptized with it, it is a very old custom. D. Stone says that this custom started in Egypt in the late fifth century and was found in the west in the sixth century.<sup>1367</sup> **St. Dionysius the Areopagite** says that the bishop "goes himself toward that mother of all divine adoption. With sacred invocations he consecrates the water, completing this by pouring the most holy ointment three times into it, each pouring being made in the form of a cross."<sup>1368</sup>

#### **701. When did the baptism by immersion start?**

The custom of immersion began with Christ Himself when He went into the Jordan River and came up from it as scripture says: "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water" (Matt. 3:16). Historically, both Eastern and Western Churches performed baptism by immersion. But the Eastern Churches preserved tradition while the West kept it only until the time of Thomas Aquinas. When something is dyed, it is completely renewed. Likewise, baptism is a renewal as the person completely takes off the old man with his deeds and that is why baptism is done by immersion so that the person may be stripped to put on the new man. In baptism, we become naked like Adam in Paradise: "here is nakedness, and there was nakedness; there, however, one that had sinned was made naked, because he sinned, but here, one is made naked, that he may be set free. Then, man put off the glory which he had; now, he puts off the old man; and before going up (to the contest), puts him off as easily, as it were his garments."<sup>1369</sup> By immersion, the person is surrounded with water on all sides; likewise, the Spirit surrounds the soul from all sides.

Immersion is also necessary because baptism is a burial with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Ancient baptisteries, in the east and the west, still witness to baptism by immersion. They were huge and some of them had stairs towards the east and the west, one side was used by the candidate for baptism, while the priest or bishop used the other so that he could place his

<sup>1367</sup> Darwell Stone, *Holy Baptism* (Longmans, Green, 1899): p. 169.

<sup>1368</sup> The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 2.3.7 (396C), in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press): p. 203.

<sup>1369</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 6 (NPNF I/13:287).

hands on the candidate's head during the immersion. The three immersions declare that baptism is in the name of the Holy Trinity. It also resembles the burial with Christ for three days so that the baptized may bear the power of the resurrection with Christ (Col. 2:12). **St. Jerome** says, “we are immersed three times that the mystery of the Trinity might be seen to be one, and we are not baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but in one name because God is understood ... although we are baptized three times because of the mystery of the Trinity, nevertheless, it is reckoned one baptism.”<sup>1370</sup>

### **702. Do we have the custom of washing feet during baptism?**

**St. Ambrose** spoke of a custom that was performed only in Milan, where the bishop or priest (who is baptizing) would gird himself and wash the feet of the person being baptized.<sup>1371</sup> It is a strange custom since the baptized person emerges from the baptismal font already clean and does not need his feet to be washed at this time. It is possible that the priests wanted to announce to the baptized the fact that the Church will continue washing his feet during his life, even after his baptism.

### **703. Is the newly baptized person anointed with the Holy Chrism?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** has a full lecture about the anointing<sup>1372</sup> with the Holy Myron (Chrism). This occurs immediately after baptism, being a sacrament on its own. **St. Theophilus of Antioch** says that are called Christians because we are anointed by God.<sup>1373</sup> **St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “It is necessary also for him who is baptized to be anointed that, having received chrism, that is anointing, he can be anointed of God and have in himself the grace of Christ.”<sup>1374</sup>

The priest anoints all the body members, announcing the sanctification of this body and this soul, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Then he prays, “O Lord who alone are mighty, who performs every wonder and nothing is impossible for You, rather by Your will, Your power works in all things. Grant the Holy Spirit in the pouring out of the holy Myron. Let it be a life-giving seal and a confirmation to Your servants, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Through whom the glory is due unto You ...”

After the priest anoints the person thirty-six times from the top of the head to the smallest toe, the priest then lays his hands on him/her and says, “May you be blessed with the blessing of the heavenly and the blessing of the angels. May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you, and in His name ...” — he then breathes in the face and says — “receive the Holy Spirit and be a

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<sup>1370</sup> St. Jerome, “Commentary on Ephesians” 4.2 in *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford University Press, 2002): pp. 169–170.

<sup>1371</sup> See St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 3.5 (FOTC 44) and *On the Mysteries* 31, 32 (NPNF II/10).

<sup>1372</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Five Catechetical Lectures (On the Mysteries)* 3 (NPNF II/7:149–150).

<sup>1373</sup> St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 1.12 (ANF 2:92).

<sup>1374</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 70.2 (FOTC 51:260).

purified vessel through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom is the glory with His good Father and the Holy Spirit.”

Here we notice three features of the Coptic rite: the use of the Holy Myron; the laying of the hands for blessing; and the breath of the Spirit in the person’s face.

#### **704. Why do the newly baptized wear white clothes?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** calls the baptismal font, “the inner chamber of the Bridegroom,” through which Christ calls the human soul. He takes her to Himself as a bride, after cleaning, dressing, and beautifying her by His beauty, and then she becomes a queen, carrying the King’s glory within her. As she emerges from the water, she is dressed in a splendid white garment, which is the best robe the Father gave to the prodigal son who returned to Him (Luke 15:22). This does not mean that there is a second or third best robe, but it was called the best robe because of its beauty, status, and value. It is the robe of the eternal wedding, without which the guests are cast out so that they may not partake in the wedding of the King’s son (Luke 22:11).

The white garment declares the fact that the person reflects the divine glory. In the Lord’s transfiguration, “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow” (Mark 9:3). In heaven, the twenty-four incorporeal presbyters are clothed in white robes (Rev. 4:4); all the triumphant are arrayed in white robes (Rev. 6:13); and the martyrs were given white robes (Rev. 6:11). The Lord told the angel of Laodicean Church to repent and to buy for himself white garments (Rev. 3:18). The color white is the color of truth, according to **St. Clement** who talks about the truth, purity, and victory.<sup>1375</sup> **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Angels shall dance around you, and say, ‘Who is this that comes up in white array, leaning upon her beloved?’ (Song. 8:5).”<sup>1376</sup> In the Coptic Rite, while the priest is clothing the baptized, he says, “A garment of the eternal and incorruptible life. Amen.”

#### **705. What is the rite of the crown and the girdle?**

This rite in its original form is not currently practiced although it may still be found in all the printed books that have the prayers of the baptism rite. What has survived of this rite is the girding the baptized person with a girdle. The priest also prays over a crown before placing it on the person’s head, saying, “O Lord, God, the Pantocrator, the Father of our Lord God, and the Savior Jesus Christ, who has crowned His holy Apostles and His prophets and martyrs who have pleased You with unfading crowns. You also now, bless these crowns, which we have prepared to set upon Your servants who have been reconciled by the Holy Baptism, that they may be united: crowns for glory and honor, amen. Crowns of virtue and righteousness, amen. Crowns of wisdom and understanding, amen. Strengthen them that may

<sup>1375</sup> See St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 11:53–55 (FOTC 23:242–243).

<sup>1376</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.16 (NPNF II/7:18).

fulfill your ordnances and Your commandments, to attain the good things of the Kingdom of heaven, in Christ, our Lord. To whom be the glory ...”

The priest places the crown upon the baptized person’s head, after girding him/her with the girdle while saying: “Set, O Master, Lord God upon Your servants: Crowns from heaven, amen. Crowns of glory, amen. Crowns of invincible and unconquerable faith, amen. Crowns of confirmation, amen. Crowns of righteousness, amen. Grant Your servants that they may be filled with the grace of Your Holy Spirit through the compassion and love-of-mankind of Your only begotten Son Jesus Christ ...”

Here, we need to pause a little bit to observe the fact that this is very similar to the rites of the Holy Matrimony, when the bridegroom is girded with a girdle like the one he received in baptism and the couple is also crowned. It is as if the Church views the sacraments of baptism and chrismation as the path to the heavenly Bridegroom. The groom is girded with a girdle as a sign of his hidden unity with the Bridegroom and with the Church, being a vital member in it. He is also crowned together with his bride because they together have become the true King’s bride.

The crown offered to us by God is His fiery Holy Spirit who unites us with our Bridegroom, and grants us victory over sin. He offers us the crown of the spiritual, marital life and of victory. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says that the apostles “partook of fire, not of burning but of saving fire; of fire which consumes the thorns of sins, but gives safety to the soul. This is now coming upon you also, and that to strip away and consume your sins which are like thorns, and to brighten yet more that precious possession of your souls, and to give you grace ... He sat upon them in the form of fiery tongues, that they might crown themselves with new and spiritual diadems by fiery tongues upon their heads (Acts 2:3).”<sup>1377</sup>

#### **706. What is the commandment to the sponsor?**

Since the baptized person has become a member of the holy body of Christ, he has become a child of God and the Church, and a holy temple for the Holy Spirit. Thus, he has the right to participate in the Church’s worship. The Church hands him over to the sponsor, who commits to nurture him with the milk of the undefiled faith.

#### **707. What does the procession of the newly baptized person while carrying lit candles mean?**

This procession signifies the spiritual joy of conquering the devil and his powers, as well as spiritual enlightenment. This procession was very joyful in the early Church when those who were new to the faith receive the resurrected life in baptism on the eve of the resurrection feast. How great was the people’s joy! They witnessed for themselves Christ’s Church which

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<sup>1377</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 17.15 (NPNF II/7:128).



never grows old as a fruitful vine. They see the white garments and each of them remembers his holy garment that he received when he was baptized, as a token of the heavenly garment. When they see the lit candles or torches, they lift their eyes to see the True Light and remember that they are the children of the Light, and so evil deeds are not befitting of them.

The Fathers explained how the darkness of the night disappeared because of all the torches and candles. Even when the sun rose, everyone inside the church could not tell night from day, for the church became filled with light like heaven.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**<sup>1378</sup> says that the heavens rejoice and the angels sing, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and his sins are covered” (Ps. 32:1). The Church sings, “Worthy, worthy, worthy.” Then everyone goes in with the believers so that the Church is filled of them and they all rejoice in Christ’s resurrection which granted all humanity the power of the resurrection.

#### **708. What about the custom of feeding the newly baptized a mixture of milk and honey?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** does not mention the custom that Bingham<sup>1379</sup> describes, of the newly baptized greeting one another with a holy kiss and eating a mixture of milk and honey after they emerge from the baptismal water. **Tertullian**<sup>1380</sup> mentions the custom of eating milk and honey. Perhaps drinking milk symbolized the pure and incorruptible teaching that the Church gives to her children through her faith, rites, and worship. Honey symbolizes Christ’s commandments that are sweet in His children’s mouths as they are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

#### **709. What is the prayer of loosening the girdle?**

In the Coptic rite, the priest usually assists those who have been baptized in putting on the white garments as well as girding them with a girdle and placing a crown on their heads.<sup>1381</sup> The white garments resemble the new nature, which was granted to them, with its angelic purity. The girdle resembles the relationship between the Church and the baptized person, being a vital member in it. The crown is a sign of victory over Satan and enjoyment of divine glories.

In the rites of the early Church, when the newly baptized took communion (usually on the resurrection feast), they remained to the eighth day in the church clothed in their white garments. They rejoice in that week because of their new spiritual birth and hence the week was called, “the week of white garments.” This tradition was preserved in the Coptic Church

<sup>1378</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 1 (NPNF II/7:6).

<sup>1379</sup> Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church: in Ten Volumes* (University Press, 1855): Volume 4, Book 12.4–6.

<sup>1380</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona (The Chaplet)* 3 (ANF3).

<sup>1381</sup> Unfortunately, this tradition has disappeared, even though it is preserved in current books of rites, which suggests that it was practiced in Egypt until recently.

in some churches in Upper Egypt but was neglected in the big cities (in Lower Egypt). Old manuscripts and modern church books preserve a rite that is performed on the eighth day of the holy baptism when the liturgy of “loosening the girdle” is prayed, during which the Church offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who granted the person who was baptized this great gift. The Church prays for him to remain steadfast and to grow in the divine grace. After the prayers and supplications, the baptized person is bathed in blessed water, where he washes his white garment and girdle, and then the water is disposed in the sea, river, or pure field.

We can compare this beautiful, simple rite with the “Bathing Prayer” which is prayed on the eighth day of a child’s birth. Even though this prayer is still practiced today, the readings in the modern books are different than those in the old manuscripts. In my comparison, I will refer to the ones from St. Anthony’s monastery from a manuscript dated 13<sup>th</sup> of Thout 1372 A. M. (1655 A.D.) and copied from a manuscript in St. Mary’s Church in Haret Zuweila, dated 1096 A. M. (1379 A. D.).

On the eighth day of the birth of the child, the Church prays **the Bathing Prayer**, as we thank God for the newborn child. The priest together with the parents, decide on the name of the newborn as the Church is the mother of all humanity, from the moment they are born, even before their baptism. The Church thanks God for His creation and care for every detail, including the process of choosing a name for the newborn. On the eighth day after the baptism, a sacrifice of thanksgiving is offered for the child’s spiritual birth and membership in the Church, being a child of God, and a member in the body of Christ.

In one tradition, the Pauline epistle is read after the thanksgiving prayer, without Psalm 50, while in another tradition, this Psalm is prayed. For during the Bathing Prayer, the Church offers the liturgy as a sacrifice of praise and joy because of the newborn, while awaiting his entry into the waters of baptism. As for the Liturgy of loosening the girdle, after the newborn is baptized and has received the spiritual white garment, he ought to preserve this purity through the continuous act of repentance.

In the Bathing Prayer, the Pauline epistle talks about the circumcision of the flesh (Phil. 3:1–9), which was performed on the eighth day in the Old Testament. In this passage, St. Paul explains that we should not have confidence in the flesh and the righteousness of the law, but in the faith of Christ Jesus, our true righteousness. For if we were born according to the flesh, we do need the new spiritual birth, so that “we worship God in the Spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). As for the second practice, the Pauline epistle is about the crossing of the Red Sea in the cloud, when all ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink from the Rock which was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1–4). The Church declares to the baptized, that he has received what the people of the Old Testament could only enjoy through shadows and symbols. The baptized person did not cross the Red Sea, but holy healing waters. He was not liberated from Pharaoh’s slavery,

but from the authority of Satan. He did not pass in the cloud, but the Holy Spirit now dwells in him. He did not eat the manna, but delights in Christ Jesus Himself, the true Manna.

In the first tradition, the Church asks the parents to thank God for His gift, and to offer spiritual vows, oblations, and prayers, which will support their child until he grows in grace and stature: “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. I will go into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered.” In the second tradition, the Psalm that is read blesses the baptized person for the gift of forgiveness which he has received and which he ought to keep: “Blessed is he whose sins were forgiven, whose sins were covered. Blessed is the man whom God did not consider his sins, nor was deceit was found in his mouth.”

During the Bathing Prayer, the passage from the gospel about the circumcision of Christ is read, as He enters the altar and is carried by Simeon the elder, whose eyes were opened by seeing the salvation which God gave to all the nations (Luke 2:21–35). It is as if the Church is affirming to the parents the necessity of spiritually circumcising their child in Christ, to be held by the heavenly arms, and to delight in dwelling in the temple of God, becoming a blessing for many. As for the loosening of the girdle, the gospel of John’s baptism is read (Matt. 3:1–6), who prepared the path for the Lord by repentance, so that the baptized person could be in a continuous state of repentance so as not to lose the fruit of baptism.

During the Bathing prayer, the priest asks the Lord to bless the child and to prepare him to receive the Holy Baptism: “We ask and entreat Your goodness for Your servant ... Bless him/her with all heavenly blessings. Bless also his/her birth. May his/her days be lengthened according to Your grace. Let him/her grow and increase a hundred fold and sixty fold and thirty fold. May his/her parents rejoice and be glad for his/her birth like Zacharias and Elizabeth unto whom You have granted John the prophet. And at the appointed time, may he/she be worthy of the washing of the new birth unto forgiveness of his/her sins, preparing him/her to be a temple for Your Holy Spirit.”

In loosening the girdle, we thank God for the gift of enlightenment, which the baptized has received, praying that he might remain steadfast in the orthodox faith to the end, and be ready for the eternal life and the Kingdom of heaven through Christ Jesus our Lord: “O Master Lord, our God, Giver of peace and blessing, to whom alone belongs goodness and love of mankind. Who has blessed us and sanctified us and enlightened us with the light of His Godhead. Who has made His servants worthy to receive the ineffable light from on high of our Christ Jesus, our Savior. Enlighten them with the light of the blessing, purify them, bless them, and renew them by Your grace through the baptism they have received in the power of Your life-giving Holy Spirit ... Bless them with Your blessing and confirm them in Your orthodox faith unto the end. Bring them to maturity and adulthood. May they be guarded by good angels unto the end. Fill them with knowledge and every understanding ... Make them worthy of the eternal life and the kingdom of the heavens in Christ Jesus our Lord ...”

During the Bathing Prayer, we sing Psalms 148–149, and both traditions include the Lord’s Prayer, the absolution, the blessing of the water by the sign of the cross, then Psalm 150, and the concluding blessing after the child is bathed.

**710. Why can baptism not be repeated?**

Baptism is a spiritual new birth. Just as humans are physically born once, they are also spiritually born once. If the person falls, he repents, which is called a new birth.

**711. What happens to the person who, because of carelessness, falls into sin after baptism?**

St. Peter says, “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20). This does not mean that there is no salvation for them, for repentance is the path by which one can set himself straight, even at the very last moments of his life.

**712. What is the baptism of blood?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “If any man receive not Baptism, he has not salvation; except only Martyrs, who even without the water receive the kingdom. For when the Savior, in redeeming the world by His Cross, was pierced in the side, He shed forth blood and water; that men, living in times of peace, might be baptized in water, and, in times of persecution, in their own blood. For martyrdom also the Savior is wont to call a baptism, saying, ‘Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ (Mark 10:38).”<sup>1382</sup>

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<sup>1382</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.10 (NPNF II/7:16).

## 18

# The Sacrament of Chrismation

### 713. What is the role of the Holy Chrism in the life of the believer?

In the sacrament of baptism, the believer experiences the work of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism, receives the new birth, and acquires the nature of the new man according to the image of his Creator. The believer is born as a child under the faithful care of the Church and is in constant need of growth and maturity to be truly prepared for the eternal wedding. Then his soul becomes the bride who daily reflects the light of her Bridegroom, the King of kings. All this is what the word of God as well as the Church Fathers' commentaries, would like us to experience through the chrismation.

**St. Macarius the Great** says, "And thus the commandments of the Lord being fulfilled by us through His Spirit, who alone knows the will of the Lord, and the Spirit having perfected us in Himself and Himself perfected in us, when we are once cleansed from every defilement and spot of sin, He will present our souls pure and faultless, like fair brides, to Christ, we resting in God in His kingdom, and God resting in us world without end."<sup>1383</sup>

Our God wishes to make from His people a heavenly queen, bearing the icon of her Bridegroom, the King of kings. He grants us the daily experience of the work of the Holy Spirit within us, whom we have received in the holy sacrament of chrismation.

### 714. How did the Apostles perform this sacrament?

While the apostles were baptizing, they laid their hands on the baptized, praying for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–6). Also, bishops laid their hands on the believers, immediately after their baptism, so that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the number of those desiring to join the Church of Christ, as well as those born in Christian families, increased, priests began to anoint the newly baptized with the Chrism oil. The word "Chrism" is a Greek (and Coptic) word meaning "perfume" or "ointment." This fragrant oil is a mixture of perfumes and spices, sanctified by God's word and prayer, and prepared by bishops. The newly baptized is anointed thirty-six times by the sign of the cross on all their members. This anointing fills one's entire being with the Holy Spirit and he becomes the Lord's anointed. However, this anointing does not replace the laying on of hands. In the West, the Chrism or Myron, is known as the sacrament of confirmation. In the early Church, it was known as "the seal of the Spirit" and was administered together with Baptism.

What does this anointing over all the body members point to? Anointing the forehead points to the sanctification of thoughts, anointing the back points to the sanctification of the

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<sup>1383</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 19.9: p. 162.

heart and desires, anointing the eyes, the ears, and the lips points to the sanctification of the senses, anointing the hands and feet points to the sanctification of the believer's deeds and actions.

### **715. What is the role of the sacraments of baptism and chrismation?**

In baptism, we enjoy the new birth and the forgiveness of sins; while in chrismation, we receive the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. Since the two sacraments are often performed at the same time, some Fathers talk about baptism in the broader sense which includes chrismation.

In the writings of **Origen**, he demonstrates both the specific and the broad meaning of baptism. He says, "In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was given by the imposition of the apostles' hands in baptism."<sup>1384</sup> This is the broad meaning of baptism, when combining both sacraments together. He continues later, "Lastly, for this reason was the grace and revelation of the Holy Spirit bestowed by the imposition of the apostles' hands after baptism."<sup>1385</sup> This is the specific meaning of baptism. The two phrases complete each other, illustrating the distinction between the two sacraments while being connected to each other.

**Miltiades of Rome** in the fourth century says, "The Holy Spirit, Who comes down on the waters of Baptism bearing salvation in His flight, bestows at the font, the fullness of innocence; but in Confirmation He confers an increase of grace. In Baptism we are born again unto life; after Baptism we are strengthened."<sup>1386</sup>

**Tertullian** in the second century, says, "The hand is laid on us, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through benediction ... Then, over our cleansed and blessed bodies willingly descends from the Father that Holiest Spirit."<sup>1387</sup>

In the fourth century, **Pacian of Barcelona** distinguished between the two sacraments saying, "For by baptism sins are washed away; by chrism the Holy Spirit is poured out upon [the individual]. Yet both of these are obtained through the action and words of the bishop. And so it is that the whole man is born again and renewed in Christ."<sup>1388</sup>

**St. Augustine** also distinguishes between baptism and chrismation, calling the former "spiritual birth" and the latter "nourishment of the Spirit." In baptism, the believer is born by the Spirit and receives the forgiveness of sins. The first gift prepares the way for the other gifts of the Spirit. It is the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit Himself by whom we are

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<sup>1384</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1.3.2 (ANF 4:252).

<sup>1385</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1.3.7 (ANF 4:254).

<sup>1386</sup> Miltiades of Rome or Pope Melchiades: quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3.62.1.

<sup>1387</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 8 (ANF 3:672).

<sup>1388</sup> Pacian of Barcelona, *On Baptism* 6 (FOTC 99:92).

cleansed and are forgiven. He dwells in us to help us in every good deed, for our growth and our perfection.<sup>1389</sup>

### 716. Can Baptism be accomplished without the work of the Holy Spirit?

**St. Cyprian** says, “Water alone is not able to cleanse sins and sanctify man unless accompanied by the Holy Spirit ... there can be no baptism without the Holy Spirit, for baptism is never gifted without the Spirit.”

### 717. What is do the laying on of hands and chrismation mean?

The laying on of hands is a sign of the transfer of power, not from one person to another, but from God, the source of all power and grace, to the one devoted to the divine work, just as Moses the prophet did by laying his hands on Joshua based on the Lord’s command (Num. 27:18). The apostles also did so for the Holy Spirit to descend upon those who had been baptized (Acts 8:17–18). This mystery is also called, the “seal of the Spirit,” the “sacrament of confirmation,” or “chrismation.” The laying of hands is used in ordinations (Acts 6:6; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Tim. 4:14); in absolutions (1 Tim. 5:22); and in the unction of the sick (Mark 16:18). St. Paul the Apostle considered “the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands” to be one of the elementary principles of Christ (Heb. 6:1–2) or one of the basics of the Christian life.

Paul the Apostle uses four Greek terms in 2 Corinthians regarding the anointing of the Holy Spirit: establishment (or confirmation); chrism; seal; and guarantee of the Spirit. He says, “Now He who **establishes** us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us is God, who also has **sealed** us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a **guarantee**” (2 Cor. 1:21–22).

**Tertullian** in the second century talks about chrismation as an established custom in his days, connected to baptism and the laying of hands. He says, “After this, when we have issued from the font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction ... the unction runs carnally, (*i.e.* on the body,) but profits spiritually; in the same way as the *act* of baptism itself too is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, *but* the *effect* spiritual, in that we are freed from sins. In the next place the hand is laid on us, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through benediction.”<sup>1390</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “For those who had believed in Samaria had believed in the true faith and had been baptized within by the deacon, Philip, whom the same Apostles had sent, in the Church, which is one and to which alone it is permitted to give the grace of baptism and to absolve sins (cf. Acts 8:14–17). And, therefore, it was not necessary for those who had

<sup>1389</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume III: Sermons 51–94*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1991) 71.19, 33: pp. 257–258, 266–267.

<sup>1390</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 7–8 (ANF 3:672).

received legitimate and ecclesiastical baptism to be baptized again, but only that which was lacking was supplied by Peter and John, after having prayed for them and imposed hands upon them that the Holy Spirit should be invoked and infused into them.”<sup>1391</sup>

**St. Augustine** also talks about the laying on of hands and chrismation in connection with the Holy Spirit as the gift of God, and not of the disciples personally, “For no one of His disciples gave the Holy Spirit, since they prayed that He might come upon those upon whom they laid their hands [Acts 19:6]: they did not give Him themselves.”<sup>1392</sup>

### **718. Why is the Chrism often referred to as God’s seal upon the soul?**

A seal was a common sign of ownership. Some of those devoted to pagan gods would sometimes seal themselves with a mark on their bodies, bearing the name of the god to which they belonged and by which they are protected. Baptism in the Spirit is the unseen seal of incorruptibility in Christ.<sup>1393</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “‘And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption’ (Eph. 4:30). ‘In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory’ (Eph. 1:13–14).”

He also says, “... those who are baptized in the Church are offered to the bishops of the Church and, through our prayer and the imposition of hands, may receive the Holy Spirit and be signed with the seal of the Lord.”<sup>1394</sup>

And he says, “See how you partake in the name of Christ and how the seal of the Holy Spirit was given you.”<sup>1395</sup>

“... for those who had been baptized in Samaria, at the coming of the Apostles Peter and John, only as hands were imposed upon them did they receive the Holy Spirit ... those who had believed in Samaria had believed in the true faith and had been baptized within by the deacon, Philip, whom the same Apostles had sent, in the Church, which is one and to which alone it is permitted to give the grace of baptism and to absolve sins (Acts 8:14–17). And, therefore, it was not necessary for those who had received legitimate and ecclesiastical baptism to be baptized again, but only that which was lacking was supplied by Peter and John, after having prayed for them and imposed hands upon them that the Holy Spirit should be invoked and infused into them.”<sup>1396</sup>

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<sup>1391</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 73.9 (FOTC 51:273).

<sup>1392</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Holy Trinity* 15.26 (NPNF I/3:224).

<sup>1393</sup> *Jerome Bible*, p. 344.

<sup>1394</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 73.9 (FOTC 51:274).

<sup>1395</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 73*.

<sup>1396</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 73.9 (FOTC 51:273).



**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “Just as the owner seals his flock with a special seal by which he can identify them, so does the Holy Spirit seal whoever belongs to Him in baptism through the anointing of the holy oil which they receive in baptism.”<sup>1397</sup> “All the faculties of your soul are sealed with the Holy Spirit seal ... The King put His message on you, sealing it with the fiery seal, so that no stranger can read it and distort it.”<sup>1398</sup>

**St. Didymus the Blind** says, “The Holy Spirit grants us through His salvific seal to regain our first image. For if a flock is not distinguished, it becomes an easy prey for wolves since it is not aided by the seal and cannot be distinguished like the flock that belongs to the Good Shepherd.”<sup>1399</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “God anointed you, Christ sealed you. How? Because you were sealed unto the form of the cross itself, unto His passion.”<sup>1400</sup> “You have received a spiritual seal. God the Father sealed you; Christ the Lord confirmed you, and gave a pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.”<sup>1401</sup> “So recall that you have received a spiritual seal, ‘the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of piety, the spirit of holy fear’ (Isa. 11:2).”<sup>1402</sup> “There follows a spiritual sign which you heard read today, because after the (baptismal) font there remains the effecting of perfection, when at the invocation of the priest the Holy Spirit is poured forth.”<sup>1403</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “As a seal is imprinted on soldiers, so is the Holy Spirit imprinted on the believers.”<sup>1404</sup>

**St. Gregory Nazianzen** says, “But if you would fortify yourself beforehand with the Seal, being signed both in your bodies and souls with the oil (chrism) and the Spirit ... what then can happen to you? The flock that is sealed are not easily snared, but those who are unmarked are an easy prey to thieves ... You would be able to lay down your life in peace, having suffered no loss of the help which God gave you unto salvation.”<sup>1405</sup>

### **719. What is the connection between the hand of the Almighty and the hand of a human being?**

**St. Augustine** strongly refuted any doubts that the Holy Spirit is gifted by an apostle or a bishop and said that this thought is foreign to the Church since the laying of hands in chrismation, the water in baptism, and the laying of hands in priests’ ordinations are all

<sup>1397</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Enchir. Patr.* 712.

<sup>1398</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Faith Teaching* 5.

<sup>1399</sup> PG 39:717B.

<sup>1400</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 6.2.7 (FOTC 44:320).

<sup>1401</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 7.42 (FOTC 44:20).

<sup>1402</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 7.42 (FOTC 44:20).

<sup>1403</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 3.2.8 (FOTC 44:293).

<sup>1404</sup> PG 61:418.

<sup>1405</sup> PG 36:364; 36.377A.

apparent signs that are accompanied with prayers for the person to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit from God and not from any human being.

#### **720. How can the believer constantly grow and mature spiritually?**

**St. Augustine** says, “During the fast, the catechumens are grinded like wheat, kneaded with water in baptism, shaped like the body of Christ, and are baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit through the anointing of the Chrism.” In the Third Hour Prayer (Agpeya) we say, “Your Holy Spirit, O Lord whom You sent down upon Your holy disciples and honored apostles in the third hour, do not take Him away from us, O Good One, but we ask You to renew Him within us. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” **St. Irenaeus** also says, “those upon whom the apostles laid hands received the Holy Spirit, who is the food of life [eternal]”<sup>1406</sup> (compared to the milk on which St. Paul said they fed (see 1 Cor. 3:2)).

#### **721. Why is this holy sacrament called an anointing?**

**St. Theophilus of Antioch** says, “we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God.”<sup>1407</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “It is necessary also for him who is baptized to be anointed that, having received chrism, that is anointing, he can be anointed of God and have in himself the grace of Christ.”<sup>1408</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “The name of Christ is ‘the Anointed One’ and every Christian receives this anointing, not as a sign that he is a partaker in the kingdom only but also since he has become a warrior against demons.”

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “You are properly called christs, and of you God said, ‘Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm’ (Ps. 105:15). Now you have been made christs, by receiving the antitype<sup>1409</sup> of the Holy Spirit; and all things have been wrought in you by imitation, because you are images of Christ. He washed in the river Jordan, and having imparted the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters, He came up from them; and the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His being lighted on Him, like resting upon like. And to you in like manner, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given an Unction, the antitype of that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Spirit; of whom also the blessed Isaiah, in his prophecy respecting Him, said in the person of the Lord, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me: He has sent Me to preach glad tidings to the poor’ (Isa. 61:1).

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<sup>1406</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.38.2 (ANF 1:521).

<sup>1407</sup> St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 1.12 (ANF 2:92).

<sup>1408</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 70.2 (FOTC 51:260).

<sup>1409</sup> The Greek word used here does not imply an “antitype” in the allegorical sense but is the same word used in Heb. 9:24.

“For Christ was not anointed by men with oil or material ointment, but the Father having before appointed Him to be the Saviour of the whole world, anointed Him with the Holy Spirit, as Peter says, Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). David also the Prophet cried, saying, ‘Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom; You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God even Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows’ (Ps. 45:6–7). And as Christ was in reality crucified, and buried, and raised, and you are in Baptism accounted worthy of being crucified, buried, and raised together with Him in a likeness, so is it with the unction also. As He was anointed with an ideal oil of gladness, that is, with the Holy Spirit, called oil of gladness, because He is the author of spiritual gladness, so you were anointed with ointment, having been made partakers and fellows of Christ.

“But beware of supposing this to be plain ointment. For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Spirit, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature ... and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.

“And you were first anointed on the forehead, that you might be delivered from the shame, which the first man who transgressed bore about with him everywhere; and that with unveiled face ye might reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). Then on your ears; that you might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Esaias said, The Lord gave me also an ear to hear (Isa. 50:4); and the Lord Jesus in the Gospel, He that has ears to hear let him hear (Matt 11:15). Then on the nostrils; that receiving the sacred ointment you may say, We are to God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved (2 Cor. 2:15). Afterwards on your breast; that ‘having put on the breast-plate of righteousness’ (Eph. 6:14), you may ‘stand against the wiles of the devil’ (Eph. 6:11). For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Spirit, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise you, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armour of the Holy Spirit, are to stand against the power of the adversary, and vanquish it, saying, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ (Phil. 4:13).”<sup>1410</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, “It is very plain that the Spirit's descent on Him in Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body. And it did not take place for promotion to the Word, but again for our sanctification, that we might share His anointing, and of us it might be said, ‘Do you not know that you are God's Temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?’ (1 Cor. 3:16). For when the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him. And when He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of It. And moreover for this reason, not as Aaron or David or the rest, was

<sup>1410</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 21.1–4 (NPNF II/7:149–150) amended.

He anointed with oil, but in another way above all His fellows, ‘with the oil of gladness’ (Ps. 45:7–8), which He Himself interprets to be the Spirit, saying by the Prophet, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me’ (Isa. 61:1); as also the Apostle has said, ‘How God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 10:38). When then were these things spoken of Him but when He came in the flesh and was baptized in Jordan, and the Spirit descended on Him (Matt. 3:16)? And indeed the Lord Himself said, ‘The Spirit shall take of what is Mine’ (John 16:14); and ‘I will send Him (John 16:7); and to His disciples, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22). And notwithstanding, He who, as the Word and Radiance of the Father, gives to others, now is said to be sanctified, because now He has become man, and the Body that is sanctified is His.”<sup>1411</sup>

“No otherwise should we have partaken in the Spirit and been sanctified, but that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, has spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us. And therefore have we securely received it, He being said to be anointed in the flesh; for the flesh being first sanctified in Him, and He being said, as man, to have received for its sake, we have the sequel of the Spirit grace, receiving ‘out of His fullness.’”<sup>1412</sup>

#### **722. Why is the Holy Chrism also called the “sacrament of confirmation”?**

St. Paul the Apostle says, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:21–22). St. John the Apostle also says, “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that **He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**” (1 John 3:24). **St. Ambrose** says, “God the Father sealed you; Christ the Lord confirmed you, and gave a pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts, as you have learned in the lesson of the Apostle.”<sup>1413</sup>

#### **723. What is the difference between Christ’s anointing and the anointing of the Chrism (or Myron) of those who are newly baptized?**

The Spirit descended and remained upon the Word of God, who was incarnate, being united with Him and equal to Him. Hence, we the believers have received the right to receive the Holy Spirit as a free gift.

**St. Ambrose** says, “There was therefore a pouring out upon us of the Spirit, but upon the Lord Jesus, when He was in the form of man, the Spirit abode ... Around us is the liberality of the Giver in abundant provision, in Him abides forever the fullness of the Spirit. He shed forth then what He deemed to be sufficient for us, and what was shed forth is not separated nor divided; but He has a unity of fullness wherewith He may enlighten the sight of our hearts

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<sup>1411</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.12.47 (NPNF II/4:334).

<sup>1412</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.12.50 (NPNF II/4:336).

<sup>1413</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 7.42 (NPNF II/10:322).

according to what our strength is capable of. Lastly, we receive so much as the advancing of our mind acquires, for the fullness of the grace of the Spirit is indivisible, but is shared in by us according to the capacity of our own nature.”<sup>1414</sup>

He also says, “David has reason to cry, like a man renewed, ‘And I will go in to the altar of my God, to God, who gives joy to my youth’ (Ps. 43:4). Even as he had said earlier that he had grown old among his enemies, as we read in the sixth psalm, here he says that youth has been restored to him after the lengthy old age of man’s fall. For we are renewed through the regeneration experienced in baptism, we are renewed through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we shall be renewed also through the resurrection, even as he says in a later passage, ‘your youth is renewed like the eagle’s’ (Ps. 103:5). Learn the manner of our renewal: ‘You shall sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed, you shall wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow’ (Ps. 51:9). And in Isaiah, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’ (Isa. 1:18). One who changes from the darkness of sin into the light of virtue and into grace is properly renewed. Thus, one who earlier was stained with foul defilement may shine with a brightness that is whiter than snow.”<sup>1415</sup>

#### **724. What is the difference between the anointing of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament?**

The first mention of “anointing” in Scripture is when Jacob saw a ladder in a dream, which was set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and the Lord standing above it, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, and he said, “‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’ and then he took the stone that he had put at his head, and he poured oil on top of it.” (Gen. 28:12–18). The anointing was used to proclaim the sanctification of the place and its consecration, for it to become “Bethel” or the “House of God.” Also, the Mosaic law instructed the anointing of kings, priests, places (the temple), and the vessels that were consecrated for the service of the Lord’s house.

Chrismation aims to make the person or object consecrated to God only. All this, throughout the generations, is a symbol pointing to the coming of the Messiah whom the Father has anointed with the oil of gladness (Ps. 45:7) to preach good tidings to the poor (Isa. 61:1). He is the center of the Father’s gladness and joy because while He is the Logos of God and the Only Begotten Son, He was incarnate to reconcile humanity with the Father. Thus, He is capable of transmitting this heavenly joy to the poor who were deprived of the joy of the exalted life. Christ was anointed with the oil of gladness so that we would be anointed in Him because we are members of His body, and therefore are anointed in Him.

<sup>1414</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.8.93 (NPNF II/10:105–106).

<sup>1415</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Prayer of Job and David* 4.9.35 (FOTC 65:418–419).

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “All righteous people portrayed the chrismation and decorated it with their proclamations. Each one of them described its beauty during his time. **Moses** came, and he placed the table in the tabernacle of that time and sanctified it with the blood of sacrifices and with oil. By oil, **Samuel** gave the kingdom to the children of his people, and also **Elisha** ministered with the mystery of the kings’ anointing. As for **Christ**, He is the most exalted among all the Christian ranks and through Him, all the prophetic mysteries were served ... The Shepherd designed the anointing.”<sup>1416</sup>

## **725. What is the role of the anointing of the priests in the Old Testament and the Myron (Chrism) oil in the New Testament?**

The very first time that anointing people was used in the history of salvation was the anointing of priests; Aaron and his children (Ex. 29:7). As a high priest in the Old Testament, Aaron had to commit to always place on his forehead the plate of pure gold which had the words, “Holiness to the Lord,” engraved on it so that the people may be accepted before the Lord (Ex. 28:36–38). This was a symbol of the heavenly High Priest, our Lord Jesus (Rom. 8:34). At the same time, he was not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies except once every year, and only after offering sacrifices on behalf of himself and the people (Lev. 16:34; Heb. 9:7).

As for us, we have become priests of the Lord in Christ Jesus, who grants us His righteousness as a plate on our foreheads, minds, senses, and all the faculties of our bodies, souls, and spirits. Therefore, we offer our prayers and worship since we have put on Christ as Scripture says: “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34); “Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25); “And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen” (Rev. 1:6); “And have made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10); and “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

We will discuss, God willing, in detail the difference between the general priesthood and the sacrament of priesthood, in the section on the “Sacrament of Priesthood.”

## **726. What is the role of Chrismation in the life of the baptized person?**

**First: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit** as St. Paul says: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

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<sup>1416</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memra on the Renewal of the Temple*.

**Second: The consecration of the body and soul.** Tertullian says, “The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed (through baptism); the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also maybe illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God. They cannot then be separated (the flesh and soul) ... when they are united in their service.”<sup>1417</sup>

**St Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Which ointment [the Chrism] is symbolically applied to your forehead and your other senses; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.”<sup>1418</sup>

**St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, “Hence also, through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, the Holy Spirit was given to those who were being born again ... When has this been fulfilled, save when the Lord came and renewed all things by grace? Our spirit is renewed; but the Holy Spirit is not simply spirit, but God says it is his Spirit, whereby ours is renewed.”<sup>1419</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “We were sealed by the Holy Spirit through God. And as we die in Christ to be born again, we are thus sealed by the Holy Spirit to receive His splendor, image and grace, which is undoubtedly our spiritual seal. Even though our bodies are visibly sealed, our hearts are spiritually sealed, for the Holy Spirit to engrave within us the heavenly icon.”<sup>1420</sup>

**Third: The consecration of the soul as a heavenly bride.** Psalm 45 is truly marvelous, where the Psalmist talks about the mystery of the unity between the Church and Christ the Lord, or their marriage. God the Father sees Himself performing this unique, unseen divine anointing, saying, “Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness” (Ps. 45:7). The Coptic Church took the rite of anointing the bride and the bridegroom with oil in the sacrament of holy matrimony from this specific psalm. The Church anoints them so they can understand that their marriage is an antitype of the heavenly wedding.

**Fourth: Enlightenment of the mind, and divine providence against the devil and the powers of darkness.** “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John. 14:26).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “You are protected by your seal from the evil attacks of the wicked one, him who by your baptism has no authority over you. Keep This unspotted: for it

<sup>1417</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection* 8 (ANF 3:551).

<sup>1418</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 21.3 (NPNF II/7:150) amended.

<sup>1419</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (Epworth Press, 1951) 1.6, 9: p. 74, 81–82.

<sup>1420</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.6.79.

shall teach you all things, if it abide in you, as you have just heard declared by the blessed John, discoursing much concerning this Unction. For this holy thing is a spiritual safeguard of the body, and salvation of the soul.”<sup>1421</sup> He also says, “Your name is now inscribed, and you are invited to enter the (spiritual) camp.” “Every one of you approaches, presents himself before God, in the presence of the innumerable host of angels, so that the Holy Spirit may place a mark on your souls. Thus, your souls are counted in the great army of the Lord.”<sup>1422</sup>

**St Cyprian** says, “I wished indeed to strive bravely, and, remembering my oath (*sacramentum*) I took up the arms of devotion and faith.”<sup>1423</sup> **Tertullian** says, “We were called to God’s army ... when we responded to the words of this Sacrament.”<sup>1424</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “How will the guardian angel defend you, how could he protect you from the enemy, if he is unable to see the seal? Did you not know that the destroyer passed over the houses sealed with blood, during the early days of Moses the savior, and he killed the firstborn of the unsealed? The unsealed treasure is easily stolen by thieves, the unmarked herd are safely stolen.”

**St. Ambrose** says, “The Holy Spirit has delivered us from that Gentile impurity ... Excellent, then, is that grace which changes the rage of beasts into the simplicity of the Spirit.”<sup>1425</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Adhere to what you received, it will never change, it is a royal badge.”<sup>1426</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Let us not therefore put off from us the royal seal and token, that we may not be of those who are not sealed, that we may not be unsound, that we may be firmly grounded, that we may be of the foundation, and not carried to and fro.”<sup>1427</sup>

**Fifth: He offers heavenly comforts.** “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). **St. Macarius the Great** says, “Let us then beseech God to bestow upon us the wings of a dove, even of the Holy Spirit, that we may fly to Him and be at rest, and that He would separate and make to cease from our souls and bodies, that evil wind, which is the sin that dwells in the members of our souls and bodies. None but He can do it.”<sup>1428</sup>

**Sixth: He intercedes for us.** “Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession

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<sup>1421</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Five Catechetical Lectures (On the Mysteries)* 3.7 (NPNF II/7:150).

<sup>1422</sup> PG 33:428A.

<sup>1423</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 3: On the Lapsed* 13 (ANF 5:440).

<sup>1424</sup> Tertullian, *To the Martyrs (Ad Martyras)* 3 (ANF 3:694).

<sup>1425</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 2.10.107 (NPNF II/10:128).

<sup>1426</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Explanation of John*, article 16.

<sup>1427</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Timothy* (NPNF I/13:494).

<sup>1428</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 2.3: p. 13.



for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26–27). **St. Augustine** comments on the groaning of the Holy Spirit for us, saying, “The Holy Spirit does not groan within Himself in the Holy Trinity, in His eternal essence ... but groans within us, namely, He makes us groan. It is easy for the Holy Spirit to make us groan, for He grants us to acknowledge that we are sojourners on this earth, and teaches us to look towards our home and groan eagerly for it.”<sup>1429</sup>

**Seventh: He Proclaims the divine truth to us.** “The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John. 14:17). **St. Augustine** says, “‘And you have an unction from the Holy One, that you may be manifest to your own selves’ (1 John 2:20). The spiritual unction is the Holy Spirit Himself, of which the Sacrament is in the visible unction. Of this unction of Christ he says that all who have it know the bad and the good; and they need not to be taught, because the unction itself teaches them.”<sup>1430</sup>

**Eight: The indwelling of the Holy Trinity.** **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, “And when the Spirit is in us, the Word also, who gives the Spirit, is in us, and in the Word is the Father.”<sup>1431</sup>

**Ninth: He grants us spiritual gifts.** “But One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). **St. Gregory Nazianzen** says, “The soul that is not covered or beautified by the grace of the new birth, I do not know if the angels will accept it when it leaves the body! Truly they cannot receive it if it does not bear the seal, or any other mark that belongs to an owner. Surely, it will be carried away by the air, roaming restlessly, no one looking out for it, for it is without an owner. It will seek rest but will not find it; shouting and regretting in vain.”<sup>1432</sup>

**St. Didymus** says, “No one can earn heavenly gifts without being renewed by the Holy Spirit and urged by His seal of Holiness, even if his life is pure and spotless in everything.”<sup>1433</sup>

**Tenth: Convicting of sin.** “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness” (John. 14:8). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘of sin’; this means, will cut off all their excuses, and show that they have transgressed unpardonably.”<sup>1434</sup>

<sup>1429</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *In 2 Tim.* hom 6.

<sup>1430</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John* 3.5 (NPNF I/7:477).

<sup>1431</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, trans. C. R. B. Shapland (Epworth Press, 1951) 1.30: p. 142.

<sup>1432</sup> PG 46:424C.

<sup>1433</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *De Trinitate* 2.12.

<sup>1434</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 78.1 (NPNF I/14:285).

**727. What is the meaning of “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He it is who marks us as a royal flock; He, who separates us from all former things; He, who suffers us not to lie among them that are exposed to the wrath of God — and do you grieve Him? Look how startling are his words there; For he that rejects, says he, rejects not man, but God: and how cutting they are here, Grieve not the Holy Spirit, says he, in whom you were sealed. Let this seal then abide upon your mouth, and never destroy the impression. A spiritual mouth never utters a thing of the kind. Say not, It is nothing, if I do utter an unseemly word, if I do insult someone, it is nothing. For this very reason is it a great evil, because it seems to be nothing ... You have a spiritual mouth. Think what words you uttered immediately upon being born, — what words are worthy of your mouth. You call God, Father, and do you straightway revile your brother? ... Now the God of peace keep both your mind and your tongue, and fence you with a sure fence, even His fear, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen.”<sup>1435</sup>

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “If a servant comes into a palace, to be employed upon the vessels used there, he takes of what belongs to the king he himself has nothing to bring and ministers to the king with the king's own vessels. Here he needs much intelligence and judgment, that he may make no mistake in serving, by bringing one dish to the royal table when he should bring another, but should serve the courses, first and last, in the right succession. If through ignorance and want of judgment he does not serve the king in the right order, it is as much as his place and life are worth. In like manner a soul which is serving God in grace and the Spirit requires much discretion and knowledge, that it may commit no fault with the vessels of God, that is, in the service of the Spirit, by not keeping its own will in harmony with grace.”<sup>1436</sup>

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<sup>1435</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 14 (NPNF I/13:120).

<sup>1436</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Homily 15.5: p. 108.

## 19

## The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession

**728. Why was our Lord Jesus called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19)?**

The Word of God was incarnate to heal the souls wounded by sin. He has compassion on them for He is the loving physician who opened the gates of Paradise to a thief who was counted unworthy of living in the world (Luke 23:34) and accepted a sinful woman who was about to be stoned to death (John 8:1–12). He invited Himself into the house of a cold-hearted chief publican and a lover of money, even though the multitudes complained against Him (Luke 19:5). He knows how sin humiliates humanity and therefore, He is compassionate with sinners. He neither reproaches nor rebukes any broken heart, “He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matt. 12:19–20).

He stands and knocks at the doors of our hearts, that we may also be compassionate towards Him and offer Him the heart which He purchased with His blood and even if we do not offer Him what He actually owns; He never forces Himself in, but stands outside weeping as He did when He entered Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). In sweetness, He calls the soul “My sister, my love,” and then He encourages her, revealing her inner beauty by saying, “O My perfect one” (Song. 5:2). He encourages the souls of the broken despite their defilement and evil.

As much as the Lord’s sermons and parables — in public and in secret — revolved around the Kingdom, He emphasized the need for repentance and that we cannot approach Kingdom without repentance. And as much as He was tenderhearted and kind to repentant sinners, He seemed harsh with the cruel hearts of those who were unwilling to repent. He was generous with the sinners, adulterers, and thieves because they were eager to repent, but scolded and rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees who insisted in their stubbornness not to repent.

It is important for us not to despise His love and longsuffering and hence be lax with sin, relying on the fact that the Savior is the Lover of humanity and the Forgiver of sins, as St. Paul says, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). **St. Basil the Great** says, “he who has been chastised for his past sins and has obtained pardon prepares for himself a judgment of wrath more severe than the former judgment if he sin again ... ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ (John 5:14).”<sup>1437</sup>

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<sup>1437</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Morals* 11.2 (FOTC 9:87).

**729. What was Christ’s commandment to His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection?**

He said to them, “‘As the Father has sent Me, I also 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 them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (John 20:21–23). He gave them this authority to show them that the world always needs repentance and confession so that the believers may never cease to confess the Lord’s blessings as well as the fact that they are sinners and hence offer repentance every time they pray the Lord’s prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Therefore, Christ who is risen from the dead, calls them to be merciful with the people that the Lord may be merciful with them as well.

**730. What are the important obligations of the believer who repents?**

**First:** He or she thanks God for His blessings, His mercy, and His salvation, so that he may have the boldness to seek forgiveness.

**Second:** To admit that he is a sinner and unable to enjoy the holy life without God’s mercy and free grace.

**Third:** To be merciful to those who sin against him and to forgive them, so that the Savior may open for him the way of salvation.

**Fourth:** The believer’s focus on heaven, his anticipation of the eternal wedding and his love for others, elevates all his inner being as on the wings of the Holy Spirit so that the person may know the heavenly Bridegroom, who prepares for him eternal glory. He also acknowledges his weaknesses, and the grace of God that is capable of transforming the heart from corruption to incorruption and from an earthly heart to a new heaven, and from humans to angels.

Repentance to God and confession before Him in our private rooms and in the presence of a priest are the beginning of a change in one’s way of life, both at the inner level as well as the external behavior. **It is a transformation in which we acknowledge the richness of God’s love, and hence offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, in which we acknowledge our weaknesses and wickedness,** confident in His salvific work and His ability to raise use from corruption to an angelic life that is acceptable to the Father. This is how are continuously cleansed in the spirit of hope. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Repentance is the evangelical path through which the soul **passes to the kingdom,**” and, “Therefore, beloved, when you commit sin, do not wait for another man to accuse you but, before you are accused and indicted, you yourself condemn what you have done. Then, if someone accuses you later on, it is no longer a matter of your

doing the right thing in confessing, but of your correcting the accusation which he makes ... Peter certainly sinned gravely in denying Christ. But he was quick to remind himself of his sin and, before anyone accused him, he told of his error and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72). He so effectively washed away his sin of denial that he became the chief of the apostles and the whole world was entrusted to him.”<sup>1438</sup>

**731. Should someone who lives in sin constantly be in tears and fear? And with what hope must this person approach the Lord?**

During the events of the repeated church bombings at the end of the era of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the following years, our understanding of the concept of repentance in the Gospel and the writings of the Church Fathers was confirmed, in that it leads to an atmosphere of peace, true joy, courage, hope, and fearlessness in the face of death. It also triggers within us a desire for the salvation of all humanity, even for those who persecute the Church and resist the faith. Repentance is an invitation to experience a taste of heaven and communion with the Lover of all humanity!

**St. Jacob of Sarug** begins his homily on repentance with expressions that reveal the joyful biblical concept of repentance, which is in essence a delightful encounter with Christ Himself to enjoy His wondrous blessings, even if it was accompanied with some sorrow and regret because of our human weakness.

In his introduction, the saint experiences the life of repentance as a journey that extends across the entire life. He invites us to speak openly with Christ, being the open Door for all humanity and the Way that leads us to the Father’s bosom.

He sees the incarnate Son of God with His hands stretched on the cross to embrace the repentant together with the right-hand thief, leading them in, for He is the Door (John 10:9) and the Way (John 14:6), and accompanying them throughout the way as He did with the disciples of Emmaus, when he says with them, “Was not our heart burning in us, as He spoke to us in the way?” (Luke 24:32).

St. Jacob of Sarug says, “O Son of God, open to me by Your love the great door; **You are the door and the way of life** to those who walk through You. O Good Friend, with You I walk to Him who sent You. The wicked is accompanied by many since he abides in the world. Through You, I come forward to speak to You, O Teacher of Life, for without You no man can see the Father.”<sup>1439</sup>

The path of repentance takes the believer away from sin. Our Christ draws him back, speaks to him and gives him life so that he may see His great divine glory by His grace.

<sup>1438</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* 8.3.3–4 (FOTC 68:213–214).

<sup>1439</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *On Repentance*.

**St. Basil the Great** says of the soul, “In the first place, it ought to hate its former reprehensible life, and shudder and be repelled at the very memory of it; for it is written: *Iniquity I hated and abhorred, but your law I have loved* (Ps. 118:163 LXX). Second, let it use the dread of eternal judgment and of everlasting punishment as a teacher, that it may gain a livelier fear, and let it acknowledge a season of tears through repentance, just as David taught in the sixth psalm (Ps. 6:6–8 LXX), that the purification of its sins can be achieved through an abundance of tears in the blood of Christ by the power of his mercy and the multitude of God’s compassions, who said: *Although your sins be as crimson, I will make them white as snow; although they be as scarlet, I will make them white as wool* (Isa. 1:18). After it has received the power and the capacity to please God, it says: *You have changed my lamentation into joy for me, you have torn away my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, that I may sing psalms to you in my glory* (Ps. 29:11–12 LXX). And so it draws near to the Lord singing psalms and saying: *I will extol you, Lord, since you have upheld me and have not let my enemies rejoice over me* (Ps. 29:2 LXX).”<sup>1440</sup>

### **732. Who can heal my soul except You, O Physician, so that it may serve You?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** asks us not to focus on our wounds, but on the Physician who came down from heaven, and so we invite Him to descend into the depths of our souls and visit them by Himself. Our soul is like Simon Peter’s mother-in-law who was with high fever and unable to rise from her bed. The soul demands that He rebukes the fever of sin that it may leave the soul, so that she can stand and witness to Him in the spirit of enlightenment and knowledge (Luke 4:39). Who can expel the evil thoughts and take away all pains except Him?

St Jacob of Sarug says, “O my Lord, the sick soul asks You to come to her. Go in and visit her, so she can rise and serve You every day. When Simon’s mother-in-law was healed from her sickness, she arose and served You, because she relied on her health. May You do the same with the sick soul to be healed, so she could rise and serve Your word with enlightenment. O You who held the hands of her whom You healed from illness, hold the thoughts of my soul through Your love and raise them from the passions. I have been afflicted with sins like a sick man ... O You the Physician who freely came, may Your healings work within me.”

### **733. Who can sanctify my corrupted will?**

Indeed, the believer struggles between two wills and is in constant need of Christ’s grace so that his will may not lean towards evil. Sometimes he yearns for something good but falls into sin because of his weakness, so that his evil will overcome the good. Let the believer

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<sup>1440</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 117: p. 203.

say, “Through You, my Master, I shall conquer for I am too weak to conquer by myself. Your work is wondrous and astonishing!”

**St. Jacob of Sarug** admits: “I tend to do the good, but I am inclined to evil; and though I hate sin, I commit it every day. Two wills are struggling within me, one opposing the other. Every day, the evil will triumphs successfully. Through You, my Master, I shall conquer for I am too weak to prevail, but Your wondrous work is sufficient to conquer in us.”

#### **734. Sin has killed me and buried me in a tomb until I decayed; can God still accept my repentance?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says that the devil exerts every effort to portray sin as an attractive and an easy thing to do. But after we fall and desire to return to God, he then portrays the way of repentance to be difficult. The evil one fills us with despair so that we should not return to our Christ, who is the door of repentance, its way, and its end. Let us not be troubled, for even if we are unable to come to Christ, He comes to us and carries us to His heavens and His kingdom. If the Lord of Glory revived Lazarus, who had died and decayed, would it be difficult for Him to heal our wounds?

How wonderful is **St. Jacob of Sarug’s** image of the sinner, who appears to be crippled and injured, but Christ grants him His own legs to walk on. Christ carries him on His shoulders and walks with Him so that he should not deviate left or right. He says, “O you sinner, flee and take refuge in repentance **for he who does not enter willingly, it forces him to enter** ... if sin killed you and your tomb was shut before your face, He will raise you even if you have decayed like Lazarus. He who can revive the dead, what wounds would be too difficult for Him to heal, except only those that you did not ask for? ... If you sin, He does not rebuke you for He is full of mercy. He rebukes you only if you do not repent ... If the sinner repents, he becomes of more splendor than all the saints, for the Shepherd carries him on His shoulders, and does not carry the others. For this reason, he becomes more beautiful because when you look at him, you see the Shepherd too.”

“O you the lamb, take for yourself the Shepherd’s legs and come into the sheepfold for your legs were broken because of sin. Who is he, from the fallen, who rejects such love! Except the one who hates his own self and does not remember it ... for if he, who has fallen, was not supported with hope, how will he rise and attain perfection?”

#### **735. What is the role of the tears of repentance in our lives?**

The first thing that sin does is to destroy one’s spiritual (inner) sight so that he loses his sight of God the Lover of humanity and the acknowledgment of the corruption he is in. Through love, the tears of repentance flow and the Lord opens the person’s sight as He did with the man born blind who washed in the pool of Siloam (John 9). Through tears, we see the divine beauty and cannot tolerate the uncleanness and corruption of sin.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Repentance requires me to offer her tears, for they are much loved by her. When the soul commits sin, sin destroys the soul’s love and distorts her vision, so that she does not weep for her corruption ... If the soul fixed her eyes on God, regret comes quickly and opens the closed doors. She sees how abhorrent the sin she committed was and sees her weaknesses which she could not see when she committed it.”

**736. What boldness do the tears of repentance give someone before God?**

Joyful tears that are full of hope and confidence in the Savior, intercede for the soul before God so that her hidden voice may be heard, and her broken evil will may be transformed to a good will. If sin destroys holy thoughts and buries them in the dust, the tears of repentance intercede before Him who is the Resurrection that He may revive the soul and that it may be strengthened in the Lord, experiencing the words of the prophet: “Let the weak say, I am strong” (Joel 3:10). The soul renews her inner beauty and hears the voice of her Beloved saying, “You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you” (Song. 4:7).

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “O repentance ... the sound of your agony comes to God ... pursuers hurled me with arrows of sin. Like a spear, sin is lodged within me. It is good for you, O my soul, to weep for those, for there will be a good reward for your overflowing tears.”

**737. To what language does the heavenly Physician listen, if not to tears of repentance?**

The heavenly Physician is ready to heal the wounds of the soul; Him who is Almighty and Wise. The method of communication with Him is through tears that are capable of bursting the springs of His love that forgive sins.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Raise your voice (O tears) to the Physician full of goodness for He is capable of healing your wounds. Because of your voice, the Physician knows your pain and according to your pain, He will grant you a medicine to help you. In exchange to the tears, mercies will overflow from the Merciful, and according to the weeping, love will flow from forgiveness.”

**738. Why are tears of repentance often called a “second baptism”?**

The Church Fathers often spoke about the greatness of baptism, but they feared lest the believers rely on their baptism and on being children of God, and therefore lose their feeling of need for tears of repentance. Therefore, they explained that the tears of repentance are a second baptism for continuous daily renewal, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,” that we may “come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). This wondrous baptism can be described as follows:



- a. The spring of its water is weeping, which overflows from the depths of the believer through the work of the divine grace.
- b. Its water is pure and cleanses sins through the precious blood and is offered by one's holy will.
- c. It is practiced daily, through the grace of God, and so it fixes what was corrupted numerous times.
- d. A hidden baptism, the repentant believer feels as if a scorpion bit him, so he hastens to repent before the mighty Physician.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Bathe O defiled soul who was dirtied with sin, in this pure water of weeping and be cleansed ... You will not receive a second baptism for the tears of the sinner replace it every day. Good will is present every day to kill sin with repentance. The eyes of the sinner are every day a baptism and at any time, he can open them, bathe, and purify himself.”

### **739. Are tears of repentance a gift from God?**

Right before the events of the crucifixion, Christ reproached His disciples saying, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). He did not specify what they should ask for. Among the things that the faithful should ask for are tears of repentance, since Christ will never hold back such a precious gift from them.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** believes that the believer asks for this gift and receives it, only to give it back to Him who gave it to him, as the most precious offering that our Lord treasures.

“It is not hard for the Lord of Love to grant those who ask Him. Give Him little reason and He will grant you great riches ... You who are guilty of recurring sins and uncountable iniquities, consecrate for God some water and He will accept it. He so asks from the sinful rich: Bring tears and come take for yourselves forgiveness ... Some weeping here is hope for him who sins, for in hades no one will answer you even if you asked with wailing ...”

“The rich man asked for a droplet of water (Luke 16:24) ... but did not receive his request since he was not worthy. If he had asked here for an ocean, he would have received it. There, he supplicated for one droplet and was not given.”

“The adulterous woman offered her tears to the Creator of the rivers and seas, and He accepted her offering as a precious gift that He treasures, offered her forgiveness and purity, and kept her tears as an eternal remembrance and an eternal crown for her. As for the rich fool, who did not offer anything, he asked for a drop of water to cool his tongue but was never given.”

“Who is the outcast: the rich or the harlot? She offered tears and her remembrance was honored. She offered water from her eyes to the Lord of rivers and received cleansing in return. I wonder if that rich man was like the adulterous here, would he not have received when he asked? If he looked with love towards Lazarus, he would have enjoyed blessings in the Kingdom.”

#### **740. Why do you fear the Friend of sinners?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** concludes his homily on repentance by calling sinners to be content with the Friend of sinners. For as much as He does not accept sin, He is very gentle with sinners, to carry them on His shoulders so that any evil may not approach them.

He says, “O sinner, your path is easy if you repent. When you come to Him, He will not greet you with hostility. The righteous one is to be feared, but do not be afraid when you draw near Him ... He left all the others to carry you on His shoulders. Blessed is He who came and through whom the sinners entered and in whom they were justified. To Him be the glory from all His creation, forever. Amen.”

#### **741. The days are running out and the time of our departure from this world is approaching, so why postpone our repentance?**

Our life in this world is a gift from God and is a journey alongside Him, in which we offer repentance daily until we depart to the eternal glory. Do not postpone today’s repentance till tomorrow.

**St Jacob of Sarug** says, “If we begin the day, the night brings us down, then the night leaves us and gives us a day and then the night snatches us from the morning, and morning brings back to the night. A fast-paced way to travel, yet we were not willing to benefit from this or to pay attention to our steps along the way.”

**St. Basil the Great** says, “this present life is the time for penance and for the remission of sins; in the life to come, the just judgment of retribution will take place,”<sup>1441</sup> and “after departure from this life there is no opportunity for good deeds, since God in his forbearance has provided the present life for doing those things that please Him.”<sup>1442</sup>

#### **742. How can tribulations help us pursue the life of repentance?**

While Archbishop **Basil** was suffering from several consecutive illnesses, he felt a constant need to live the life of repentance. In the year 373 A. D., he wrote to Eusebius Bishop of Samosata: “But, since it is the scourge of the Lord which augments our sufferings by additional trials according to our deserts, I have acquired one infirmity after another. The

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<sup>1441</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Morals* 1.2 (FOTC 9:71).

<sup>1442</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Morals* 1.5 (FOTC 9:73).

consequence of this is evident even to a child—that this bodily shell of ours must certainly go hence, unless, perhaps, the loving kindness of God, granting us in His forbearance time for repentance, would also now, as frequently before, bring about some release and a way of escape from inconceivable sufferings. At all events, these matters will be as is pleasing to Him and beneficial to us.”<sup>1443</sup>

#### **743. Is it necessary to repent before God in our private rooms, and then again in the presence of the Father of Confession?**

The goal of confessing our sins is to encounter God, the Physician of our souls. Whoever does not feel his weakness or sins, will never feel the need for the heavenly Physician and will not therefore experience God’s love. Many times, we consider ourselves righteous, since we do not commit any dangerous sins that hurt others. A true believer, however, does not differentiate between big sins and trivial sins, since what truly concerns him is to be the icon of Christ, the Holy One’s ambassador, and an unblemished steward of heaven.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “it seems necessary that sins be confessed to those entrusted with *the stewardship of the Mysteries of God* (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1). For thus also those who repented of old are found to have confessed their sins before the saints. For it is written in the gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5) and in the Acts of the Apostles, to the apostles, by whom they were also baptized (cf. Acts 2:37).”<sup>1444</sup>

He also says, “On the other hand, where sin is concerned, be your own accuser (Prov. 18:17), and do not wait for others to make the accusation. Thus, you will be like a just man who accuses himself in the first speech made in court, or like Job who was not deterred by the crowd of people in the city from declaring his personal guilt before all (Job 31:34).”<sup>1445</sup>

#### **744. Why does God the Lover of humanity use different ways of chastisement?**

God reveals His love and providence not only when He forgives, but also when He disciplines. When He chastises like a Father, He elevates us from pampered infancy to maturity. Without discipline, we may not feel the seriousness of sin, nor struggle to live a life of holiness. Therefore, we would lose our victory and heavenly crown.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “We should learn, then, that it is because we have turned away from the Lord and disregarded His ways that God has inflicted these wounds upon us. He does not seek to destroy us, but rather endeavors to turn us back to the right way, just as good parents who care for their children are stern and rebuke them when they do wrong, not

<sup>1443</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 136 To Eusebius Bishop of Samosata (FOTC 13:278).

<sup>1444</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 21: p. 129.

<sup>1445</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Of Humility* (FOTC 9:485).

because they wish them harm, but rather desiring to lead them from childish negligence and the sin of youth to mature attentiveness.”<sup>1446</sup>

He also says, “How long will we not obey Christ who calls us to His heavenly kingdom? ... This is the time of repentance and that is of receiving the reward. This is the time of toil and labor and that is of receiving the wages. This is the time of patience and that is of comfort.”

#### **745. How does one resist sin through the positive aspects of repentance?**

**St. Basil** leans towards giving more attention to the positive aspects of repentance, while emphasizing the importance of the negative aspects. The positive aspects in resisting sin are as follows:

- a. Rather than resisting sin by simply refraining from committing it, the believer asks for the grace of God to replace his energies which were used as evil instruments for them to be constructive instruments used for the edification of the Kingdom of God, so that whoever used his mind or tongue in blaspheming, will now use it to offer thanksgiving and praise to God. Thus, in fixing his mistakes and weaknesses, he finds an opportunity to acquire the grace of God for the edification of God’s kingdom. Whoever was used to stealing from others, will now give alms to the poor and needy, since he counts everything he possess, a gift from God who gives to him on account of his brothers and sisters.
- b. **St. Basil the Great** says, “Whoever sins in his flesh, must use the flesh in a contrary virtue. You blasphemed? Praise God with your mouth. You have stolen? Compensate for that by doing good. You drank alcohol? You should fast. You boasted? Humble yourself. You envied others? Pray for those you envied. Maybe you killed someone, you should bear the pains of martyrdom and to exhaust your body with mortification.”
- c. The believer should not waste his time contemplating the past or imagining what the future could look like, but instead live in the present to experience a token of eternity. **St. Basil the Great** says, “Why, what does it profit a man to have dined well yesterday, if today his natural hunger does not find food for its proper satisfaction? Likewise, there is no gain for the soul from yesterday’s virtue, if that virtue is deprived of today’s just actions.”<sup>1447</sup>
- d. An interest in constructive communal work and worship. **St. Basil the Great** says, “As the day begins to dawn, all will gather in one voice and one heart, and will offer

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<sup>1446</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “In Time of Famine and Drought” 2, in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:75).

<sup>1447</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 42.1 To Chilo, His Pupil (FOTC 13:103).

to God the confession Psalm (Psalm 50), so everyone will consider those words to be for his repentance.”<sup>1448</sup>

**746. Are there any practical steps to support us in the life of repentance?**

**First: Involve children in crying with us to God.** How wonderful is the participation of the children when we offer communal repentance as did the people of Nineveh.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Oh, what concerted repentance! What wise and intense affliction! They did not even leave the animals outside this discipline but devised a way to compel them to cry out as well. They separated the calf from its mother and prevented the lamb from nursing; took suckling children from the arms of their mothers. The mothers were placed in one enclosure, the children in another, calling out and replying to one another with plaintive voices. The hungry children sought the source of their milk, while the mothers were pierced by the sufferings of maternal instinct and cried out to their children with anguished voices. Hungry infants screamed and grasped with the most urgent cries, while the mothers’ hearts were tormented with the pangs of natural affection. And for this reason, the inspired word preserved the account of their repentance as a universal example of how to live. The elders mourned on account of the threatened chastisement, tearing at their gray hairs. The young and those in their prime lamented even more fervently. Paupers groaned, while the rich forgot their comforts and put on sackcloth as befits those who mourn. The king of Nineveh himself turned his glory and splendor into shame. He put aside his crown and poured dust on his head; he cast off his royal garment and put on sackcloth. He left his high and exalted throne and crawled pitifully on the ground. He forsook luxuries that belonged to him as king in order to grieve together with the people; he became one of them, when he saw the wrath of the common Master of all (Jonah 3:6–10).”<sup>1449</sup>

**Second: Imitate the blessed David**, who drenched his couch with his tears (Ps. 6:6).

**Third: Support repentance with fasting.** **St. Basil the Great** says, “If Eve had practiced fasting and avoided eating from the fruit of this tree, we would not have needed this fast now. For ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ (Matt. 9:12). For our sin brought sickness upon us, so let us be healed through repentance, yet repentance without fasting is futile. ‘Cursed is the ground for your sake ... both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you’ (Gen. 3:17–18).”

**747. How can we deal with those who refrain from big sins but tolerate lesser sins?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “First of all, it is necessary to understand that this distinction has no basis in the New Testament. One proclamation was offered for all sins when the Lord

<sup>1448</sup> Mike Aquilina, *The Way of the Fathers: Praying with the Early Christians* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000): Article 426.

<sup>1449</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “In Time of Famine and Drought” 3, in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:77–78).

says: ‘Whosoever commits sin is a slave of sin’ (John 8:34) ... If we are able to speak of a small sin and great sin freely, then this is an unacceptable testimony. The argument here is that the great sin is the one which seizes the person under its authority, while the small one does not reach the upper authority. Such as gladiators, the strongest is the winner, while the weak is the one who is defeated by whoever is greater than him.”<sup>1450</sup>

**748. How can someone reach the level of hating sin (Ps. 119:163)?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “If therefore one is assured how many and how great are the evils of which sins are the cause, then spontaneously and without any encouragement, and from inner disposition a hatred arises in him against them.”<sup>1451</sup>

**749. How can the soul be completely convinced that God forgives its sins?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “She notices within herself this tendency that says: ‘I hate and abhor lying’ (Ps. 119:163). When God sent His only Son for the forgiveness of our sins, He forgave us as long as we believe in His role. David the Psalmist sings of mercy and justice (Ps. 101:1), testifying that God is merciful and just (Ps. 115:5), so it is very important for the words of the Apostles and Prophets that pertain to repentance to be entwined within us, and also their words about God’s righteous judgments and His perfect mercy in the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>1452</sup>

**750. How can the soul be certain that it is purified from sin?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “If one recognizes David’s motif when saying, ‘I hate and abhor lying’ (Ps. 119:163) or realizes that he is fulfilling the apostle’s command: ‘Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming,’ adding to that as an extension to judgment over every sin, ‘upon the sons of disobedience’ (Col. 3:5–6). In order for him to say, ‘A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness’ (Ps. 101:4). Again, one realizes that he possesses the same thing as this meek one if he had the same awe as the saints. For this reason, David says, ‘I see the treacherous, and am disgusted because they do not keep Your word’ (Ps. 119:158).

“The apostle says, ‘Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?’ (2 Cor. 11:29). Truly these words elevate the soul over the flesh (Matt. 10:28). We care about the flesh, are disgusted by all kinds of dirt. We are wholeheartedly saddened when we see wounds or any harm in the flesh, so how much more

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<sup>1450</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae*, 293.

<sup>1451</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 149: p. 237.

<sup>1452</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 12.

should we be saddened for what befalls the sinners. For whoever loves Christ and loves the brethren, suffers when he sees them wounded on account of the wild beasts and are viciously attacked by deadly evil attacks as David says, ‘My wounds are foul and festering Because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh.’ (Ps. 38:5–7). The Apostle also says: ‘The sting of death is sin’ (1 Cor. 15:56). When one is made aware of the state he is in because of his sins and the sins of others, he is assured that he will be perfectly purified.”<sup>1453</sup>

### 751. What happens to a person who sins after his baptism?

This question was presented to **St. Basil the Great**, due to the spread of a certain idea that whoever falls into grave sins after baptism has no hope. The saint affirmed that we should never lose hope as long as our repentance is sincere and bears the fruit of our return to God, who awaits all. **St. Augustine** says that as long as we have breath, God waits for our repentance, or else why did He not take the soul away?

Will he fall into despair of his own salvation, he who fell in a multitude of sins after his baptism? What is the measure by which someone can continue to be hopeful in God’s love through repentance?

**St. Basil the Great** responds: “If we compare God’s ultimate compassion or abundant mercy, to the number of sins and their heaviness, we will find no place for despair. Even if the latter can be measured or counted, it is impossible to measure God’s compassion or to count His mercies, so despair can by no means find place. By the knowledge of mercy and condemnation of sin, we find forgiveness in the blood of Christ as it is written in Matthew 26:28. There are many methods and paths by which we learn that we ought not to despair. In particular, we look at the parable by our Lord Jesus Christ, about the son who wasted his fathers’ wealth on sin. From words of the Lord Himself, we learn what kind of great banquet it was, that which befits repentance (Luke 15:22–24). I add to that what God said through Isaiah: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). We need to be aware though, that this is only achieved when our repentance is truly worthy of this, and if it is the result of our hatred to sin, as it is written in the Old and New Testaments, bearing fruits worthy of it.”<sup>1454</sup>

### 752. What are the fruits of true repentance?

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “the manner of repentance should be appropriate and worthy fruit be shown by those turning from sin through their repentance, as it is written: *Bring forth*

<sup>1453</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 296.

<sup>1454</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae*, 13.

*fruits worthy of repentance* (Luke 3:8),<sup>1455</sup> which was mentioned in its own designated places (which means returning to God).<sup>1456</sup>

**753. Why is it that sometimes one feels sorrow and remorse without any effort (almost naturally) for a certain sin, but at some other times one feels very lukewarm and even if he forces himself, he still does not feel any regret in his heart?**

**St. Basil the Great** responds, “Such a compunction comes from the gift of God to stir up desire, that the soul, having tasted the sweetness of such compunction or sorrow, might be stirred and drawn to imitate such a grace. For it is shown that if it is given even to those who have not much stirred themselves, how much more shall it be given to those who desire and labour always to be in the compunction of the fear of God, and that those who lose this grace through indolence are without excuse. But the fact that sometimes we force ourselves and yet are unable to obtain it is proof thereby that we are negligent at other times—for it is impossible that one who has not continually exercised himself either in meditations or in the divine ordinances should suddenly turn to prayer and immediately obtain what he seeks. Yes, and it shows thereby that a soul of this kind is oppressed by other vices and passions, the ascendancy of which does not allow it the freedom for those things it wishes to possess, according to what the Apostle dealt with, saying: *I am carnal, sold under sin; for what I want, this I do not perform, but what I hate, this is what I do* (Rom. 7:14-15) and again: *But now it is no longer I who am doing this, but rather sin that dwells in me* (Rom. 7:17).

“God has permitted this very thing to befall us for a good purpose, so that through the very things that the soul suffers against its will, it may in time be corrected and converted to him who will alleviate it of its burdens (cf. Ezek. 18:23; 33:11) and at length come to know itself and recover its senses and understand that it has been seized and held down in *the snares of the devil* (cf. 1 Tim. 3:7; 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:26), into which it has fallen of its own accord, so that as a captive *what it does not want it performs and what it hates it does* (cf. Rom. 7:15). But if it turns to the Lord so that he may *liberate it from the body of this death* (Rom. 7:24), immediately it shall discover mercy, provided it repents wholly and from the heart.”<sup>1457</sup>

**754. What is our stance on those who conceal their sins?**

**St. Basil the Great** responds, “What shall we do about him who claims that his conscience does not condemn him for the sins he is committing. Thus, the question here is specific to him who speaks to someone about repentance, while the hearer conceals his sins. It is fitting for us to remind him without aggression with the words of the Lord: ‘For there is

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<sup>1455</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 21: p. 129.

<sup>1456</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 14.

<sup>1457</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 123: p. 211–213.



nothing covered that will not be revealed' (Matt. 10:26); 'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' (Matt. 12:34)."

**755. What if a person says, "my conscience is clear"?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, "A similar thing happens to physical sicknesses. There are many diseases that are not felt by those who have them, yet they trust the physician's diagnosis more than their own feeling of sickness. So also, for spiritual sickness, namely, sin. If one is unaware of his sin but does not condemn himself, he ought to trust in those who can see his case clearer. This is explained by the holy Apostles who though they were very much attached to the Lord, when they heard the Lord telling them that, 'one of you will betray Me' (Matt. 26:21), they preferred to trust in His word and yielded to His declaration, saying: 'Lord is it I?' (Matt. 26:22). St. Peter teaches us, that even though he was zealous in his humility, he refused His Master, Lord and God's ministry (in washing his feet) and so he heard the words: 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me' (John 13:8), and he was thus convinced of this truth and so said: 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!' (John 13:9)."

**756. What is required of the repentant person when he falls into the same sin again?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, "He who has offended once and incurs this same sin again is seen to indicate this about himself: first that he is not purified of what is prior to the sin, from which, as from a kind of noxious root there sprout the same ills as before. It is as if someone cuts off the branches of a tree but leaves behind the root. As long as the root remains in the ground it will eventually generate shoots from the same stock. So also with sin: since not all who commit an offence take their impulse from the sins themselves—rather the cause of the offence arises from yet other offences—it is therefore necessary for him who wishes to purify himself wholly from sin to cut out from below the very first causes of defect. For example, if there has been something of *strife and envy* (cf. Rom 13:13, et al.), it does not take a beginning from itself, but has a root of arrogance and the love of human glory; for he who seeks glory from men either harries with disputes or envies those who act uprightly, that is, with anyone through whom he appears to be held in less praise or admiration."<sup>1458</sup>

**757. What is the appropriate conduct of the repentant believer?**

Paul the Apostle presents five principles of appropriate conduct that suits the children of God who have repented:

**First:** Walk in Christ. "As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (2 Cor. 2:6). Whoever accepts Christ the Lord, walks in Him, who is the divine Way

<sup>1458</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 22.1–6: p. 129–131.

and thus is able to traverse the world in his heart and mind, to the Father’s bosom, and thus he settles his hope on the resurrection of the flesh and the constant presence in eternal glory. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Walk in Him, for He is the way that leads to the Father, and not the Angels, for they are incapable of bringing us to Him.”<sup>1459</sup>

**Second:** Walk in the Holy Spirit. “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). **St. Anthony the Great** says, “(The Holy Spirit) urges (the believer) to continuously struggle in the body and the soul, to be equally sanctified, and equally worthy of inheriting eternal life.” He also says, “In this way the whole body is accustomed to goodness, submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit and so it is gradually transformed until at the end, it partakes to a certain degree in the characteristics of the holy body which we receive in the resurrection of the righteous.”<sup>1460</sup>

**Third:** Walk in love. “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2). A Christian partakes in Christ’s priesthood (the general priesthood), by offering his life as a sacrifice of love for others, like his Master. This is the characteristic of the “new man” who replaces the “old man.” **St. Augustine** says, “Now he who dwells in love dwells in God, for ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16)”<sup>1461</sup> and, “You are called a child: if you refuse to imitate Him, why do you seek His inheritance?”<sup>1462</sup>

**Fourth:** Walk as children of light. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Through love, we resemble God, partaking in His nature and are counted as children of light. Thus, there will not be any room for death within us, but we enjoy the light of the resurrection. Through this concept, the Apostle advises us to walk as children of light, enjoying the power of the resurrection and its joy within us, proclaimed in our daily life in our seen and unseen actions, leaving behind us all the inappropriate works of darkness. **St. Augustine** says, “For when you were darkness, you were not in the Lord. Again, when you are light, you are light not in yourselves, but in the Lord.”<sup>1463</sup>

**Fifth:** Walk in wisdom, redeeming the time. “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Col. 4:4). St. Paul the Apostle asks us to walk wisely and carefully, among others, to win them to the kingdom of God. Through our actions, we witness to our Christ and direct the hearts of many to the cross so that they may enjoy the power of God’s salvation and that the gates of salvation may be opened before them. Every moment

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<sup>1459</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* (NPNF I/13:284) amended.

<sup>1460</sup> St. Anthony the Great, Epistle 1, *Philokalia* 16, 17, 20.

<sup>1461</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume III* (131–164) 148.5 (FOTC 20:228).

<sup>1462</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 64.3 (NPNF I/6:453) amended.

<sup>1463</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 17.5 (NPNF I/6:311–312) amended.

in our lives is valuable and could be a reason for blessing or bitterness and death, thus he says, “redeeming the time.”

**758. Is there a contradiction between shedding tears of repentance and having a cheerful personality?**

**St. Basil the Great** suffered much, but he always had a smile on his face, which revealed his inner peace and joy. Even though he went through a lot, he referred to the tears of repentance as the tears of love. According to St. Basil, tears are a sacrifice of love to God through repentance and the full desire for the believer to become an icon of God. On the other hand, his tears were offered as a sacrifice for his brothers and sisters in humanity, praying for the salvation of all if possible. In this, he shares the feelings of the Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

St. Basil’s answer to the question of whether it is appropriate for someone to laugh was that he could understand how a good Christian could laugh “especially since there are so many who *through their transgression of the law dishonour God* (cf. Rom. 2:23) and are *dying in their sins* (cf. John 8:24), over whom it is fitting to sorrow and to groan unceasingly.”<sup>1464</sup> He says in his homily on the Martyr Julitta: “When you see your brother weeping in repentance over his sin, weep with him. So then through others’ sins, you save yourself from sin. Whoever pours those tears over his neighbor’s sins, will be healed through his grief over his brother. As the case of him who says: ‘Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law’ (Ps. 119:53).”<sup>1465</sup>

He also says, “‘You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness’ (Ps. 30:12). The joy of God is not found in just any soul but, if someone has mourned much and deeply his own sin with loud lamentations and continual weepings, as if he were bewailing his own death, the mourning of such a one is turned into joy, and here it is praiseworthy to mourn ... The prophets make a lamentation for us, summoning us to mourn, in order that, becoming aware from the prophetic words of our own sins, we may bewail our destruction, afflicting our flesh with hardships and toils. By such a person, the mourning garment, which he put on when bewailing his sin, is rent, and the tunic of joy is placed around him and the cloak of salvation, those bright wedding garments, with which, if one is adorned, he will not be cast out from the bridal chamber. (Matt. 22:11–13).”<sup>1466</sup>

<sup>1464</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 53: p. 153.

<sup>1465</sup> PG 31:257D.

<sup>1466</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 14.7 On Psalm 29 (FOTC 46:224).

**759. What is grief according to God and grief according to the world? (cf. 2 Cor.7:10).**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “*Grief according to God* is when we grieve over the neglect or transgression of the commandment of God, as it is written: *Grief has seized me because of sinners who forsake your law* (Ps. 118:53), but it is *grief according to the world* when we are grieved over some aspect of human affairs or of those things which pertain to the world.”<sup>1467</sup>

**760. What kind of sorrow is praiseworthy (Matt. 5:4)?**

**St. Basil the Great** answers, “This question is also covered by the question in which we explained *grief according to God* (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10), that is, if we mourn over sins either because we weep over those who *through their transgression of the law dishonour God* (Rom. 2:23), or because of those who are in peril through sin, for *the soul that sins, itself shall die* (Ezek. 18:4, 20) according to him who said: *that I may mourn over many who have sinned till now* (2 Cor. 12:21).”<sup>1468</sup>

**761. Is discipleship necessary?**

Christianity exists wherever discipleship is, but is weakened and becomes dry, heavy, and fictional when discipleship is lost. That was why when the Lord ordered the disciples to preach, He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). The Lord commanded them to prepare a new generation of disciples who will live as they lived, emphasizing the fact that discipleship is the primary method of teaching and the keeping of the commandments. Through discipleship, the disciples are filled with the Spirit of the Lord and Christianity is passed on from one generation to the next. For this reason, Christians were called “disciples,” and were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Perhaps, this was out of mockery from the pagans, by attributing to them the crucified Christ.

Since we are “Christians,” let us also acknowledge that we are “disciples.” I am not thus saying that we are all apostles or shepherds but that every Christian ought to be characterized by discipleship to our Lord Jesus at the hands of his or her mentor. The sacraments of baptism and repentance both fulfill that role through the sponsor and the Father in confession who are both responsible before God for the believer.

Confession, according to this concept, **is the discipleship of a new generation that lives by the spirit of their fathers the saints, for Christ the Lord. It is a union between the**

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<sup>1467</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 50: p. 153.

<sup>1468</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 52: p. 153.

**confessor, the Father in confession and Christ;** not just for a certain time of the week, but continuously. A father gathers his children and delights in regularly meeting them, not just physically but also spiritually in his private prayers or on the altar. The son and daughter then love their father, pray for him, follow his example, and consult him in everything, to learn from his spiritual experiences in struggling against sin so that they may follow his example too, his faith, struggle, and watchfulness.

**762. Why do I need discipleship to my Father in confession if I already knew the source of his teachings and instructions? I memorized the entire Bible and I even studied it much better than many priests!**

In our intellectual and elitist age this kind of objection reveals how many Christians are spiritually lukewarm. Many of our Christian youth memorize many passages from scripture, but are content merely to study and memorize them without putting them into action; without living, tasting, and experiencing them. We live in an era where everyone competes to become a teacher and not a disciple, to convict others for their sins while hiding their own personal sins and ignoring scripture itself, which although it teaches that wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit, emphasizes the importance of discipleship to the Father in confession, to live with him in Christ.

Scripture testifies that when Saul of Tarsus met the Lord, he immediately asked him: “What do you want me to do?” The Lord’s response was to direct him to a spiritual father, Ananias (Acts 9:12). Samuel, great among the prophets, was more attentive to God’s voice than Eli the priest, yet Samuel learned and was trained at his hands (1 Sam. 3:10). Cornelius, to whom the Lord proclaimed the acceptance of his charities and prayers through an angel, was not guided by the angel but was commanded to call Peter the Apostle to guide him (Acts 10:5).

**Abbot Moses** says, “The Lord did not of Himself instruct by the method of a Divine colloquy the lad Samuel, when chosen for judgment, but suffered him to run once or twice to the old man, and willed that one whom He was calling to converse with Him should be taught even by one who had offended God, as he was an old man, and preferred that he whom He had deemed worthy to be called by Him should be trained by the Elder in order to test the humility of him who was called to a Divine office, and to set an example to the younger men by the manner of his subjection.

“And when Christ in His own Person called and addressed Paul, although He might have opened out to him at once the way of perfection, yet He chose rather to direct him to Ananias and commanded him to learn the way of truth from him, saying: Arise and go into the city and there it shall be told you what you ought to do. (Acts 9:6) So He sends him to an older man, and thinks good to have him instructed by his teaching rather than His own, lest what might have been rightly done in the case of Paul might set a bad example of self-sufficiency, if each one were to persuade himself that he also ought in like manner to be trained by the

government and teaching of God alone rather than by the instruction of the Elders. And this self-sufficiency the apostle himself teaches, not only by his letters but by his acts and deeds, ought to be shunned with all possible care, as he says that he went up to Jerusalem solely for this reason to communicate in a private and informal conference with his co-apostles and those who were before him that Gospel which he preached to the Gentiles, the grace of the Holy Spirit accompanying him with powerful signs and wonders: as he says And I communicated with them the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles lest perhaps I had run or should run in vain. (Gal 2:2) Who then is so self-sufficient and blind as to dare to trust in his own judgment and discretion when the chosen vessel confesses that he had need of conference with his fellow apostles. Whence we clearly see that the Lord does not Himself show the way of perfection to anyone who having the opportunity of learning despises the teaching and training of the Elders, paying no heed to that saying which ought most carefully to be observed: Ask your father and he will show it to you: your Elders and they will tell you. (Deut. 32:7).<sup>1469</sup>

### **763. Is there a model prayer for repentance?**

**St. Basil the Great** offers us his own prayer for repentance, which reveals the following to us:

- a. He fixes his eyes on God's overflowing love and compassion, and not just on his own sins.
- b. He asks God to grant him a repentance such that his repentance never loses its way.
- c. He blends tears of repentance with the joy of thanksgiving to the Forgiver of sins.
- d. He proclaims his love for God, being beloved by Him until the end.
- e. He asks him for strength to be saved from the devil and the world.
- f. He does not promise to do good deeds, but asks God to grant him goodness.

*O Master Lord, God of all, and infinitely righteous Father.*

*O You who is ever existent and abides forever.*

*You are ever-existent without change.*

*You had no beginning and will have no end.*

*O You who are imperceptible in essence, infinite in greatness,  
perfect in goodness and flowing in nature.*

*The depth of Your strength and wisdom are indescribable.*

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<sup>1469</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 2.14–15 (NPNF II/11:315–316).

*I bless You as you look with mercy and compassion on my wretchedness,  
for You save me from the filth of this vain and malicious world, made of brick.  
You save me from the numerous nets of the ruler of the darkness of this age.*

*I bless You, Lord, for showing me, a sinner, Your wondrous mercies.  
You have become my Beloved One to the end in all things.  
You are the instructor and governor, the refuge and the helper,  
the fortress of every soul and body.*

*I bless You, Lord, for You show me, the unworthy,  
the abundance of Your infinite love.  
Although I daily subject myself to Satan because of my laziness,  
You guard me and deliver me from his traps.*

*I bless You, Lord, for You grant me the strength to repent for my sins,  
and You grant me countless opportunities to return from my malice.*

*I bless You, Lord, for although I have no strength,  
You strengthen my weakness, not allowing me to completely fall,  
but You stretch out Your helping hand from above  
and restore me back to You again.*

*How can I repay You, O Master who is full of goodness,  
for all the blessings you bestowed on me?  
You never cease laboring for me, I the sinner.*

*What thanksgivings can I offer You?  
This is why I cry out to You from dawn till evening like a swallow,  
and I sing joyfully to You like a nightingale.  
I will never cease blessing You all the days of my life,  
O my Creator, who is Benevolent to me and my Protector.*

*I am unworthy to speak to You O God, for I am very sinful.  
But I thank You Lord, for Your patience with my many transgressions.  
You did not punish me until this very moment.*

*I thank You, Lord, for You do not desire the death of a sinner,  
but rather that he returns and lives (Ezek. 18:23).  
I deserve to be greatly punished, and be cast away from Your presence,  
but Your love that tolerated me extended Your longsuffering towards me.*

*I thank You, Lord, even when I am unable to thank You as befits Your patience for me.  
Have mercy on me, Lord, and straighten my life according to Your will.  
Lead me, for Your kindness knows what is best for me.  
According to Your great compassions,*

*make me perfect in every good deed that pleases You, and free my poor flesh.  
For Your work is mercy and our salvation, O God.*

*We glorify You, give thanks to You, and worship You  
with Your Only Begotten Son,  
and Your All-Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver,  
from now and forever and unto the ages of all ages, Amen.*<sup>1470</sup>

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<sup>1470</sup> Cf. Nikolaos S. Hatzinikolaou, *An Anthology of Patristic Prayers* (Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1988): pp. 53–55.



## 20

## The Sacrament of the Eucharist

**764. What is the mystery of communion in the eucharist?**

It is the mystery of uniting us the faithful with the Savior by partaking of His Body and Blood which He gave up for us. Thus, our whole being, including our bodies, is sanctified and is blessed by His eternal glory.

**765. Is the eucharist a sacrifice?**

**First:** The Church was introduced to the idea of sacrifice at the time of the apostles, for St. Paul says, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb. 13:10). In his epistle to the Hebrews (Chapter 10), he speaks of the Old Testament sacrifices as symbols fulfilled in Christ’s redemption and in the eucharist. He also speaks of the eucharist as an offering when he compares the holy table of God to that of demons (1 Cor. 10:20–21).

**Second:** Around the year 100 A. D., the author of the **Didache** mentions the eucharist as a pure sacrifice.<sup>1471</sup> This was further confirmed by Fathers of the Church<sup>1472</sup> such as St. Ignatius, St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Cyprian, and St. Augustine.

**Third:** The Church uses two Greek words to refer to the eucharist: *θυσία* (*thysia*; sacrifice), and *προσφορά* (*prosphora*; offering). When talking about the eucharist, **St. Ignatius** refers to the Church assembly as the eucharistic *θυσιαστήριον* (*thysiastirion*; place of sacrifice or altar).<sup>1473</sup> **St. Clement of Rome** says that the work of the bishop is the offering of the *προσφοτερια* (*prosfoteria*; the oblations).<sup>1474</sup>

**Fourth:** The Fathers often used<sup>1475</sup> the word *τράπεζα* (*trapeza*), which means table, to refer to the altar. This term does not contradict the fact that the eucharist is a sacrifice, but it gives the sacrificial act of the eucharist a new meaning. In the New Testament, senseless animals were unwillingly slaughtered by the people on the altar for a sacrifice. However, on our altars, the Sacrifice offers Himself out of His immense love, to grant us life. He is not

<sup>1471</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 14: p. 196.

<sup>1472</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philipppians* 4 (ANF 1); St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 117 (ANF 1); St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 4.17.5; 4.18.6 (ANF 1); St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 5.8 (NPNF II/7); St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume I (1–82)* 68.9 (FOTC 12).

<sup>1473</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 5 (ANF 1:51); *Epistle to the Trallians* 7.2 (ANF 1:68–69); *Epistle to the Philipppians* 4 (ANF 1:117).

<sup>1474</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 44 (ANF 1:17).

<sup>1475</sup> See Pseudo-Athanasius, *Dispt. Cont. Arian.* 17; and Tertullian, *De Exhort. Constit.*, 10.

just a sacrifice, but He is also the invisible Priest, the Giver of Life, and the Mediator between the Heavenly Father and His people through His sacrificial work.

**St Augustine** says, “it follows that the whole of that redeemed city, that is, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the High Priest who, taking the form of a servant, offered Himself in His passion for us that we might be the body of so glorious a Head ... we ourselves who constitute the whole sacrifice ... Such is the sacrifice of Christians: ‘We, the many, are one body in Christ.’ This is the Sacrifice, as the faithful understand, which the Church continues to celebrate in the sacrament of the altar, in which it is clear to the Church that she herself is offered in the very offering she makes to God.”<sup>1476</sup>

He also says, “Is the altar not heavenly? How so? Because nothing bodily is on it, but all that is spiritual on it becomes an offering. The offering does not turn into ashes and smoke ... for what is on the altar is glorious and unique ... The church is heavenly, she is nothing but heaven!”<sup>1477</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Awesome in truth are the Mysteries of the Church, awesome in truth is the Altar. A fountain went up out of Paradise sending forth material rivers, from this table springs up a fountain which sends forth rivers spiritual. By the side of this fountain are planted not fruitless willows, but trees reaching even to heaven, bearing fruit ever timely and undecaying. If any be scorched with heat, let him come to the side of this fountain and cool his burning. For it quenches drought, and comforts all things that are burnt up, not by the sun, but by the fiery darts. For it has its beginning from above, and its source is there, whence also its water flows. Many are the streams of that fountain which the Comforter sends forth, and the Son is the Mediator, not holding mattock to clear the way, but opening our minds. This fountain is a fountain of light, spouting forth rays of truth. By it stand the Powers on high looking upon the beauty of its streams, because they more clearly perceive the power of the Things set forth, and the flashings unapproachable ... They who share this blood stand with Angels and Archangels and the Powers that are above, clothed in Christ's own kingly robe, and having the armor of the Spirit. Nay, I have not as yet said any great thing: they are clothed with the King Himself.”<sup>1478</sup>

He also says, “How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. Lo! You see Him, You touch Him, you eat Him. And you indeed desire to see His clothes, but He gives Himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you.”<sup>1479</sup>

“[When you see the Table set before you], say to yourself, ‘Because of this Body am I no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner, but free: because of this I hope for heaven, and

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<sup>1476</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God, Books VIII–XVI* 10.6 (FOTC 14:127).

<sup>1477</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 829 To the Newly baptized*.

<sup>1478</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.4 (NPNF I/14:165) amended.

<sup>1479</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 82.4 (NPNF II/10:476) amended.

to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels, converse with Christ; this Body, nailed and scourged, was more than death could stand against; this Body the very sun saw sacrificed, and turned aside his beams; for this both the veil was rent in that moment, and rocks were burst asunder, and all the earth was shaken. This is even that Body, the blood-stained, the pierced, and that out of which gushed the saving fountains, the one of blood, the other of water, for all the world.”<sup>1480</sup>

“When we see the Lord as a sacrifice placed on the altar, the priest praying over the sacrifice, and the congregation being cleansed by the precious blood, can you say that you are still standing with men on earth? ... Did you not ascend directly to heaven?”<sup>1481</sup>

“Since we have become heavenly and received such an offering, let us fear! It is befitting for us to stop walking on this earth, for he who desires to depart from the earth is from now able to ... for as we draw near God, we become ourselves in heaven. So what do I need from heaven, if I can now see the God of heaven, and I myself have become heaven?”

“He has invited us to heaven, to the table of the great and wonderful King, and do we shrink and hesitate, instead of hastening and running to it? And what then is our hope of salvation? We cannot lay the blame on our weakness; we cannot on our nature. It is indolence and nothing else that renders us unworthy.”<sup>1482</sup>

### **766. Why is the Sacrament of the Eucharist considered to be the pinnacle of Christian worship?**

In the sacrament of the eucharist, the believer, along with his heavenly friends, sets off to Golgotha where he sees his soul’s heavenly Groom, offering His blood as a dowry. The believer then remembers the death and resurrection of His life-giving Groom, not just in words and thoughts but by actively partaking of His body and blood that are offered for him; the secret of his life and his continuous spiritual growth.

In the sacrament of the eucharist, the Holy Spirit offers us the crucified body of the Lord who rose from the dead, and His precious blood, to be in Him and He in us. Through Him, we are worthy to enter before His divine throne, abiding in Christ’s righteousness, as members of His body. Christ the Lord says, “For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him ... so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:55–57). The Church hides in this Holy Sacrifice, and therefore bears Christ’s holiness and righteousness.

<sup>1480</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 24.7 (NPNF I/12:142) amended.

<sup>1481</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3.

<sup>1482</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3 (NPNF I/13:65) amended.

She becomes a spotless bride (Song. 4:7) to her Holy Groom. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “with this gift do we adorn ourselves, with this we are beautified.”<sup>1483</sup> He also says, “This blood is the salvation of our souls, by this the soul is washed, by this is beautiful, by this is inflamed.”<sup>1484</sup>

Then he says, “For this Table is the sinews of our soul, the bond of our mind, the foundation of our confidence, our hope, our salvation, our light, our life ... when you see It set before you, say to yourself, ‘Because of this Body am I no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner, but free: because of this I hope for heaven, and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels, converse with Christ.’”<sup>1485</sup>

“This fountain is a fountain of light, spouting forth rays of truth. By it stand the Powers on high looking upon the beauty of its streams ... They who share this blood stand with Angels and Archangels and the Powers that are above, clothed in Christ’s own kingly robe, and having the armor of the Spirit. Nay, I have not as yet said any great thing: they are clothed with the King Himself.”<sup>1486</sup>

#### **767. Is it possible to partake of the eucharist every week?**

There are two main reasons that some people offer for excusing themselves from receiving the eucharist every week. The **first** reason is feeling unprepared; while the truth is that to be prepared for communion is simply to feel unworthy, while sincerely praying for the work of God’s grace through repentance and prayer. The **second** reason is when people lose the meaning of the eucharist because they pray the Divine Liturgy merely as a routine. The eucharist is the medicine of immortality. He who feels the need for this medicine should not stop partaking of the eucharist, or praying, or studying the Holy Bible, or striving to keep the divine commandments. Doing these things prevents us from practicing the rituals in a literal manner that is void of spirit, and instead fills the heart with love for God and love for others.

#### **768. Is it permissible for a person to receive the body and blood of our Lord every day?**

**St. Basil** talks about praying the Divine Liturgy daily: “Now, to receive Communion daily, thus to partake of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, is an excellent and advantageous practice; for Christ Himself says clearly: ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting’ (John 6:54). Who doubts that to share continually in the life is nothing else than to have a manifold life? We ourselves, of course, receive Communion four times a week, on

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<sup>1483</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 50.3 (NPNF I/10:303).

<sup>1484</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.3 (NPNF I/14:164–165).

<sup>1485</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 24.8, 7 (NPNF I/12:143, 142).

<sup>1486</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.4 (NPNF I/14:165).

Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays; also on other days, if there is a commemoration of some saint.”<sup>1487</sup>

He also says, “The daily Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ is great and beneficial because the Lord declares: ‘Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you’ (John 6:53).”<sup>1488</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Throughout these days the teachers feed you. Christ daily feeds you, That His Table is ever ordered before you. What is the reason, O Hearers, that you see the Table, and come not to the Banquet?”<sup>1489</sup>

### **769. Why do we believe in the one Sacrifice that is offered on multiple altars?**

There are no multiple sacrifices like the High Priest used to offer in the past, for we offer the same sacrifice every day, or in other words we fulfill the remembrance of the sacrifice (ἀνάμνησις, *anamnesis*). We believe in one altar, despite its multiplicity, for they are all together the one holy tomb of the one body of Christ. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of His death, and this [remembrance] is one and not many ... For we always offer the same, not one sheep now and tomorrow another, but always the same thing: so that the sacrifice is one ... Christ is one everywhere, being complete here and complete there also, one Body ... so also [He is] one sacrifice ... It is not another sacrifice, as the High Priest, but we offer always the same, or rather we perform a remembrance of a Sacrifice.”<sup>1490</sup>

### **770. Why do we mix the wine with water in the chalice?**

When the Lord was pierced in His side, blood and water came out. St. Augustine believes that mixing the Eucharistic blood with water indicates that water is a symbol of humanity which partakes in Christ’s suffering.

### **771. How can we prepare ourselves to receive the body and blood of the Lord?**

The believer should examine his conscience before God and purify it through repentance. The Apostle says, “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in

<sup>1487</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 93 To the Patrician Caesarea, about Communion (FOTC 13:208).

<sup>1488</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *De baptismo* 10.6, 54.

<sup>1489</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 82.1 (NPNF I/6:504).

<sup>1490</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1956): pp. 137; see also St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On Hebrews* 17.6 (NPNF I/14:449).

an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Cor. 11:27–29).

**772. What results from partaking of the body and blood of the Lord?**

By receiving the body and blood of the Lord, the believer abides in Christ, unites with Him, and shares in the eternal life. Christ says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I am in him” (John 6:53–56).

**773. How do we feel when we participate in the Divine Liturgy?**

- a. We should ask the Lord to grant us His fear, to realize that we are in heaven before the majesty of the throne of God.
- b. During the church readings, we should count ourselves among the multitudes and that Christ Himself (at that moment) talks to us.
- c. In the offering of the Lamb, we must contemplate the Trinity. The Father sent His Son to us; the Son is pleased to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our salvation; and the Holy Spirit leads us towards Jesus Christ and lift us up to heaven.
- d. In the institution narrative, we should consider ourselves in the upper room where Christ blessed and sanctified, granting us His body and blood.
- e. During communion, we should feel that Christ Himself is extending His hands to offer us His body and blood.
- f. After receiving the eucharist, we should consider ourselves as standing before the throne of God, praising and glorifying Him with the heavenly hosts.
- g. Upon leaving the church, we should occupy ourselves with talking to the Savior who raises us with Him, desiring to be one with Him as Mary Magdalene desired when He spoke to her and revealed that He was not the gardener as she thought, but the Lord Himself.

**774. Will the Church continue to pray Divine Liturgy until the second coming?**

The Apostle says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). By saying, “you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes,” the Apostle reveals the eschatological aspect of the life of the Church. The main role of the Church is to be united with Christ the Lord in His death, and in the continuous waiting for His second coming, so that she may partake in His glory and see Him face to

face. We delight in Him here by partaking in His body and blood, but at His coming, He will carry us to the bosom of His Father, wherein we partake of His glory and fulfill the pleasure of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**St. Ambrose** says, “So, as often as you receive, what does the Apostle say to you? As often as, we receive, we proclaim the death of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). If death, we proclaim the remission of sins. If, as often as blood is shed, it is shed for the remission of sins, I ought always to accept Him, that He may always dismiss my sins (cf. Matt. 26.28). I, who always sin, should always have a remedy.”<sup>1491</sup>

### **775. What is the relationship between the table of the eucharist and the table of teaching?**

In his ninety-fifth homily on the reception of the holy mysteries, **St. Jacob of Sarug** links the eucharistic table with the teaching table. He says, “Come, you discerning, let us delight today in the teaching, the taste whereof is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Come and be filled with the table that is full of life, for its foods are unblemished for those who deserve them.”

### **776. What is the role of this banquet in the lives of those who partake of it?**

**First: Openness towards others.** As the believer enjoys this banquet, he in turn desires to invite others to it. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The King’s bride went out on the paths of the world to gather all peoples in order to delight them ... She stood in the marketplaces and the corners of the earth to invite the assemblies and the crowds to the banquet.”<sup>1492</sup>

He also says, “Who is capable of sacrificing the Son before His Father, if He had not offered Himself from before His sufferings? Our Lord is the High Priest and the perfect sacrifice and therefore, He offered Himself before His Father ... He died, but while being dead, He was alive. He is the Priest and the Sacrifice. Comprehending this mystery is beyond debate. He taught them to drink from the Cup of His blood and to make the nations, countries and the world drink from it ... He sealed with His blood the new covenant, which He instituted for the remission of sins for the whole world.”<sup>1493</sup>

**Second: Caring for the poor.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “These words let us also listen to, all of us, as many as in this place approach with the poor to this holy Table, but when we

<sup>1491</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Sacraments* 4.6.28 (FOTC 44:306; PL 16:446).

<sup>1492</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, see mimrō 95 “On the Partaking of the Holy Mysteries—for the Week of White,” in *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, ed., Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig 1905, 2nd ed. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006).

<sup>1493</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 52, On Our Savior’s Sufferings, Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection* (Coptic).

go out, do not seem even to have seen them, but are both drunken and pass heedlessly by the hungry; the very things whereof the Corinthians were accused.”<sup>1494</sup>

**Third: Walking in the spirit of unity and love.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “And what do they become who partake of it? The Body of Christ: not many bodies, but one body. For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains nowhere appear; they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction; so are we conjoined both with each other and with Christ ... Wherefore also he adds, ‘for we all partake of that one bread’ (1 Cor. 10:17) ... why do we not also show forth the same love, and become also in this respect one?”<sup>1495</sup>

**St. Augustine** also says, “In this loaf of bread you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Were there not many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it cannot possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it is not yet bread without fire to bake it.”<sup>1496</sup>

**Fourth: Not to participate in the tables of the wicked.** **St. John the Chrysostom** says, “Do not then run to the contrary things. For neither if you were a king’s son, and having the privilege of your father’s table, should leave it and choose to partake of the table of the condemned and the prisoners in the dungeon, would your father permit it, but with great vehemence he would withdraw you; not as though the table could harm you, but because it disgraces your nobility and the royal table.”<sup>1497</sup>

**Fifth: Walking in the spirit of strength.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Let us then return from that table like lions breathing fire, having become terrible to the devil; thinking on our Head, and on the love which He has shown for us ... (Our Lord says) I have willed to become your Brother, for your sake I shared in flesh and blood, and in turn I give out to you the flesh and the blood by which I became your kinsman. This blood causes the image of our King to be fresh within us, produces beauty unspeakable, permits not the nobleness of our souls to waste away, watering it continually, and nourishing it ... This blood, if rightly taken, drives away devils, and keeps them afar off from us, while it calls to us Angels and the Lord of

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<sup>1494</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 27.7 (NPNF I/12:162).

<sup>1495</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 24.4 (NPNF I/12:140).

<sup>1496</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 227 (FOTC 38:196).

<sup>1497</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 24.5 (NPNF I/12:141) amended.



Angels. For wherever they see the Lord's blood, devils flee, and Angels run together ... this blood was poured forth and made heaven accessible."<sup>1498</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, "as the Eucharist is appointed for this very purpose that it may be a safeguard to the receivers, it is needful that we may arm those whom we wish to be safe against the adversary with the protection of the Lord's abundance."<sup>1499</sup>

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, "The Angel could not touch the live coal with his fingers but brought it close to Isaiah's mouth. The Angel did not hold it, and Isaiah did not eat it, but our Lord allowed us to do both this and that."

**Sixth: The emergence of rivers of living water. St. John Chrysostom** says, "Awesome in truth are the Mysteries of the Church, awesome in truth is the Altar. A fountain went up out of Paradise sending forth material rivers, from this table springs up a fountain which sends forth rivers spiritual."<sup>1500</sup>

**Seventh: Embracing our Savior. St. John Chrysostom** says, "He has given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy all their love."<sup>1501</sup>

**Eighth: Attainment of the heavenly kingdom. St. John Chrysostom** says, "So that they (the Lord's body and blood) may be for those who partake of them for vigilance of soul, remission of sins, communion of Your Holy Spirit, fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven, boldness before You, not for judgment or condemnation."<sup>1502</sup>

**Ninth: Fellowship in the praise of the heavenly. John Chrysostom** says, "It is as though man is taken up to heaven itself to stand before the throne of glory, to fly with the Seraphim and to sing the holy song."

**Tenth: Transforming the heart into Bethlehem. St. Ambrose** says, "Thus, every soul which receives the bread which comes down from heaven is a house of bread, the bread of Christ, being nourished and having its heart strengthened by the support of that heavenly bread which dwells within it. Hence, Paul says: 'We are all one bread' (1 Cor. 10:17). Every faithful soul is Bethlehem, just as that is called Jerusalem which has the peace and tranquility of the Jerusalem on high which is in heaven."<sup>1503</sup>

**Eleventh: Challenging corruption and death. St. Cyril the Great** says, "For the food of manna (says He) having for a very little time supplied the need of the body, and driven away the hurt of want, was again powerless, and did not engraft eternal life in those who had

<sup>1498</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.3 (NPNF I/14:164).

<sup>1499</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 53.2 (ANF 5:337).

<sup>1500</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.4 (NPNF I/14:165).

<sup>1501</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 46.3 (NPNF I/14:164) amended.

<sup>1502</sup> The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Prayer of the Epiclesis.

<sup>1503</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters 1-91* 45 (FOTC 26:236).

eaten of it. That was not the *true Food*, then, and Bread from heaven, that is; only the Holy Body of Christ, Which nourishes to immortality and life everlasting, is verily the *true Food*. ‘Yes and they drank water also from the rock.’ ‘And what then’ (He says) ‘or what was the profit to those who drank? For they have died.’ That too then was not *true drink*; but *true Drink* in truth is found to be the Precious Blood of Christ, Which uproots all corruption from the roots, and dislodges death which dwelt in the flesh of man.”<sup>1504</sup>

St. Cyril the Great comments on the Last Supper, saying, “In what manner therefore can man upon earth, clothed as he is with mortality, return to incorruption? I answer that this dying flesh must be made partaker of the life-giving power which comes from God. But the life-giving power of God the Father is the Only-begotten Word: and Him He sent to us as a Savior and Deliverer. And how He sent Him, the blessed John the Evangelist clearly tells us, saying, ‘And the Word became flesh, and dwelt in us’ ... When we partake of the Holy Body of Christ, our Savior, and drink His precious blood, we receive life in us, for we become one in Him; we dwell in Him and He reigns in us ... And do not doubt that this is true, since Himself plainly says, ‘This is My body,’ ‘This is My blood,’ but rather receive in faith the Savior’s word; for He, being the Truth, cannot lie.”<sup>1505</sup>

In one of his letters to Nestorius, he wrote, “Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the only begotten Son of God, that is, Jesus Christ, and confessing His resurrection from the dead and ascent into Heaven, we celebrate the bloodless sacrifice in our churches; and thus approach the mystic blessings and are sanctified by partaking of the holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all. And we receive it, not as common flesh (God forbid), nor as the flesh of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of merit, or as having a divine indwelling, but as a really the life-giving and very flesh of the Word Himself.”

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “He says: ‘Take, eat, this is My body ... this is My blood’ (Matt. 26:26, 28). Such is the suitable food which the Lord ministers, and He offers His flesh and pours forth His blood, and nothing is wanting for the children’s growth. O amazing mystery! We are enjoined to cast off the old and carnal corruption, as also the old nutriment, receiving in exchange another new regimen, that of Christ, receiving Him if we can, to hide Him within; and that, enshrining the Savior in our souls, we may correct the affections of our flesh.”<sup>1506</sup>

**Twelfth: Living for Him who died for us and rose again. St. Basil the Great** says, “Learn then in what manner you ought to eat the Body of Christ, namely, in remembrance of

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<sup>1504</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* On John 6:55 (LFHCC 43:421–422) amended.

<sup>1505</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 142: pp. 666–668, amended.

<sup>1506</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 1.6 (ANF 2:220).

Christ's obedience even to death, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."<sup>1507</sup>

**Thirteen: The declaration of Himself. St. Augustine** says, "Ah yes, brothers and sisters, but where did the Lord wish to be recognized? In the breaking of bread. We're all right, nothing to worry about; we break bread, and we recognize the Lord. It was for our sakes that he didn't want to be recognized anywhere but there, because we weren't going to see him in the flesh, and yet we were going to eat his flesh. So if you're a believer, any of you, if you're not called a Christian for nothing, if you don't come to church pointlessly, if you listen to the word of God in fear and hope, you may take comfort in the breaking of bread."<sup>1508</sup>

**Theophylact of Bulgaria** says, "The eyes of those who receive the holy bread are opened to know Christ, for within the Body of the Lord is His great incomprehensible power."

**Fourteenth: Acknowledging the mystery of the Christian Passover. St. Melito of Sardis** says, "But the mystery of the Lord ... through the body which was able to suffer ... For, he himself led as a lamb and slain as a sheep, he ransomed us from the world's service as from the land of Egypt, and freed us from the devil's slavery as from the hand of Pharaoh; and he marked our souls with his own Spirit and the members of our body with his own blood."<sup>1509</sup>

The mystery of the Passover has been completed in the body of the Lord. For He who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit and the members of our bodies by his own blood.

**Fifteenth: Continuous spiritual growth. St. Cyril the Great** says, "The acquisition of a spiritual life through the Eucharist requires regular participation in the sacrament. The believer retains his spiritual life and grows in the Spirit as long as he is attached to Christ, not only spiritually but also by regularly participating in the communion of the body and blood of Christ. But irregular participation in the Eucharist deprives the believer of eternal life."

### **777. What does the heavenly Bridegroom offer the faithful on His table?**

The Bridegroom offers His body to the bride to partake of it. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, "Who ever saw a bridegroom sacrificed at the marriage supper, or brides eating their betrothed? The Son of God has done a new thing in the world, which no man ever did but He

<sup>1507</sup> *Catena Aurea*.

<sup>1508</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 235.2 (FOTC 38:229).

<sup>1509</sup> Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, ed., Stuart George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979): 61, 66–67, pp. 33, 35–37.

alone. His Body and His Blood He has set forth at the feast before them that sit at table, that they may eat of Him, and live with Him without end. Meat and drink is our Lord at His marriage supper: blessed is He who has given us His Body and Blood, that in Him we may delight.”<sup>1510</sup>

### **778. Is the eucharist, true Body and true Blood?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The chosen apostles were concerned to believe the Son, not to argue or question Him like the daring ones. The bread He broke and called His flesh, they knew it as flesh and they truly believed that His blood was being poured out.”

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “He once in Cana of Galilee, turned the water into wine, akin to blood, and is it incredible that He should have turned wine into blood? When called to a bodily marriage, He miraculously wrought that wonderful work; and on the children of the bride-chamber (Matt. 9:15), shall He not much rather be acknowledged to have bestowed the fruition of His Body and Blood?”<sup>1511</sup> And, “Since then He Himself declared and said of the Bread, *This is My Body*, who shall dare to doubt any longer? And since He has Himself affirmed and said, *This is My Blood*, who shall ever hesitate, saying, that it is not His blood? ... Wherefore with full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ.”<sup>1512</sup>

**Origen** says, “for ‘he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat not from faith’ (Rom. 14:23), and as nothing is pure to him who is defiled and unbelieving, not in itself, but because of his defilement and unbelief.”<sup>1513</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “For they knew not the beauty of the Mystery, and that fairest economy devised for it. Besides this, they full surely reasoned thus with themselves, How can the human body implant in us everlasting life, what can a thing of like nature with ourselves avail to immortality? Christ therefore understanding their thoughts (for all things are naked and, bared to His eyes), heals them again, leading them by the hand manifoldly to the understanding of those things of which they were yet ignorant ... For if you suppose that My Flesh cannot put life into you, how can It ascend into heaven like a bird? ... For this too is equally impossible for flesh. But if it ascends contrary to nature, what is to hinder it from quickening also, even though its nature be not to quicken, of its own nature? For He Who made That heavenly which is from earth, will render it Lifegiving also.”<sup>1514</sup>

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<sup>1510</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *On the Reception of the Holy Mysteries*.

<sup>1511</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 22.2 (NPNF II/7:151).

<sup>1512</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 22.1, 3 (NPNF II/7:151).

<sup>1513</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 11.14 (ANF 10:443).

<sup>1514</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* On John 6:62 (LFHCC 43:434–435) amended.

“... it is befitting for the Eternal to give what is eternal, and not enjoyment of temporary food, which is barely able to last for just the least moment ... For it was a work befitting that which came down then, to render the partakers of It superior to death and decay.”<sup>1515</sup>

“And verily when He was raising the little daughter of the chief of the Synagogue saying, *Maid, arise* (Luke 8:54), He laid hold of her hand, as it is written, giving life, as God, by His All-Powerful command, and again, giving life through the touch of His Holy Flesh ... and when He went into the city called Nain, and one was being carried out dead, *the only son of his mother* (Luke 7:12–14), again he *touched the bier*, saying, *Young man, to you I say, Arise*. And not only to His Word does He give power to give life to the dead, but that He might show that His Own Body was life-giving ... And if by the touch alone of His Holy Flesh, He gives life to that which is decayed, how shall we not profit yet more richly by the life-giving Blessing when we also taste It? For It will surely transform into Its own good, i.e., immortality, those who partake of It.”<sup>1516</sup>

“Christ therefore gave His Own Body for the life of all, and again through It He makes Life to dwell in us; and how, I will say as I am able. For since the life-giving Word of God indwelt in the Flesh, He transformed it into His Own proper good, that is life, and by the unspeakable character of this union, coming wholly together with It, rendered It life-giving, as He Himself is by Nature. Wherefore the Body of Christ gives life to all who partake of It. For it expels death, when It comes to be in dying men, and removes corruption, full in Itself perfectly of the Word which abolishes corruption.”<sup>1517</sup>

“And do not doubt that this is true, since He Himself plainly says, ‘This is My body ... This is My blood:’ but rather receive in faith that Saviour’s word; for He, being truth, cannot lie.”<sup>1518</sup>

“Let them then, who of their folly have not yet admitted the faith in Christ, hear, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you (John 6:53). For wholly destitute of all share and taste of that life which is in sanctification and bliss, do they abide who do not through the mystical Blessing receive Jesus. For He is Life by Nature, inasmuch as He was begotten of a Living Father (John 6:57): no less giving life to His Holy Body also, being in a manner gathered and ineffably united with the all-quickening Word [Logos].”<sup>1519</sup>

<sup>1515</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* On John 6:58 (LFHCC 43:430–431) amended.

<sup>1516</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* On John 6:53 (LFHCC 43:418–419) amended.

<sup>1517</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* On John 6:51 (LFHCC 43:410) amended.

<sup>1518</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 142: p. 668.

<sup>1519</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 4.2 (LFHCC 43:418) amended.

**St. Augustine** says, “He said that He was to ascend into heaven, of course, whole: ‘If you see the Son of Man ascending to where He first was.’ certainly then, at least, you will see that not in the manner you suppose does He dispense His body; certainly then, at least, you will understand that His grace is not consumed by tooth-biting.”<sup>1520</sup>

He also says, “He is Himself the Bread which came down from heaven; but Bread which refreshes the failing, and does not fail; Bread which can be tasted, cannot be wasted. This Bread did the manna also figure. Wherefore it is said, ‘He gave them the bread of heaven, and man ate the bread of the angels’ (Ps. 77:24–25 LXX). Who is the Bread of heaven, but Christ? But in order that man might eat Angels’ Bread, the Lord of Angels was made Man. For if He had not been made Man, we should not have His Flesh; if we had not His Flesh, we should not eat the Bread of the Altar. Let us hasten to the inheritance, seeing we have hereby received a great earnest of it. My brethren, let us long for the life of Christ, seeing we hold as an earnest the Death of Christ.”<sup>1521</sup>

**St. Hilary of Poitiers** says, “It is no longer permitted us to raise doubts about the true nature of the body and the blood, for, according to the statement of the Lord Himself as well as our faith, this is indeed flesh and blood. And these things that we receive bring it about that we are in Christ and Christ is in us.”<sup>1522</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “The mystery that you accept is the work of the word of Christ. If the words of Elijah had the power to bring down fire from heaven (1 Sam. 18:38), would not the word of Christ have the power to change the nature of elements?”

**John of Damascus** says, “If you were asked, ‘how does the bread become the body of Christ?’ I answer, ‘The Holy Spirit overshadows the priest, and works in the elements the same way as in the womb of Virgin Mary.’”

## **779. Do you want to see Jesus Christ?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. Lo! You see Him, You touch Him, you eat Him. And you indeed desire to see His clothes, but He gives Himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you.”<sup>1523</sup>

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<sup>1520</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 27.3 (NPNF I/7:174) amended.

<sup>1521</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 80.2 (NPNF I/6:499).

<sup>1522</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 8.14 (FOTC 25:286).

<sup>1523</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 82.4 (NPNF II/10:476) amended.

**780. Who transforms the offerings into the body and blood of Christ?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Until now, Christ, who is attached to us, prepares the table Himself and sanctifies it. For it is not man who transforms the offerings into His body and blood, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest utters the words, but God’s power and grace accomplish the sanctification. Christ says, ‘This is My body,’ and the offerings are sanctified.”<sup>1524</sup>

**781. How can St. Paul say, “because I received from the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:23) when he did not attend the Lord’s Supper?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He said so that you may know that the first table had no advantage above that which comes after it. For even today also it is He who does all, and delivers it even as then.”<sup>1525</sup>

**782. What does the Apostle mean by the words, “the cup of blessing” (1 Cor. 10:16)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “No mean title is that which was spoken. For when I call it ‘blessing,’ I mean thanksgiving, and when I call it thanksgiving I unfold all the treasure of God’s goodness, and call to mind those mighty gifts.”<sup>1526</sup>

**783. Why did Christ say, “Do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of Me” (Luke 22:19)?**

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says (quoting Christ): “I call it My Body, and it is truly so. The smallest part of It is capable of sanctifying thousands of souls, sufficient to grant life to those who partake of it.”<sup>1527</sup>

The word ἀνάμνησις (*anamnēsis*) in Greek is not just a memorial or remembering something from the past that is absent from us now. Rather, it means repeating the event or the past action affecting the present in a very real sense. Anamnesis means recalling the crucified Christ who rose from the dead, or recalling His sacrifice not as a past event, but by offering a true and living sacrifice; an active remembrance.<sup>1528</sup>

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<sup>1524</sup> Cf. Catena Aurea.

<sup>1525</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 27.5 (NPNF I/12:161) amended.

<sup>1526</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 24.3 (NPNF I/12:139).

<sup>1527</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre 4 on the Passion*.

<sup>1528</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1956): pp. 136–137. Fr. Dix Gives many examples from the Old and New Testaments; see Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): p. 161.

**784. How can the altar, which is the source of many blessings, be a reason for judgement (1 Cor. 11:29)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** replies as follows:

“Not from its own nature, says he (St. Paul), but from the will of him that approaches. For as His presence, which conveyed to us those great and unutterable blessings, condemned the more them that received it not: so also the Mysteries become provisions of greater punishment to such as partake unworthily.”<sup>1529</sup>

“Because he poured it out, and makes the thing appear a slaughter and no longer a sacrifice. Much therefore as they who then pierced Him, pierced Him not that they might drink but that they might shed His blood: so likewise does he that comes for it unworthily and reaps no profit thereby.”<sup>1530</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “You therefore who are the good guests at this feast do I address, who have in your minds the words, ‘For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgement to himself’ (1 Cor. 11:29).”<sup>1531</sup>

“What is receiving unworthily? Receiving with contempt, receiving with derision.”<sup>1532</sup>

**785. Can communion be received without true repentance?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “No one in a state of sin (with negligence) ought to claim a right to or the use of the sacraments, for it is written: You have sinned, be still. As David says in the Psalm lately quoted: ‘We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it ... How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?’ (Ps. 137:2, 4). For if the flesh wars against the mind and is not subject to the guidance of the Spirit, that is a strange land which is not subdued by the toil of the cultivator, and so cannot produce the fruits of charity, patience, and peace. It is better, then, to be still when you cannot practise the works of repentance, lest in the very acts of repentance there be that which afterward will need further repentance. For if it be once entered upon and not rightly carried out, it obtains not the result of a first repentance and takes away the use of a later one ... To which case the words apply: ‘Raze it, raze it, even to the foundations’ (Ps. 137:7).

“And David, pitying her, says: ‘O wretched daughter of Babylon.’ Wretched indeed, as being the daughter of Babylon, when she ceased to be the daughter of Jerusalem. And yet he

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<sup>1529</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 28.2 (NPNF I/12:164) amended.

<sup>1530</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 27.6 (NPNF I/12:151) amended.

<sup>1531</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 40.1 (NPNF I/6:392) amended.

<sup>1532</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VI: Sermons 184-229Z*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) Sermon 227: p. 255.



calls for a healer for her, and says: ‘Happy is he who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!’ (Ps. 137:9). That is to say, shall dash all corrupt and filthy thoughts against Christ ... For if it is said to Moses when he was desiring to draw nearer: ‘Take your sandals off your feet’ (Ex. 3:5), how much more must we free the feet of our soul from the bonds of the body, and clear our steps from all connection with this world.”<sup>1533</sup>

### **786. How can we prepare ourselves for the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord?**

Partaking of the Body of Christ in the eucharist requires purity of the soul and not luxurious clothing. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “But now, having put off your old garments, and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be continually robed in white: of course we mean not this, that you are always to wear white raiment; but you must be clad in the garments that are truly white and shining and spiritual, that you may say with the blessed Isaiah, ‘My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with a garment of salvation, and put a robe of gladness around me’ (Isa. 61:10).”<sup>1534</sup>

**St. Basil** was asked if a man who had an unclean dream or a natural secretion could partake of the holy sacraments. His response was that he who was born anew through baptism is elevated above nature, through the work of the Holy Spirit. He says, “In the Old Testament, we learn of **the horrific punishment that is inflicted on those who approach the Holies in their uncleanness** (Lev. 15:31). But now we know that the One who is greater than the temple is present (Matt. 12:6). Hence, the Apostle warns even more that, ‘whoever eats or drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself’ (1 Cor. 11:29).”<sup>1535</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Thus, it is not just through external preparations, but through the preparation of the soul, by practicing a life of love and purity of heart and body, and making our behavior inside the church the same as our behavior in our daily lives. It is fitting for men and women to enter the church calmly, silently and in an orderly manner, filled with sincere love ... that their bodies and hearts may be pure and ready for prayer.”

With regards to washing the hands, and our purification from every sinful deed, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “You have seen then the Deacon who gives to the Priest water to wash, and to the Presbyters who stand round God’s altar. He gave it not at all because of bodily defilement; it is not that; for we did not enter the Church at first with defiled bodies. But the washing of hands is a symbol that you ought to be pure from all sinful and unlawful deeds; for since the hands are a symbol of action, by washing them, it is evident, we represent the purity and blamelessness of our conduct. Did you not hear the blessed David opening this

<sup>1533</sup> St. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance* 2.104–107 (NPNF II/10:358) amended.

<sup>1534</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 22.8 (NPNF II/7:152) amended.

<sup>1535</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 309.

very mystery, and saying, I will wash my hands in innocence, so I will go about Your altar, O Lord? The washing therefore of hands is a symbol of immunity from sin.”<sup>1536</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** believes that Christ offered us His Body and Blood, which He gave up in obedience to His Father to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Thus, we are prepared for communion, by **obedience**.<sup>1537</sup> He says, “With what understanding is it necessary to eat the body and to drink the blood of the Lord? Unto the remembrance of the Lord’s obedience until death: so that the living no longer live for themselves but for the one who died and was raised on their behalf.”<sup>1538</sup>

He also says, “it is necessary for the one who receives the holy things to praise the Lord.”<sup>1539</sup>

And, “Let him who receives Communion remember the death and resurrection of Christ, and that he ought to be adorned by the purity of the body and soul, and to manifest his death from sin, the world and the ego by his life with God and with Christ our Lord.”<sup>1540</sup>

We cannot receive the Messiah’s banquet, the partaking of the Lord’s body and blood, if we have not first understood the significance of this banquet through our understanding of scripture. As we enjoy the banquet, we remain in need of listening to the Word of God.

**Let our hearts be an elevated upper room.** **Origen** says, “And since the Lord himself has been stationed with us, we, with the disciples of Christ, ascend from the lower places to the higher ... And this upper house should be large so that it may contain Jesus, the Word of God, the Wisdom, the Truth, the Peace, and everything that the Son of God is. He is not contained except by those who are magnanimous in understanding ... nor only large, but also cleaned and containing no filth of evil at all.”<sup>1541</sup> He also says that we ought to be aware that no one concerned with banquets and worldly cares can ascend to the upper room and will have no share with Jesus in keeping the Passover.

### **787. Can the Eucharist be offered in an ordinary house?**

**St. Basil** answers, “Scripture does not allow common vessels to be used in the sacred places. For this reason, the Holies are not permitted to be prepared in an ordinary house, as per God’s command in the holy covenant (Lev. 10:9–10). But the Lord says, ‘In this place is One greater than the temple!’ (Matt. 12:6). The Apostle says, ‘Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? ... What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. For

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<sup>1536</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 23.2 (NPNF II/7:153) amended.

<sup>1537</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 134: p. 223.

<sup>1538</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 21.3 (PP 51:155).

<sup>1539</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 21.4 (PP 51:157).

<sup>1540</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Concerning Baptism*.

<sup>1541</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 79: p. 686.

I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you' (1 Cor. 11:22–23). Thus, we learn not to eat and drink regular food in the church, and not to bring any defilement upon the Lord's table in a private house, except when necessary, in which case one must choose a pure place or house."<sup>1542</sup>

### 788. How should a priest serve at the altar?

Aaron, the first High Priest from the Old Testament, had glamorous garments and his mantle was adorned along with the rest of the garments, which all symbolized Christ, who is clothed in the holy unblemished Church as His garment. This garment reflects His splendor and He sanctifies it. **St. Basil** believes that the high priest in the Old Testament wore his priestly garments with little bells and pomegranates of pure gold hanging from them (Ex. 28:33; 39:25) so that whenever he moves, the sound of the bells is heard as a reminder that he is in the presence of the Lord and that it is fitting to share in the praises of the heavenly in great awe and longing to see God and to enjoy His presence in His holy temple. However, in the New Testament, **instead of these bells, the priest recites the Psalms to be united with the heavenly in their life of praise.**

- a. The golden bells and pomegranates were arranged in order, with each bell surrounded by a pomegranate on its right and left. If the little bells resemble the preaching of the gospel of Christ, then it is fitting for the preachers' voice to testify of biblical truths without ceasing, entreating God to grant them the fruit of the Spirit (symbolized by the pomegranates).
- b. In the praise of Aaron the priest in the book of Jesus the Son of Sirach, we read: "And He encircled him with tassels, with many golden bells all around" (Sir. 45:9–10). So that when he moves in the Holy Place or in the Holy of Holies, the sound of the little golden bells may be heard, so he may teach his people the importance of praying during work, as he ministers amongst the people and offers worship.
- c. Gold refers to heaven as his ministry, worship, and actions all include a heavenly aspect to them.
- d. **St. Basil** believes that it is fitting for whoever preaches the gospel to be filled with the fear of God: "A clergyman should not talk in the sanctuary more than what is necessary. Aaron had golden bells attached to his garment, for fear of the angels. For us, at the altar, the Psalms ought to replace the golden bells of Aaron ... no one ought to utter a word in the sanctuary or around the altar, but they should rather designate a place outside to eat and to break the bread there. And if they came to place the bread (on the altar) and the youngest divides it, let there be no grumbling among the clergy, nor let anyone watch him who divides. No one is to offend another."

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<sup>1542</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 310.

- e. Concerning this point, I recall how our Fr. Bishoy Kamel used to insist that the newest priest should officiate the liturgy on great feasts and deliver the sermon. He used to deal with these matters with much wisdom and the simplicity of children; things like the seniority of the priests did not concern him too much.

### **789. How can we preserve the sanctity of priestly garments?**

**St. Basil** says, “The garments which he wears as he ministers (the liturgy) should not be taken outside of the church, but must remain in the places where the servants of the church stay or in the place where the church books are kept, in a place that is befitting of the priesthood that is closely linked with the altar. The garments must be white,<sup>1543</sup> and not colorful. They should cover their feet, with an amice<sup>1544</sup> over their shoulders. They must not wear shoes as they enter the sanctuary.”

Canon 37 of **Hippolytus** says, “As often as a bishop partakes of the sacred mysteries, let the deacons and presbyters be gathered together, clothed in white robes, brilliant in the view of all the people; and in like manner with the reader.”<sup>1545</sup>

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<sup>1543</sup> White garments are a reminder of the heavenly life, since on many occasions, angels appear in white garments (e.g., Ps. 16:5).

<sup>1544</sup> *Amice*: worn by the Bishop, it is a cover for the head and shoulders that wraps around under the arms in the form of a cross on the chest and on the back.

<sup>1545</sup> Hippolytus, *Canons of the Church of Alexandria Wrongly Ascribed to Hippolytus* Canon 37 (ANF 5:258).

## On the Main Features of the Coptic Liturgy

### 790. What are the features of Egyptian liturgy?

The East in general, and Egyptian Church in particular, still retains the spirit of the apostolic patristic Liturgy. The liturgical texts that are used have not changed very much since the fifth century, which gives the study of the Egyptian liturgy particular importance. In his book “The Early Liturgy,” Father Jungmann says, “especially in the general structure of the Mass, the Oriental rites have kept many primitive characteristics which have disappeared from the Roman rite ... Whereas our Mass changes day after day, the Orient constantly repeats the same invariable formulary.”<sup>1546</sup> Fr. Dix, the Anglican monk, says, “The main lines of all the Eastern traditions had been reached before the end of the fourth century, and after this the process in all of them is no more than one of adjustment and development of detail. No new principle arose in the fifth century, as it did in the West ...”<sup>1547</sup>

### 791. Which eucharistic Liturgies does the Coptic Church currently use?

- a. **The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great.** The Coptic Liturgy differs from the Byzantine Liturgy of the same name. This Liturgy is the one that is most often used.
- b. **The Liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian.** Often used on special occasions and feasts. Prayers of this Liturgy address the hypostasis of the Son. It is not unique in doing so because there are other liturgies with the same style, such as other Egyptian liturgies, three Ethiopian liturgies, the Syrian Liturgy of Saints Addai and Mari, and the Syrian Liturgy of St. Jacob.
- c. **The Liturgy of St. Cyril (St. Mark the Evangelist).** St. Cyril of Alexandria compiled it and edited the older Liturgy of St. Mark; so it came to be named after him. Its use is less widespread than the previous two.

### 792. What are the main sections of the Coptic Liturgy?

The Liturgy can be divided into three services:

- a. **Offering of the Lamb.** The Lamb is chosen from among the offered loaves of bread. The priest anoints it with wine in the name of the Holy Trinity. The offering of the Lamb was once part of the Liturgy of the Faithful, but just before the fifth century, this rite was moved to the beginning of the Liturgy instead, in order to prepare the congregation for the renewal of their covenant with God by listening to God’s word and partaking of the sacraments. It is the beginning of the journey where the Church

<sup>1546</sup> Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy, to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans., Francis A. Brunner (University of Notre Dame Press, 1959): pp. 211, 221.

<sup>1547</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): p. 546.

acknowledges the cost of following Christ. The Church offers her whole life through Christ, the true Sacrifice. She offers her life as a sacrifice to the Lord who was slaughtered for her, for the Lord accepts no less from His Church than her entire life. Otherwise, the journey becomes feeble if the Church does not pay the cost in full.

- b. **Liturgy of the Catechumens.** Predominantly characterized by preaching and teaching, without ignoring the worship aspect. The catechumens, along with the believers, listen to the readings and the sermon, along with some prayers offered for them by the Church, for God to grant us understanding, wisdom, and faith. Thus, since the early Church, the catechumens enjoyed the Liturgy of the Word or the Liturgy of the Catechumens which prepares one for receiving the holy sacraments. For even when they have received the sacraments of baptism, chrismation, and the eucharist, they remain in need of listening to the word continuously.<sup>1548</sup>
- c. **Liturgy of the Faithful (Eucharist or Anaphora).**<sup>1549</sup> This service is an act of worship, which includes an educational aspect, where the Church ascends to heaven by the Holy Spirit to be in the presence of God in Christ Jesus.

### 793. Who reads the readings from scripture?

**St. Basil** was very concerned that the reading should be read properly. Hence, the reader should be fluent in reading and his style of reading should reveal his spiritual experience with the Holy Bible and his understanding of the Orthodox faith. “If deacons are eloquent, let them read the gospel. But if they were not good at reading [either in pronunciation, grammar, or by not practicing what they read], senior readers should read the Psalms and the deacons the gospel. No one less than the priest or deacon can read the Gospel in the church. No one can overstep his rite. If people were studying and reading the gospel at home, they should be rebuked by the priest [for fear of the heretics’ misuse of these meetings]. But if this was necessary, then they should not be rebuked [if such meetings were under the Church’s supervision].”<sup>1550</sup>

### 794. Who delivers the sermon?

The sermon was often linked with pastoral work, so that the listeners might not feel that they were being given orders, but instead offered God’s love through the fatherhood of the priest. “If the gospel reading is complete, and if a bishop is present, he should hold the gospel in his hand and address the congregation from the passages that have been read. If there is

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<sup>1548</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist. 2nd ed.* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1973).

<sup>1549</sup> *Anaphora* means to “lift up” for the Church is raised up to heaven through the celebration of the eucharist.

<sup>1550</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 542.

no bishop and the priest is capable of preaching, let him speak ... and a prayer that is relevant to the passage of the gospel is read.”<sup>1551</sup>

### 795. What do the faithful do after the readings and the sermon?

The litanies, the Creed and the prayer of reconciliation are prayed. “Prayers are offered for the whole Church (including bishops, priests, deacons, and the congregation), as well as for all the authorities and rulers, for the fruits of the earth, for the sick of the people, and for those who are traveling. Afterwards the Creed is said, then the prayer of reconciliation between God and the people.”<sup>1552</sup> Everyone gets ready to raise their hearts to heaven to encounter our Lord Jesus, and hence the Church declares the reconciliation between God and humanity through Christ Jesus, and their reconciliation with one another.

The litanies are then prayed according to their order in the Liturgy of St. Basil. The main focus here is for the Church (both clergy and laymen) to raise her heart in prayer for the all the priests and people, entreating God for their spiritual and bodily needs, such as the healing of the sick, the travelers who were unable to attend the Divine Liturgy, and the kings, rulers, and heads of state. The Church is a loving mother to all. She prays even for the plants and fruits of the earth.

### 796. Why is the holy kiss exchanged in the Divine Liturgy?

The priests, the congregation and even the children exchange the holy kiss in the Divine Liturgy, to emphasize their love for one another. **St. John Chrysostom** stresses that this kiss has been used in the Church since the Apostolic Age.<sup>1553</sup> **Athenagoras of Athens** mentions that the kiss of peace is the kiss of the eucharist or the apostolic kiss in the Christian liturgy. In the second-century, **St. Justin Martyr** referred to the liturgical kiss as a preparation for the eucharist and as a conclusion to the previous prayers for sanctification.<sup>1554</sup>

In his book “The Shape of the Liturgy,” Fr. Dix says, “So it comes about that while vestiges, at least, of the apostolic kiss of peace are still found all over catholic Christendom (except in the Anglican rites) it now stands in its primitive position only among the Copts and the Abyssinians [Ethiopians].”<sup>1555</sup>

<sup>1551</sup> Perhaps St. Basil means that the priest or bishop who delivered the sermon can raise their heart with a short prayer, asking God to enlighten him and the listeners with His knowledge and to grant them an understanding of His truths.

<sup>1552</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 543.

<sup>1553</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 44.4 (NPNF I/12:265).

<sup>1554</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65 (ANF 1:185).

<sup>1555</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): p. 110.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Once they finish the Liturgy of the Catechumens, they should ask the Catechumens to leave. After that, let the congregation be ordered to greet one another, let the males greet one another and the females greet one another.”<sup>1556</sup> By this kiss, all the attendees confirm that they truly want to be one family and that we can only offer gifts on the altar if we are first reconciled with our brothers and sisters. Thus, the deacon urges us to greet one another, saying, “Pray for perfect peace, love, and the holy apostolic greetings.” We will not enjoy reconciliation with God in Christ Jesus and peace with the Holy Trinity unless we are at peace amongst each other.

In the Syrian **Didascalia** of the Apostles,<sup>1557</sup> it is mentioned that the deacon cries out with a loud voice when people are greeting one another, warning anyone who has anything against another (as if it were a last warning) to come forward for the bishop to reconcile them together.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Then the Deacon cries aloud, ‘Receive one another and let us greet one another.’ Think not that this kiss is of the same character with those given in public by common friends. It is not such: but this kiss blends souls one with another, and courts entire forgiveness for them. The kiss therefore is the sign that our souls are mingled together, and banish all remembrance of wrongs. For this cause Christ said: ‘If you offer your sacrifice to the altar, and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your sacrifice in front of the altar and go first, make friends with your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Matt. 5:23). The kiss therefore is reconciliation, and for this reason holy: as the blessed Paul somewhere cried, saying, ‘Greet one another with the holy kiss’ (1 Cor. 16:20); and Peter, with a kiss of charity (1 Pet. 5:14).”<sup>1558</sup> **St. Augustine** says, “It is a sign of peace, for what purifies the external lips purifies the hearts within.”<sup>1559</sup>

### **797. How do we begin the Liturgy of the Faithful?**

“The deacon says: Stand with trembling. Look towards the East. Let us attend. The priest says: The Lord be with you all. And the people answer: And with your spirit. Then he says: Lift up your hearts to the Lord. The people say: We have them with the Lord. Then he says: Let us give thanks to the Lord. The people say: You are worthy, O righteous One. Then he begins with suitable prayers as ordained by our fathers the Apostles.”<sup>1560</sup>

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<sup>1556</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 543.

<sup>1557</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Bloomsbury, 2005): pp. 109, 106; Syrian Didache 2.45.

<sup>1558</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Five Catechetical Lectures* (On the Mysteries) 5.3 (NPNF II/7:153) amended.

<sup>1559</sup> PL 38:1101A.

<sup>1560</sup> In the Coptic rite of St. Basil’s Liturgy, the deacon says, “Stand in the fear of God ...”



**798. Can someone leave before the Liturgy of the Faithful ends?**

It is stated in Canon 2.7 of the Apostles: “The deacons stand at the men’s doors to prevent anyone from going out and so that the doors may remain shut for the duration of the Liturgy, even if him who knocks on the door is a believer.” **St. Basil** says, “No one is to leave after the reading of the gospel unnecessarily except after receiving the eucharist.”<sup>1561</sup>

**799. Who has the right to receive holy communion?**

“The Archdeacon says: He who is pure, let him approach the mysteries, but he who is not pure, let him not approach lest the divine fire consumes him. He who offended his friend, he who has thoughts of fornication, and he who is drunk and is unstable, let him not approach and let him stay away from Communion. This is how people should prepare themselves for Communion, which is given for healing ...”<sup>1562</sup>

In the Liturgy of St. Basil in the Coptic Church, the priest warns the people before the confession, saying, “The Holies for the holy,” and the people respond by asking the Holy Trinity to sanctify and purify them, saying, “One is the All-Holy Father, One is the All-Holy Son, One the All-Holy Spirit, amen.” Perhaps this is what St. Basil meant when he said, “people should prepare themselves for communion, which is given for healing,” healing a person spiritually through pure repentance. If the believer offends someone else, is overcome by unclean thoughts or whose actions are out of control, he needs the grace of God who is the heavenly physician and is the only one capable of healing, cleansing, and purifying us.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The Holies proceed forth from God to the holy. Therefore, the priest repeats, ‘Let the holies come down and dwell in the holy. No one should approach except him who is pure and holy.’”<sup>1563</sup>

**800. What does the Church focus on during the partaking of the Holy Mysteries?**

While partaking of the Holy Mysteries, the Church is concerned with praise in the spirit of the Bible. The Church used to warn against the songs that heretics composed to spread their corrupt teachings. This is what Arius and his followers did. It was said that because the music of these songs was so attractive, the people liked it and used to sing it in public markets. This drove St. Athanasius and those who were working with him to compose alternative hymns, to preserve the true faith.

<sup>1561</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 544.

<sup>1562</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): pp. 544–545.

<sup>1563</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, see mimrō 42 “On the Partaking of the Holy Mysteries—for the Week of White,” in *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, ed., Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig 1905, 2nd ed. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006).

“Those who sing on the altar should not sing as to show off their voices, but in wisdom. They should not sing anything but the Psalms (or anything outside of Scripture). And if some of them sang something that they composed themselves or something that they heard from others that is not written in the Psalmody, let them be cast out. If the readers read from foreign books and defiled the ears of the congregation, let them be cast out.”<sup>1564</sup>

### **801. What is the role of the congregation in the Divine Liturgy?**

**St. Basil the Great** stresses the importance of the participation of the congregation in the Divine Liturgy. Their role is not merely to listen, but to participate. Therefore, the Church is careful not to limit the liturgical worship to the priest and the deacons, but she rather encourages worship to be carried out by the whole church. “After the Psalms, the congregation should respond with all their might. If anyone is physically sick and cannot participate, he is not to be blamed. But if he has the strength to participate in worship and is silent, he alone becomes unworthy of the blessing.”<sup>1565</sup>

### **802. What do the priest and congregation say during the partaking of the Body and Blood?**

“He who is giving the Body says, ‘This is the body of Christ, which He gave up for our sins.’ The communicant then says, ‘Amen.’ And again, he who is giving the Blood says, ‘This is the blood of Christ, which He shed for us.’ The communicants respond saying, ‘Amen.’”<sup>1566</sup>

### **803. What are the characteristics of the bread that is offered as the Lamb?**

**St. Basil the Great** comments on the slaughter of the Passover lamb, being a symbol of the eucharist (Ex. 12:1–14):

“The deacons who prepare the holy bread, are careful that none is broken, stale, burnt, or blemished, lest any of them would be unclean. For the lamb that was slaughtered at the time of the Hebrews in Egypt was a type of this mystery.

“It was said: ‘And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand’ (Ex. 12:11). These words are concerning the heart, for the heart should be bound by the senses’ focus on the mystery, holding the staff of faith in his hands and his feet are straightened by the sandals of peace.

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<sup>1564</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 545.

<sup>1565</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 545.

<sup>1566</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): p. 545.

“‘No stranger or uncircumcised can approach to eat of the Passover.’ This is the case of him who is not baptized, a stranger, or a catechumen who did not yet become a full member of the church, so he will not taste this great joy. It was said, ‘Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, before eating the lamb’ (Ex. 12:15–20). Woe to us, for this saying puts us to shame. It was commanded then to consume pure bread (1 Cor. 5:7–8) seven days before the slaughter of the lamb which is just an animal. This was a symbol of what shall be, so how severe would the punishment be for him who dares to receive the true Lamb — Christ — while bearing the evil leaven, namely, adultery, hatred, theft and desiring the greater portion of everything. He does so without regretting such actions before approaching the mystery.”<sup>1567</sup>

St. Basil further compares the Passover Lamb with receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, the true Lamb:

- a. The Passover lamb should be without blemish; likewise, the Lamb being offered in the Divine Liturgy must be fresh, and not baked from the day before, or burnt.
- b. The Passover lamb is cooked on fire; likewise, the mystery offered must be prepared with spiritual fire.
- c. They eat it with belts on their waist, a staff in their hands, and sandals on their feet; likewise, the heart must be bound by the focus of the senses, with the staff of faith in his hand, and his feet walking in peace.
- d. No stranger or uncircumcised can partake of it; likewise, he who is not baptized cannot partake of communion, for he is still a catechumen.
- e. They must not eat leavened bread, but unleavened bread for seven days before eating the Passover lamb; likewise, no one can partake from the Body and Blood of Christ unless he removes from his heart the leaven of sin through repentance.

#### **804. Of what does St. Basil the Great warn the priests when they are partaking of the blood of Christ?**

He warns the priests from desiring to drink Christ’s blood as being wine, from filling the cup to the brim so that he would have much left to drink. In addition to that, filling up the cup too much may cause the blood to spill on the ground. It is fitting for the priest to practice this mystery in fear and reverence, honoring the holy sacrifice so as not to perish like the sons of Eli the priest (1 Sam. 2:29–34), nor to resemble Belshazzar the king who drank wine out of the vessels of God’s holy temple (Dan. 5:1–4), nor like the sons of Korah, Dathan, and

<sup>1567</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003): pp. 547–549.

Abiram who offered strange fire, causing the earth to open its mouth and swallow them (Num. 16:24–32).<sup>1568</sup>

### **805. How should the priest and the congregation feel while receiving holy communion?**

The eucharist is a medicine for the priests and people, who are all counted as sick. Whoever does not feel his sickness is not worthy to receive communion. **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “For this reason, when [the priest] distributes the Mysteries to them, he cries out ‘the Body of God for the forgiveness of sins, and the Blood of the Son of God for the propitiation of wrongs,’ recalling by these words what our Lord said to his disciples when he distributed his Mysteries to them: This is my body which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins, and this is my Blood which is shed for you for forgiveness (Matt. 26:26–28). Thus it is that when we approach the Mysteries of our Savior, we approach as needy sinners; for there is no need for medicine except in the case of an illness, or for healing except when someone is sick. For it is not the healthy who are in need of a doctor, but those who are ill (Matt. 9:12). It is evident, then, that everyone who approaches the Mysteries receives them for the forgiveness of his sins, whether it be the priest or the people. And if the Holy Spirit is not within us because we are sinners, by what authority does the priest invoke the spirit, or the people approach the Mysteries?”<sup>1569</sup>

### **806. What is the relationship between the eucharist and our awaiting the second coming of Christ the Lord?**

The **Didache** contains a text about the eucharist, which includes a prayer for the Church to gather together from all the ends of the earth in the prepared kingdom of God,<sup>1570</sup> as well as another prayer that fervently asks the Lord Jesus to come:<sup>1571</sup>

“Be mindful of thy Church, O Lord; deliver it from all evil, perfect it in thy love, sanctify it, and gather it from the four winds into the kingdom which you have prepared for it.’

‘Thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.’

‘Let Grace come, and this present world pass away.’

‘Hosanna to the God of David.’

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<sup>1568</sup> See *Mar Philoxenias* (Arabic), (St. Mary’s Monastery, Dair Al-Surian, 2003).

<sup>1569</sup> Philoxenus of Mabbug, “On the indwelling of the Holy Spirit” in Sebastian Brock and M. A. Mathai Remban eds. *Philoxenus of Mabbug* (Kottayam, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI), undated): p. 46.

<sup>1570</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 9.4; 10.5.

<sup>1571</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 10.6.

‘Whosoever is holy, let him approach.’”<sup>1572</sup>

“Be watchful over your life; never let your lamps go out or your loins be ungirt, but keep yourselves always in readiness, for you can never be sure of the hour when our Lord may be coming. Come often together for spiritual improvement; because all the past years of your faith will be no good to you at the end, unless you have made yourselves perfect ... And then the signs of the truth will appear: first the sign of the opening heavens, next the sign of the trumpet’s voice, and thirdly the rising of the dead — not of all the dead, but, as it says, *the Lord will come, and with him all his holy ones*. And then the whole world will see the Lord as He comes riding on the clouds of heaven ...”<sup>1573</sup>

### **807. How does the eucharist support the unity of the faithful together?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “We have partaken of a spiritual table, let us be partakers also of spiritual love. For if robbers, on partaking of salt, forget their character; what excuse shall we have, who are continually partaking of the Lord’s body, and do not imitate even their gentleness? And yet to many, not one table only, but even to be of one city, have sufficed for friendship; but we, when we have the same city, and the same house, and table, and way, and door, and root, and life, and head, and the same shepherd, and king, and teacher, and judge, and maker, and father, and to whom all things are common; what indulgence can we deserve, if we be divided one from another?”<sup>1574</sup>

<sup>1572</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 10.5–6: p. 195.

<sup>1573</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 16.1–2, 6–7: p. 197–198.

<sup>1574</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 32.10 (NPNF II/10:213).



## 21

**The Sacrament of Priesthood****808. What is the biblical and ecclesial understanding of the ranks of the priesthood?**

**St. Basil the Great** demonstrates the biblical and ecclesial understanding of the ranks of the priesthood in that although he was the archbishop of a diocese, he considered himself equal to the rest of the servants of the Church, whether bishops, priests, or deacons. He viewed the deacon as his brother<sup>1575</sup> and his beloved son,<sup>1576</sup> and addressed the priests as “deserving of all reverence.”<sup>1577</sup>

**809. What are the limits of the episcopacy?**

**St. Basil the Great** emphasizes that there should be a bishop for every city. In his letter to Amphilochius, he thanks him for helping in finding a new bishop for the church in Iturea and says, “It is preferable for the leader of the city to be an experienced person, capable of bearing the responsibility of managing every detail, but under the condition that he is a servant of God, not shaming us in anything and not seeking his own interests over the interests of others, so that he may save them.” It is most probable that he is speaking here about the bishop of a major city, as he continues saying, “If the matter was difficult, let us strive to give small cities or towns which were previously episcopal centres, to appropriate leaders, and therefore we ordain a bishop over the major city.”

**810. What are the chief qualities that qualify a believer for priesthood and pastoral service?**<sup>1578</sup>

It is true love that qualifies the believer for this work. This is why the Lord Jesus confronted St. Peter with the question, “Simon son of Jonah, do you love me? ... tend my sheep” (John 21:16). The Lord explained the true meaning, nature, and aim of his apostle’s love for Him. The love that the Apostle Peter had exhibited before the Holy Spirit descended on him was only love according to human understanding. Based on this kind of love he rebuked the Lord so He would not deliver Himself to the cross, pridefully declaring that he was ready to die instead of Christ; but instead he ended up denying and cursing Him before a servant. He then wept bitterly when he realized that his love for the Lord had been worthless.

But when the day of Pentecost came and the disciples and the apostles were gathered in one accord, the Holy Spirit came upon them as tongues of fire (Acts 2:3–4). Peter, like the

<sup>1575</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 268 (FOTC 28:256).

<sup>1576</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 265 (FOTC 28:245).

<sup>1577</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 271 (FOTC 28:261).

<sup>1578</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Pastoral Love* (Arabic), 1965.

other apostles, was filled with the Spirit of love which imprinted the image of the true Savior, the Good Shepherd Himself, upon him. This is the divine love they were waiting for, so they could apply these words: **“Do you love me? ... tend my sheep.”** When the Spirit of love filled them, they became worthy to be apostles, to preach to the whole world, and to tend God’s sheep —human souls, the subject and purpose of His love. Pastoral care is impossible without this Spirit, for He is the “Love” that is at work in the shepherds of His people, whose goal is first and foremost the growth of the shepherds and those whom they shepherd, in love through the Holy Spirit, in the person of the beloved Redeemer.

A shepherd cannot receive the bishop’s staff — the Cross — unless he first puts on the beloved Christ, or else he will be greatly weighed down by the troubles of his congregation, and then becomes a complaining and desperate servant, distressed by the service and its Master, and desiring to flee from it. Some stealthily snatch the mantle of service, and it is no wonder that they become like hired workers or even thieves, but never shepherds. If the servant does not appreciate God’s longsuffering and repent, grace will remove his lampstand, his crown will be given to another, and he will be hastily relegated to the horrible judgment (Ex. 34) that the Holy Spirit has ordained for those who despise His love.

According to **St. Basil**, the necessary qualities in a candidate for priesthood are:

**First: To be a dweller in the house of God** who possesses holy zeal. “If some dwell in the house of God, they ought to seek it without envy or stumbling.”<sup>1579</sup>

**Second: To be knowledgeable in the scriptures.** “A priest is not to be ordained if he does not know the books well, and specifically the Bible.”<sup>1580</sup>

**Third: His life witnesses to his practical faith**, for he says, “He who is chosen to be a bishop should be a chaste man, cheerful, God-fearing, defender of the oppressed and has no favoritism, but always says the truth. He does not fear the wealthy, nor greedy for money, for this sin entices all especially those in this rank.”<sup>1581</sup>

**Fourth: Not extravagant in his attire.** The bishop should always remember the hungry and naked of his congregation and should not live in luxury.

**Fifth: Possesses a fatherly spirit.** “The bishop ought to fight for the sake of the truth to the point of death. He ought to be a father for the widows and orphans, adorned with purity to win those who see him. He gently reproaches, is flexible, firm, and seasoned. He must not

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<sup>1579</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, column 38.

<sup>1580</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, column 89.

<sup>1581</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, column 38.



be a drunkard, nor should he envy anyone. He must not love gold and should consider all that the world offers as futile. Not a seeker of vainglory and escapes superficial adornments.”<sup>1582</sup>

**Sixth: Is not unlawfully married and is not remarried.** One of the conditions to be a candidate for service, whether priesthood, episcopate, or diaconate, is not having been previously unlawfully married regardless of later repentance (2 Tim. 3:2–6).

### **811. What is the work of the heavenly High Priest in the life of His priests, their preaching, and their pastoral work?**

**First: He transforms them to be like the heavenlies.** He dwells in them, so that their thoughts and lives may reflect heaven itself. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For even to the whole world He was to send them out as teachers. Therefore of men He makes them even angels (so to speak); releasing them from all worldly care, so that they should be possessed with one care alone, that of their teaching; or rather even from that He releases them, saying, ‘Do not worry about how or what you should speak’ (Matt. 10:19).”<sup>1583</sup>

He also says, “The symbols which existed before the ministry of grace were fearful and awe-inspiring ... But if you consider the ministry of grace, you will find that those fearful and awe-inspiring symbols are only trivial ... When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying there before you, and the High Priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being tintured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you not at once transported to heaven, and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with soul naked and mind pure look round upon the heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father is at that moment held in our hands, and gives himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace him ... Do you think this could be despised? Or that it is the kind of thing anyone can be superior about?”<sup>1584</sup>

“Vessels and pails measure the water drawn from natural springs; the water from the spiritual fountains is measured by our understanding, our fervent desire, and the sobriety with which we approach them. He who comes with these dispositions straightway carries away blessings beyond number, since the grace of God, working invisibly, lightens the burden of his conscience, brings him abundant assurance, and prepares him henceforth to put off from the shore of the earth and to weigh anchor for heaven. For it is possible for a man who is still in the embrace of his body to have nothing in common with the earth, but to set before his eyes all the joys of heaven and to contemplate them unceasingly.”<sup>1585</sup>

<sup>1582</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, column 39.

<sup>1583</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 32.7 (NPNF I/10:210).

<sup>1584</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* 3.4(7) PP 1:70–71).

<sup>1585</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 7.11 (ACW 31:108).

“The work of the priesthood is done on earth, but it is ranked among the heavenly ordinances. And this is only right, for no man, no angel, no archangel, no other created power, but the Paraclete himself ordained this succession. And persuaded men, while still remaining in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels. The priest, therefore, must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself, in the midst of those powers ... Imagine in your mind’s eye, if you will, Elijah and the vast crowd standing around him and the sacrifice lying upon the stone altar. All the rest are still, hushed in a deep silence. The prophet alone is praying Suddenly fire falls from the skies on to the offering. It is marvellous; it is charged with bewilderment ... Turn, then, from that scene to our present rites, and you will see not only marvellous things, but things that transcend all terror. The priest stands bringing down, not fire, but the Holy Spirit. And he offers prayer at length, not that some flame lit from above may consume the offerings, but that grace may fall on the sacrifice through that prayer, set alight the souls of all, and make them appear brighter than silver refined in the fire.”<sup>1586</sup>

**Second: He makes Him an image of His Savior, the Lover of Mankind.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “The Priest is God’s advocate. The Priest is the common father of all the world; it is proper therefore that he should care for all.”<sup>1587</sup> Therefore, the deacon or the servant is a brother of the whole world.

**Third: He shows him that Christ is the one at work in His priests and servants.** The priest does not enter the sanctuary, the heavenly throne, because of his own righteousness or even struggle in his spiritual life. Instead, he enters as though hidden in Him who is the pleasure of the Father and the secret of his sanctification. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “When you see the priest offering the sacrifice, contemplate Christ’s hands that are extended in silence.”<sup>1588</sup> He also says, “Let us imitate the couple that was at the wedding at Cana Galilee, who invited Christ to their wedding, and had Him sit in their midst.”<sup>1589</sup>

Divine grace prepares prophets, apostles, preachers, shepherds, and teachers for their heavenly calling and works with them, but if someone neglects this grace, they fall from their vocation. **Origen** writes that a good shepherd “is good precisely because he has the best Shepherd with him, pasturing his sheep along with him.”<sup>1590</sup> He again says, “If, then, to be a teacher is a gift given ‘in accordance with the measure of Christ,’ clearly also the pastor who pastors with understanding needs to have a gift to pastor. And how will someone be an evangelist if ‘the feet’ of his soul, so to speak, are not ‘beautiful’ (Rom. 10:15)? God must supply them with beauty that they may be so.”<sup>1591</sup>

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<sup>1586</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* 3.4(7) PP 1:70–71).

<sup>1587</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Pastoral Love* (Arabic), 1965: p. 546.

<sup>1588</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Pastoral Love* (Arabic), 1965: p. 27.

<sup>1589</sup> *Conversations about Marriage* 1 (Al-Noor Publications, Arabic).

<sup>1590</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 12.2 (FOTC 94:48–49).

<sup>1591</sup> Origen, “Commentary on Ephesians” 4.11–12 in *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford University Press, 2002): pp. 174–175.

He says, “These are the two works of the high priest: that he either learn from God by reading the divine Scriptures and by meditating often on them, or teach the people. But let him teach those things that he has learned from the Lord, not ‘from his own heart’ (cf. Ezek. 13:2) or from human understanding, but what the Spirit teaches ... For this reason, let us meditate on these things (stories of the Old Testament); and recalling them to our memory ‘day and night’ and being diligent in prayer and vigilant, let us entreat the Lord that in these things which we read the Lord may see fit to reveal wisdom in us and to show us how we may observe the spiritual law not only in understanding but in our deeds that, illuminated by the law of the Holy Spirit, we may be worthy to obtain the spiritual grace in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>1592</sup>

**Fourth: He makes him aware of his need for constant learning.** **St. Cyprian** says that every believer should never cease to learn, be they clergymen or laymen. For no one can *teach* without *learning*, except God Himself. In **St. Basil’s** letter to Amphilochius of Iconium, he praised him, for though being a teacher himself, he always wanted to humbly learn from St. Basil. As for the Archbishop Basil, he considers himself ignorant and in need of learning. St. Basil says, “the question of a wise man, so it seems, makes even the fool wise. And this, by the grace of God, happens to us as often as we receive the letters of your painstaking soul. For, through the question itself we become more observant and more sensible than we were, being taught many things of which we had no immediate appreciation. Moreover, our solicitude to give an answer becomes for us a teacher. So, since we had never before taken thought of your questions, now we have been driven to examine carefully and to recall whatever we have heard from our elders, and to draw conclusions related to what we have learned from them.”<sup>1593</sup>

“We were in admiration of your love of learning along with your humility, because you who have been entrusted with the position of teaching do not refuse to learn, and to learn from us who possess no great knowledge at all. Nevertheless, since you consent through fear of God to do a task not easily done by another, it is necessary for us also to co-operate, even beyond our power, in your desire and in your noble effort.”<sup>1594</sup>

As for teaching the people, he says, “The ram is an animal capable of leading, one which guides the sheep to nourishing pastures and refreshing waters, and back again to the pens and farmhouses. Such are those who are set over the flock of Christ, since they lead them forth to the flowery and fragrant nourishment of spiritual doctrine, water them with living water, the gift of the Spirit, raise them up and nourish them to produce fruit, but guide them to rest and to safety from those who lay snares for them.”<sup>1595</sup>

<sup>1592</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.6.4, 6 (FOTC 83:128).

<sup>1593</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 188 To Amphilochius Concerning the Canons (FOTC 28:4–5).

<sup>1594</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 199 To Amphilochius Concerning the Canons (FOTC 28:47).

<sup>1595</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13.2 On Psalm 28 (FOTC 46:195; PG 29:284).

**Fifth: He teaches him not to overburden the people.** **St. Basil the Great** says, “None of the priests should burden their congregation by anything outside the law set by the Apostles.”<sup>1596</sup>

**Sixth: He teaches him to apply his own teachings to his own life.** It is important for the priest to examine himself as to what he preaches, for the sake of his own salvation and the salvation of those whom he serves, so they might not stumble in him. **St. Basil the Great** says, “If a priest or a bishop is teaching, let him examine himself before he speaks so they would not stumble by his teachings.”<sup>1597</sup>

**Seventh: He teaches him to be a good listener.** Any clergyman — whatever his rank — should not judge anyone before listening to them and giving them the opportunity to present their point of view. “The clergyman should not speak evil about others before listening to them first. For it is written, ‘He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is a folly and shame to him’ (Prov. 18:13).”<sup>1598</sup>

**Eighth: He teaches him to support the repentant.** The bishop’s primary role is to care for the sinners and gently support their healing from sin: “If someone falls into sin, is saddened, and confesses, yet was broken-hearted, the clergyman or the bishop should be his support, and guide him to protect himself from this sin and to repent from his previous sins.”<sup>1599</sup>

**Ninth: He teaches him to be a man of prayer and to ask others to pray for him.** In his letter to some bishops, **St. Basil** speaks about the power of prayer in times of tribulations, saying, “We know that, even if you are not bodily present, you will furnish great assistance to us in our most trying times by the aid of your prayers.”<sup>1600</sup>

**Tenth: He teaches him not to regard food or marriage as unclean.** The fifty-first **Apostolic Canon** states, “If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or any one of the sacerdotal list, abstains from marriage, or flesh, or wine, not by way of religious restraint, but as abhorring them, forgetting that God made all things very good, and that he made man male and female, and blaspheming the work of creation, let him be corrected, or else be deposed, and cast out of the Church.”<sup>1601</sup> And in Canon 2.37 we read the warning: “... and they became

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<sup>1596</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, point 51.

<sup>1597</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, point 62.

<sup>1598</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, point 61.

<sup>1599</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, point 93.

<sup>1600</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 203 (FOTC 28:68; PG 32:741B).

<sup>1601</sup> *The Apostolic Canons* Canon 51 (NPNF II/14:597).

a cause of doubt for the people.” **St. Basil the Great** says, “A priest or a bishop should not consider any food as defiling; nothing defiles a person except separation from God.”<sup>1602</sup>

### **812. How did Christ the Lord appoint His twelve disciples and seventy apostles?**

The Logos of God was incarnate to fulfil His Father’s kingdom, calling people to repent and believe in the gospel: “After John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14–15). Christ passed this message on to His disciples, so He can work through them: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). At the last supper, He commanded them to break the bread when He instituted the sacrament of the eucharist: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

To this day, Christ continues to preach, break bread, and shepherd through the sacrament of the priesthood, which He bestowed upon the apostles and the Church so they could spread the Kingdom of God in the world. The priest is an icon of Christ — the High Priest — honored to fulfil Christ’s work of pastorship, who is Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14).

The Old Testament prophets perceived Christ as the Shepherd (Isa. 40:11; Ex. 34:23; 37:24; Zech. 13:7), and the apostles experienced Him as the overseer of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25); the chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), and the great shepherd (Heb. 13:20). The person who is in Christ Jesus — the Father of all humanity — is occupied with nothing other than bearing all humanity in his own heart and leading them into the presence of God the Father. He desires to see everyone as the unblemished bride.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “For how shall I not love you, who so loved me—even when I was dark—as to lay down your life for the sheep that you shepherd? It is not possible to conceive a love greater than this: to give up the well-being of your life in exchange for mine. ‘Teach me, then,’ she says, ‘where you keep your flock, so that as I find the saving pasture I may be filled with heavenly nourishment (apart from the eating of which one cannot enter into life), and as I run to you, the Fountain, may I suck in the divine drink that you gush forth for those who are thirsty, pouring out water from your side after the iron spear gave that spring a mouth (cf. John 19:34)—the drink that, if one tastes of it, becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life (cf. John 4:14). For if you pasture me in this way, you will assuredly give me rest at midday, when I shall take my sleep, having lain down in peace in the same place, in the unshadowed light. For the noonday, when the sun shines directly from overhead, is unshaded, and in it you give rest to those whom you shepherd, when you take your young ones with you into bed.’ But no one is worthy of noonday rest who has not become a son of

<sup>1602</sup> Monastery of the Syrians, *St. Basil the Great: His Life, Asceticism, and Church Canons* (Arabic) (St. Mary’s Monastery (Deir al-Sourian), 2003) Section 3, point 52.

the light and a son of the day. One who has separated himself equally from both the evening darkness of the west and the morning darkness of the east (that is, from the place where evil begins and the place where it ceases)—this is the one who is given rest at noonday by the Sun of Righteousness. (Mal. 4:2).”<sup>1603</sup>

### **813. How did the apostles appoint priests in every church?**

It is written, “So when they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23). Paul and Barnabas faced no difficulties in appointing priests to serve the churches, especially since they did not appoint them by issuing binding apostolic orders, but through the fasting and prayer of the entire congregation together. The two apostles were comforted after appointing priests in every city, and they entrusted the people there not into the hands of the priest, but into God’s hands, the true Shepherd who serves and protects His Church and provides for her. All these congregations were still new to the faith, and it was challenging to trust their ability to choose faithful people for service. That is why the choice necessitated fasting and prayer, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote to Titus saying, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5). Certainly, some matters were verbally passed down from the apostles to their disciples, and from them to their successors in the Church, who in turn put these matters into practice without writing them down. Scripture does not record the method by which they appointed clergymen, whether bishops, priests, or deacons, nor does it record the Church’s communal prayers, or even the prayers offered in the sacrament of matrimony, for example. This is what we call, “Church Tradition.”

### **814. What is the role of the priest or bishop as a father?**

In his discussion of the authority of priests, **Origen** describes them as physicians who care for their sick children and exert every effort to heal them. They are not emperors or rulers, but fathers. For in the Church, priests and teachers can have children, as St Paul says: “My little children, of whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19), and he says, “for though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).<sup>1604</sup>

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<sup>1603</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S. J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 2: p. 69.

<sup>1604</sup> See Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.6.3 (FOTC 83:127–128).

**Origen's** reminder is always salutary: “he who is called to the office of the bishop is not called to rulership but to service to the whole Church.”<sup>1605</sup>

God permits priests to feel weakness, so that they might be kind to those who are weak. In being more aware of their own sins, their treatment of sinners becomes more respectful, and thus, more likely to attract them to repentance: “The Law appoints human priests who have weaknesses (Heb. 7:28) in order that just as they can offer for their own weakness, so also they can offer for that of the people ... But what is most to be admired in this kind of priest? Not that he may not sin—because that is impossible—but that he knows and understands his own sin. For he who thinks he has not sinned never corrects himself. In like manner, he is more easily able to pardon those who sin, whose conscience is disturbed by his own weakness.”<sup>1606</sup>

### **815. What is the role of the priest or bishop as a physician?**

In one of his homilies on the Psalms, **Origen** calls the bishops “physicians” who are skilled in healing wounds.<sup>1607</sup> He also comments on the bishops’ authority by saying that Christ was the great physician who heals from all sicknesses and diseases. Now, His apostles Peter and Paul, like the prophets, are also physicians. Likewise, those who are entrusted with the Church follow in their footsteps, for they were granted the gift of healing. Especially those servants in the Church, whom God established as physicians of souls, for He does not wish the death of a sinner, but rather that he returns and repents.<sup>1608</sup>

### **816. What is the correct understanding of the leadership of clergymen, fathers, servants, and all Church leaders?**

It is the work of the leaders to create a spirit of leadership in others, so that the ministry might not be concentrated in them alone: “But note that God said to Moses in this place, ‘Go before the people and take with you men advanced in years, that is the elders of the people’ (Ex. 17:5). Moses alone does not lead the people to the waters of the rock, but also the elders of the people with him. For the Law alone does not announce Christ, but also the prophets and patriarchs and all ‘those advanced in years’”<sup>1609</sup>

<sup>1605</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.1 (ACW 68:908; PG 13.239); see also Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 21.

<sup>1606</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 2.3.1 (FOTC 83:44; PG 13.239).

<sup>1607</sup> Ernest Latko, *Origen's Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 78.

<sup>1608</sup> Origen, *Homilies on the Psalms* On Psalm 37, 1.1 (FOTC 141; PG 12:1369); Ernest Latko, *Origen's Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 74.

<sup>1609</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 11.2 (FOTC 71:357).

### **817. What is the role of the priest or bishop in offering sacrifices?**

**Origen** combines the apostolic and the priestly definitions of the Christian ministry when he says: “The apostles and their successors, priests according to the great High Priest ... know from their instruction by the Spirit for what sins, and when, and how, they must offer sacrifice.”

### **818. What is the role of the priest or bishop as an interpreter of scripture?**

**Origen** links the priest’s role of offering the sacrifice for himself and the people with his primary role as a teacher.

Joseph W. Trigg clarifies how Origen believes that the main work of the priests of the Old Testament was ritual service, while that of the New Testament is education.

“The Old Testament priesthood was appealing to Origen, in the first place, because priests were a tribe apart, entirely consecrated to God’s service. On his return to Alexandria after his first sojourn in Caesarea, Origen wrote about this at the beginning of his *Commentary on John*. Priests, he explains, are persons consecrated to the study of the word of God, and high priests are those who excel at such study. There can be no question that these grades correspond to ecclesiastical offices. Priests, and the high priest in particular, also have privileged access to God. Thus, Origen follows Clement of Alexandria in interpreting the priest as a spiritual man but if the priest has a privileged access to divine secrets, this is only so that, as a teacher, he might mediate God’s word to others.

“Origen transforms the Jewish ritual legislation into an exposition of the priest’s vocation as a teacher. For example, removing the skin of the sacrificial victim symbolizes removing the veil of the letter from God’s word, and taking fine incense in the hand symbolizes making fine distinctions in the interpretation of difficult passages. He also interprets sacrifice as the progressive liberation of the soul from the body that makes possible the apprehension of higher truths. Thus, the Levitical priesthood comes to symbolize a moral and intellectual elite of inspired teachers of scripture. This transformation culminates in Origen’s interpretation of the high priest’s vestments, each item of which symbolizes a spiritual qualification.”<sup>1610</sup>

If the apostle is an inspired exegete, he is also, like the priest, a teacher by vocation, responsible for mediating God’s word to persons at all levels of spiritual progress. Jesus made this clear when he ordered the disciples to allow little children to come to him, thus signifying that more advanced Christians should condescend to the simple.<sup>1611</sup> The “works of an apostle” are, in fact, works of teaching. When Jesus commissioned his disciples and gave them power to give sight to the blind and to raise the dead, he had in mind restoring to sight

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<sup>1610</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19; pp. 9–10.

<sup>1611</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 15.7: pp. 448–449.



persons “blinded” by false doctrines and raising to life persons “dead” in their sins.<sup>1612</sup> Being an apostle is not an official position but function verified in the doing. In arguing to this effect Origen cites 1 Corinthians 9:2: “If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”<sup>1613</sup>

Bishops have a special place in the divine economy, since they share responsibility for their congregations with angelic bishops, with whom they cooperate. As a result of these unique responsibilities, bishops have more powers granted to them than are granted to ordinary Christians; though, conversely, more is required of them.<sup>1614</sup>

### 819. What is the role of the priest or bishop with regards to education?

**Origen** says that the priest must also be able to communicate what he knows. “For it is not sufficient for the high priest to have wisdom and to know the reason of all things unless he can communicate what he knows to the people.”<sup>1615</sup> Origen says that the priest wears the robe of doctrine to teach the advanced and the robe of the word to teach those who are beginning in the faith.<sup>1616</sup> Origen comments on the clothes of the priest in and outside the holy of holies saying, “You see, therefore, how this most learned priest when he is within, among the perfect ones as in ‘the holy of holies,’ uses one robe of doctrine, but when ‘he goes out’ to those who are not capable he changes the robe of the word and teaches lesser things and he gives to some ‘milk’ to drink as ‘children’ (1 Cor. 3:1–2), to others ‘vegetables’ as ‘the weak’ (Rom. 14:2), but to others, he gives ‘solid food,’ of course, for those who, ‘insofar as they are able, have their senses trained to distinguish good or evil’ (Heb. 5:14). Thus, Paul knew how to change robes and to use one with the people, another in the ministry of the sanctuary.”<sup>1617</sup>

### 820. What is the role of priests or bishops as pillars of the church?

**Origen** says, “In the tabernacle of the Old Testament, therefore, the pillars are joined by interposed bars; in the Church the teachers are associated by the right hand of fellowship which is given to them. But let those pillars be overlaid with silver and their bases overlaid with silver. Let two bases, however, be allotted to each pillar; one, which is said to be the ‘capital’ and is placed over it; another, which is truly called the ‘base’ and is placed under the pillar as a foundation. Let the pillars, therefore, be overlaid with silver because those who preach the word of God shall receive through the Spirit ‘the words of the Lord,’ which are ‘pure words, silver proved by fire’ (Ps. 11:7). But they have the prophets as the base of their

<sup>1612</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.4 (ACW 68:913–14).

<sup>1613</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 32.17 (4.453.6–454.11); Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: pp. 11–12.

<sup>1614</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 11.3; Fragment 50 (FOTC 97:104–105; 307).

<sup>1615</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.4.3 (FOTC 83:123).

<sup>1616</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 4.6 (FOTC 83:77–80).

<sup>1617</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 4.6.4 (FOTC 83:79).

preaching ... I have already said above that the bars of the pillars are the right hand of the apostolic fellowship given to one another.”<sup>1618</sup>

### **821. What is the bishop’s responsibility in discipling new generations of bishops and priests?**

**Origen** says that the bishop should follow Moses’ example when he chose Joshua as his successor.<sup>1619</sup> In addition, church history informs us how patriarchs used to prepare their disciples to become spiritual leaders in various capacities: patriarchs, bishops, and deans of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. He also says, “Here is no popular acclamation, no thought given to consanguinity or kinship ... the government of the people is handed over to him whom God has chosen, to a man who ... has in him the Spirit of God and keeps the precepts of God in his sight. Moses knew from personal experience that he was preeminent in the law and in knowledge, so that the children of Israel should obey him. Since all these things are replete with mysteries, we cannot omit what is more precious.”<sup>1620</sup>

“If the Scriptures are true, then the Lord speaks not only there, in the congregations of the Jews, but today too, in this congregation. And Jesus teaches not only in this congregation, but in other gatherings, and in the whole world. He seeks instruments through whom he can teach. Pray that he will find me, too, well tempered and fit for singing!”<sup>1621</sup>

J.W. Trigg says, “As with priests, the prime qualification of the apostles was their insight into the mysteries of the Bible. The ‘fields ... white already to harvest’ which Jesus called upon the Apostles to reap were the books of the Old Testament.<sup>1622</sup> When he called upon them to cross the Sea of Galilee, this symbolized his call to pass from the literal to the spiritual sense of Scripture.<sup>1623</sup> A prime characteristic of the Apostle’s function as an interpreter and teacher of the Bible was the duty to exercise discretion. Paul, the greatest of the Apostles, provided Origen with an example of apostolic discretion. When among spiritual Christians, Paul boldly imparted ‘a secret and hidden wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 2:7), but among the simple he judged it expedient ‘to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and Him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2).<sup>1624</sup> Origen was careful in the case of Apostles, as with priests, to remove any suggestions that those who fulfilled the apostolic function in the church could be identified as the holders of particular positions. Apostles are those who perform the works of an Apostle, works such as restoring to sight those blinded by false doctrine and raising to life those dead in their

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<sup>1618</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.3 (FOTC 71:339).

<sup>1619</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: pp. 13.

<sup>1620</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* 22:4; Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: pp. 13–14.

<sup>1621</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 32.2 (FOTC 94:130).

<sup>1622</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 13.47.

<sup>1623</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 11.5 (ANF 10:434–435).

<sup>1624</sup> See Origen, *Commentary on John* 13.18; and *Homilies on Leviticus* 4.6.

sins.<sup>1625</sup> Apostleship is verified in its fruits, or as Paul said: ‘If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 9:2).”<sup>1626</sup>

### **822. How approach should the priests take in dealing with people’s sins? And what is their authority?**<sup>1627</sup>

**Origen** writes that just as the apostles knew how to use their authority, so will the priests, who are ordained according to the order of Christ, the Great High Priest, know how to use their authority.<sup>1628</sup> He affirms the same concept in another context as well. In one of his homilies on Leviticus, he writes that Christ, who laid the foundation of priesthood in the Church, willed for the priests to bear the sins of their people and in the likeness of their divine Master, grant forgiveness for these sins.<sup>1629</sup>

**St John Chrysostom** says that priests on earth “have received an authority which God has not given to angels or archangels. Not to them was it said, ‘What things soever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and what things soever you shall loose, shall be loosed’ (c.f. Matt. 18:18) ... What priests do on earth God ratifies above. The Master confirms the decisions of his slaves. Indeed, he has given them nothing less than the whole authority of heaven.”<sup>1630</sup>

### **823. How can the priest examine himself in order not to lose his authority?**<sup>1631</sup>

**St John Chrysostom** warns priests against abusing the honor of their priesthood: “What if you have received a great dignity, and have at any time obtained some office of Church government? Be not high-minded ... but esteem yourself to be poor and inglorious.”<sup>1632</sup> He also says, “What purity fits him who invokes the Holy Spirit to come upon the holy sacrifice, while the angels surround the altar.”<sup>1633</sup>

**Origen** says, “What good is it to me that I sit back in a teacher’s chair in front [of the congregation], and receive the honor due to a more important person, but am not able to carry out deeds worthy of my rank?”<sup>1634</sup>

<sup>1625</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.4 (ACW 68:913–14).

<sup>1626</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 32.17; Joseph W. Trigg, Origen (London: Routledge, 2002): p. 142.

<sup>1627</sup> Ernest Latko, *Origen’s Concept of penance*, Laval 1949, p. 72f.

<sup>1628</sup> Cf. Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom etc.*, trans., Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 28.8–9: p. 150–151 (PG 11:527–530).

<sup>1629</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 5.3 (FOTC 83:93–96; PG 12:451).

<sup>1630</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* 3.5 (PP 1:72) amended.

<sup>1631</sup> Ernest Latko, *Origen’s Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 72f.

<sup>1632</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 10.5 (NPNF I/12:56; PG 61:85) amended.

<sup>1633</sup> *Ibid* 5.6.

<sup>1634</sup> Origen, *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel*, trans., Mischa Hooker, ed., Roger Pearse (Ipswich: Chieftain Publishing, 2014) 5.4.1: p. 167 (see also PG 13:707).

Origen affirms on several occasions that the validity of ecclesiastical powers depends upon the state of the priest's soul: "If he is tightly bound with the cords of his own sins, to no purpose does he bind and loose." The right of forgiving sins committed against God is reserved to him who "is inspired by Jesus, as the apostles were, and whom we can know by his fruits as having received the Holy Spirit."<sup>1635</sup>

Origen stresses the importance of spiritual qualities in the bishop. He believes that a sinful bishop loses his power to remit sins, saying: "After this let us see in what sense it was said to Peter, and to every believer who is Peter, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 16:19) ... When one judges unrighteously, and does not bind upon earth according to His will, the gates of hell prevail against him: but in the case of him against whom the gates of hell do not prevail, this man judges righteously; inasmuch as he has the keys of the kingdom of heaven, opening to those who have been loosed on earth that they may also be loosed in heaven, and free; and closing to those who by his just judgment have been bound on earth that they also be bound in heaven, and condemned. When those who claim the function of the episcopate, use this text even as Peter, and having asserted that they have received the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven from Christ, teach that things bound by them, that is to say, condemned, are also bound in heaven, and that those which have obtained remission by them are also loosed in heaven, we must say that they speak well if they have the way of life ... and if they are such that upon them the Church is built by Christ, and to them with good reason this could be referred; and the gates of hell ought not to prevail against him when he wishes to bind and loose. But if he is tightly bound with the cords of his sins, to no purpose does he bind and loose."<sup>1636</sup>

He warns against excommunicating those who are suspected of having sinned, even if their sin is hidden.<sup>1637</sup> But if their sin was scandalous and obvious, they would be inevitably expelled from the church. However, great caution must be used lest we uproot the wheat with the tares.<sup>1638</sup>

#### **824. How dangerous is vainglory for bishops?**

Some bishops, "particularly in the largest cities," make themselves as inaccessible as tyrants in order to overawe their congregations.<sup>1639</sup> **Origen** comments on the behavior of Joshua who received his lot of inheritance after all the tribes and after Caleb, saying, "Why do you think he wanted to be 'last of all'? Doubtless so that he might be 'first of all' (Matt.

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<sup>1635</sup> R. Cadiou, *Origen* (Herder Book Co., 1944): p. 315.

<sup>1636</sup> Ernest Latko, *Origen's Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 70.

<sup>1637</sup> Ernest Latko, *Origen's Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 102.

<sup>1638</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 21.1 (FOTC 105:184–185; PG 12:928); Ernest Latko, *Origen's Concept of penance* (Laval, 1949): p. 102.

<sup>1639</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 16.8: pp. 484–486. See also Joseph W. Trigg, "The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen's Understanding of Religious Leadership." *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: p. 14.

19:30). And he did not presume for himself a portion of the inheritance, but he received it from the people. The people gave him an inheritance from that which they themselves had received. For thus it is written, ‘And the sons of Israel gave Jesus the son of Nun a portion’ (Josh. 19:49). But ‘these things happened figuratively to them’ (1 Cor. 10:11) ... it is said, ‘The greater you are, the more you should humble yourself, and you will find favor before the Lord’ (Sir. 3:16); and again, that which is written, ‘If they appoint you leader, do not be lifted up, but be among them as one of them’ (Sir. 32:9).”<sup>1640</sup>

“Accordingly, if we do alms before men ... we receive the reward from men (cf. Matt. 6:1–4); and universally, everything done with an eye on being glorified by men has no reward from Him who ... renders the reward to those who are pure, in secret. So, too, those influenced by thoughts of vain glory or love of gain act with sullied motives. The teaching which is thought to be the teaching of the church, if it becomes servile through words of flattery, either when it is used as a pretext for avarice, or when one seeks human glory because of one’s teaching, it is no longer the teaching of those ‘who have been set up in the church: first, apostles, second, prophets, third, teachers’ (1 Cor. 12:28). And you will say the same with regard to one who seeks the office of bishop for the sake of human esteem, or for the sake of gain received from converts to the word who give in the name of piety; a bishop of that sort assuredly does not ‘aspire to a noble task’ (1 Tim. 3:1), nor can he be ‘irreproachable, temperate, self-controlled,’ as he is intoxicated with glory and intemperately puffed up with it. The same is also applicable to presbyters and deacons.”<sup>1641</sup>

In his homilies and exegetical works, Origen presents an image of humility, for clergymen and teachers alike:

1. He always attributed his understanding and knowledge of the scriptures to God’s grace, not to himself.
2. He would often ask those who attended his sermons to listen to those who were more wise than him and had attained more grace of understanding from God; for example: “It is likely, therefore, that a person wiser than us, and judged by God to be worthy of a clearer and richer gift in a word of wisdom through the Spirit of God, and a gift of knowledge in the word according to the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8), will discover with full apprehension things loftier and greater ... But we ... ask leniency from our readers ... Perhaps, because of our eagerness and lack of hesitation, we will appear to have something worthy of acceptance.”<sup>1642</sup> and, “May God grant to whom He wills a richer word of wisdom and a more distinct word in the light of knowledge so that these words

<sup>1640</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 24.2 (FOTC 105:206).

<sup>1641</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 11.15 (ANF 10:444). See also Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 21.

<sup>1642</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 1*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 15:37: pp. 228–229.

of ours, in comparison with those proceeding from such great gifts, may be found to be like a lamp beside the sun.”<sup>1643</sup>

3. **Origen** modestly concludes his exposition, saying, “These are the things we have perceived in relation to this passage at the present. But let the person who is able and who possesses a greater grace in relation to this passage speak greater and better things.”<sup>1644</sup> “(None can fully interpret) unless Jesus, who privately explained everything to His own disciples (Mark 4:34), has made His dwelling in his mind and opens all the dark, hidden unseen, treasure-chambers in the parable ... Now I have not yet received a mind sufficient and capable of being mingled with the mind of Christ and thus able to attain to such things.”<sup>1645</sup>

### **825. How was Moses a brilliant example of how to appoint a successor?**

**Origen** asks all clergy to be humble, imitating Moses the archprophet who did not dare to choose a successor for himself, but instead asked God Himself to choose the fittest for this position:

“But for now let us consider the grandeur of Moses. When he was about to depart from the world, he prays to God to provide a leader for the people. What are you doing, O Moses? Are not Gershom and Eleazer your sons? Or, if you have some hesitations about them, does not your brother, a great and famous man, have sons? Why not pray to God for them, to have them appointed leaders of the people? But let the rulers of the churches learn not to ordain as their successors those who are linked to them by blood relation, nor those who are associated by proximity of the flesh. They should not transmit a hereditary rule in the church, but should defer to God's judgment and not select one whom human affection recommends. Instead let them allow the matter of the election of a successor be completely determined by God's judgment.

“Was Moses unable to choose a leader for the people, and to choose by a true judgment and by a fair and just decision ... Who then was as capable of choosing a leader for the people as Moses? But he does not do it, he does not choose, he does not dare. Why does he not dare? So that he will not leave to posterity a presumptuous precedent. But listen to what he says: ‘May the Lord God of spirits and of all flesh provide a man over this congregation, who will go out before their face and who will go in, and who will lead them forth and lead them back’ (Num. 27:16–17). Thus, if a man of the stature and quality of Moses does not allow to his own judgment the selection of a leader of the people, the appointment of a successor, who will there be who would dare to do this, whether from the people, who often are accustomed

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<sup>1643</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 1*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 16:13: p. 252.

<sup>1644</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 1*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 16:17: p. 258.

<sup>1645</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 14.12 (ANF 10:502).

to be stirred up by shouts for favors, or who perhaps are provoked by financial gain; or even from the priests themselves? Who will there be who would judge himself capable of doing this, unless it be revealed to someone who prays and asks the Lord?”<sup>1646</sup>

### 826. Who is the true bishop in the eyes of God?

Trigg summarizes **Origen’s** view thus: “How is it that the church is in such a sorry state? Has God failed to provide the church with worthy leaders? By no means. But the church sometimes fails to give such persons their proper place of honor and responsibility.”<sup>1647</sup>

Origen says, “For it frequently happens that he who deals in an humble and abject interpretation and knows earthly things has the preeminent rank of a priest or sits in the chair of a teacher, while he who is spiritual and so free from earthly things that he ‘judges all things and is judged by no one’ either holds a lower rank of ministry or is relegated to the common multitude.”<sup>1648</sup>

### 827. Why did Moses clothe Aaron, the high priest, and his sons (Lev. 8:7, 13)?

**Origen** writes, “Indeed, it is said that God made those. ‘For God made skin tunics and clothed Adam and his wife’ (Gen. 3:21). Therefore, those were tunics of skins taken from animals. For with such as these, it was necessary for the sinner to be dressed. It says, ‘with skin tunics,’ which are a symbol of the mortality which he received because of his skin and of his frailty which came from the corruption of the flesh. But if you have been already washed from these and purified through the Law of God, then Moses will dress you with a garment of incorruptibility so that ‘your shame may never appear’ (Cf. Ex. 20:26) and ‘that this mortality may be absorbed by life’ (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:4).”<sup>1649</sup>

He also says, “For, before everything, the priest who assists at the divine altars ought to be girded with purity, otherwise he will not be able to cleanse the old and establish the new unless he has put on the linens. About the linen clothes, it has been frequently spoken already, and especially when we were speaking about the priestly garments, that this kind has the form of purity, from the fact that the origin of flax is brought forth from the earth so that it conceived without any mixture.”<sup>1650</sup>

<sup>1646</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 22.4.1: pp. 137–138. See also Robert B. Eno, *Teaching Authority in the Early Church. Message of the Fathers of the Church, V. 14* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1984): p. 84.

<sup>1647</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: p. 14.

<sup>1648</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* 2.1 (7.9.22–27), quoted in Joseph W. Trigg, “The Charismatic Intellectual: Origen’s Understanding of Religious Leadership.” *Church History* 50, no. 1 (1981): 5–19: pp. 14–15.

<sup>1649</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.2.7 (FOTC 83:120).

<sup>1650</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 4.6.3 (FOTC 83:78).

**828. What is the priest's portion of the peace offering?**

Origen says, “‘The fatty parts which are above the breast’ are placed on the altar, but ‘the breast itself is for Aaron and his sons’ (Lev. 7:30) ... I think that if anyone says he is a priest of God, unless he has a breast (or the heart as the source of thoughts) chosen from all the members, he is not a priest. Such is the limb (Lev. 7:33) of the priest that the sons of Israel bring it to him for their salvation by which they are saved. In this offering ‘the breast’ and ‘the right limb’ are made part of the priest that it may be a sign that his breast and heart, which thought evil things before, converted by the labor of the priest, received good thoughts and thus was cleansed that likewise ‘he may be able to see God.’ In like manner also, in the limb is the sign that his evil and sinister words, which are certainly wicked and not good, he converts into right that they may be according to God. This is the right limb, which is said to be the priest’s part.”<sup>1651</sup>

“From this I think it is one thing for the priests to perform their office, another thing to be instructed and prepared in all things. For anyone can perform the religious ministry, but few there are who are adorned with morals, instructed in doctrine, educated in wisdom, very well adapted to communicate the truth of things and who expound the wisdom of the faith, not omitting the ornament of understandings and the splendor of assertions which is represented by the ornament ‘of gold plate’ placed on his head. One then is the name of a priest, but there is not one dignity either by the worth of his life or by the virtues of his soul. For this reason, in the things which the divine law describes, even as in a mirror any priest ought to inspect himself and to gather from that place the degrees of his merit, if he sees himself placed in all these high priestly ornaments, which we explained above.”<sup>1652</sup>

**829. Is it necessary for the hearts of the priests to never depart from dwelling in God's house?**

A priest should never leave the House of God, i.e., he loves the heavenly life. **Origen** says, “For that reason, if anyone wants to be a high priest not just in name but in worthiness, let him imitate Moses; let him imitate Aaron. What is said about them? ‘They did not leave the Tent of the Lord’ (Lev. 10:7). Moses was constantly in ‘the Tent of the Lord.’ What was his work? That he should either learn something from God or teach the people.”<sup>1653</sup>

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<sup>1651</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 5.12.5–7 (FOTC 83:113–114).

<sup>1652</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.6.1 (FOTC 83:126).

<sup>1653</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.6.4 (FOTC 83:128).



**830. Why is the priest committed to a life of continual prayer?**

**Origen** says, “Thus let the priest of the church also pray unceasingly that the people who are under him may defeat the invisible Amalchite hosts who are the demons that assail those who want to live piously in Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).”<sup>1654</sup>

**831. What is the general priesthood?**

In his homilies, **Origen** refers to the general priesthood of all members of the Church. For example, he says, “Indeed do you wish to know what the difference is between the priests of God and the priests of Pharaoh? Pharaoh grants lands to his priests. The Lord, on the other hand, does not grant his priests a portion in the land, but says to them: ‘I am your portion’ (Cf. Num. 18:20). You, therefore, who read these words, observe all the priests of the Lord and notice what difference there is between the priests ... But let us hear what Christ our Lord admonishes his priests: ‘He who has not renounced all he possesses,’ he says, ‘cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:33). I tremble when I speak these words. For I myself am my own, I say, my own accuser first of all. I utter my own condemnations. For Christ denies that that man whom he has seen possessing anything and that man who ‘renounces’ not ‘all which he possesses’ is his disciple. And what do we do? How do we, who not only do not renounce these things which we possess, but also wish to acquire those things which we never had before we came to Christ, either read these words ourselves or explain them to people? For since conscience rebukes us, are we able to hide and not bring forth the words which are written? I do not wish to be guilty of a double crime.”<sup>1655</sup>

Cadiou comments: “Origen was training men who would later be the ruling class in the life of the Church. He himself had not yet been ordained to the priesthood but he had long aspired to that grace. In the meantime he regarded his pedagogical functions as something sacred, seeing in them an image of the priesthood of Aaron. Let us remember that St. John represents the Christian people in his vision of the twelve tribes whom he counted around the Lamb. On one side, he places the virgins, as first fruits of the faithful of Christ. They are the intellectual elite, the little group of disciples who, by the study of Holy Scripture, by contemplation as well as by vigilance and perseverance, guard that purity of body and of mind by which the perfect are known. They can be called Levites or priests of Israel because they exercise an inner priesthood.”<sup>1656</sup>

Origen says, “are you ignorant that to you also, that is, to all of the Church of God and to the people of believers, the priesthood was given? Hear what Peter says about the faithful: You are ‘an elect race, royal, priestly, a holy nation, a chosen people’ (1 Pet. 2:9). Therefore, you have a priesthood because you are ‘a priestly nation,’ and for this reason ‘you ought to

<sup>1654</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.6.5 (FOTC 83:128).

<sup>1655</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 16.5 (FOTC 71:221–222).

<sup>1656</sup> R. Cadiou, *Origen* (Herder Book Co., 1944): p. 310.

offer an offering of praise to God’ (cf. Heb. 13:15), an offering of prayers, an offering of mercy, an offering of purity, an offering of justice, an offering of holiness.”<sup>1657</sup>

“Most of us devote most of our time to the things of this life and dedicate to God only a few special acts, thus resembling those members of the tribes who had but few transactions with the priests and discharged their religious duties with no great expense of time. But those who devote themselves to the divine word and have no other employment but the service of God may not unnaturally, allowing for the difference of occupation in the two cases, be called our Levites or priests. And those who follow a more distinguished office than their kinsmen will perhaps be high priests according to the order of Aaron.”<sup>1658</sup>

“In the moral sense, this high priest can be seen as the understanding of piety and religion, which through the prayers and supplications which we pour out to God, performs in us, as it were, a kind of priesthood. If this one should transgress in something, immediately ‘he makes all the people sin’ (cf. Lev. 4:3) against the good acts which are within us. For we do not do any right deed when the understanding, the guide of good works, turns aside into wrong. For that reason, for correction of this, not just any kind of offering is required but the sacrifice ‘of the fatted calf’ (cf. Luke 15:23) itself. In like manner, the guilt of the congregation; that is, the correction of all virtues which are within us, is repaired though nothing other than by putting Christ to death.”<sup>1659</sup>

“Observe that there always ought to be ‘fire on the altar.’ And you, if you want to be a priest of God, as it is written, ‘For every one of you will be priests of the Lord’ (Isa. 61:6). For it is said that you are ‘an elect race, a royal priesthood, an acquired people’ (1 Pet. 2:9). If, therefore, you want to exercise the priesthood of your soul, let the fire never depart from your altar. This is what the Lord also taught in the Gospels that ‘your loins be girded and your lamps burning’ (Luke 12:35). Thus, let the ‘fire’ of faith and the ‘lamp’ of knowledge always be lit for you.”<sup>1660</sup>

“As we have already said often, you too can function as a high priest before God within the temple of your spirit if you would prepare your garments with zeal and vigilance; if the word of the Law has washed you and made you clean, and the anointing and grace of your baptism remained uncontaminated; if you were to be clothed with two garments, of the letter and of the spirit; if you were also girded twice so that you may be pure in flesh and spirit; if you would adorn yourselves ‘with a cape’ of works and ‘a breastplate’ of wisdom; if also he would crown your head ‘with a turban’ and ‘golden plate’ (Lev. 8:7f.), the fullness of the knowledge of God; although, I would have you know, you may be hidden and unknown

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<sup>1657</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 9.1.3 (FOTC 83:177); see also Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 146.

<sup>1658</sup> Origen, *Homilies on John* 1:3 (PG 14:25), quoted in R. Cadiou: Origen, Herder Book Co., 1944, p. 310.

<sup>1659</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 2.4.1 (FOTC 83:45–46).

<sup>1660</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 4.6.2 (FOTC 83:78).

before men. ‘For you are the temple of the living God’ if ‘the Spirit of God lives in you’ (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Cor. 3:16).”<sup>1661</sup>

“Or are you ignorant that to you also, that is, to all of the Church of God and to the people of believers, the priesthood was given? Hear what Peter says about the faithful: You are ‘an elect race, royal, priestly, a holy nation, a chosen people’ (1 Pet. 2:9). Therefore, you have a priesthood because you are ‘a priestly nation,’ and for this reason ‘you ought to offer an offering of praise to God’ (cf. Heb. 13:15), an offering of prayer, an offering of mercy, an offering of holiness. But in order to offer these things worthily, you must have clean clothes separated from the common clothing of the rest of humanity and have the necessary divine fire, not one ‘alien’ to God but that one which is given people by God, about which the Son of God says, ‘I came to send fire upon the earth and how I wish that it be ignited’ (Luke 12:49). For if we do not use that but another, and this an opposing fire, from that one which transforms itself as ‘an angel of light’ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14), without doubt we will suffer the same thing that ‘Nadab and Abiud’ suffered.”<sup>1662</sup>

### **832. What is the nature of the relationship between the clergy and the congregation?**

We shall return to the idea of democracy in the Church in the relationship between clergy and laity of on another occasion, but are some points:

- a. Origen says, “He who is called to the office of the bishop is not called to rulership but to service to the whole church.”<sup>1663</sup>
- b. St. Clement<sup>1664</sup> and Origen<sup>1665</sup> both spoke of the general (laity) priesthood.
- c. R. Cadiou says, “We are told by these historians that, according to a number of evidences, the most ancient of which is found in the works of St. Jerome, that the bishop of Alexandria, from the earliest times in that church, was one of the members of the local clergy; that he was chosen and delegated by the priests in some such way as the emperor was chosen by the army. This primitive custom, so we are told, ended only under the successors of Demetrius. Beginning with this post-Demetrius period, the ‘patriarch’ was elected and consecrated by the neighboring bishops according to the habitual procedure; and they would have been under no obligation to choose him from the ranks of the clergy of Alexandria.”<sup>1666</sup>

<sup>1661</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 6.5.2 (FOTC 83:125).

<sup>1662</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 9.1.3 (FOTC 83:177).

<sup>1663</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.1 (ACW 68:908; PG 13:239).

<sup>1664</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall be Saved?* (ANF 2).

<sup>1665</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 9.1 (FOTC 83:176–178).

<sup>1666</sup> R. Cadiou, *Origen* (Herder Book Co., 1944): pp. 317–318.

**Origen** gives some insight into the election of bishops in his day. Using Origen’s *Homily on Numbers* 13.4 as evidence, E. Ferguson demonstrates that in the third century there were at least four ways of electing bishops:<sup>1667</sup>

1. A popular election.
2. An appointment by a reigning bishop.
3. A testimonium either nominating a person or ratifying one elected by the people.
4. A presbyterial election, Origen’s personal preference.

Origen asserts that the presence of the people is required in the ordination of a priest, since they are the ones who elect him,<sup>1668</sup> that all may know for certain that the man elected to the priesthood is of the people “the most eminent, the most learned, the holiest, the most outstanding in every virtue.”<sup>1669</sup> He says, it should be an open decision lest anyone have doubts. Origen bases this on the fact that “Moses called together the whole assembly.”

### **833. Do a priest’s administrative duties hinder his internal liberation?**

The Church Fathers linked the administrative duties of the priest or bishop with their perfect inner liberation from all worldly and bodily needs. **St. Basil the Great** considers the mind that is disturbed with worldly concerns as incapable of seeing the truth.<sup>1670</sup> Therefore, he demanded a strict examination of the candidates to ordination, so that no administrative tasks could hinder them from being spiritually free or liberated.

Among St. Basil’s rules on Christian ethics, we find:

“That it is necessary for those entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel, with prayer and supplication to ordain deacons or presbyters who are blameless and esteemed for their former life (Matt. 9:37–38).”<sup>1671</sup>

“That it is necessary not to be reckless in ordinations or to approach them heedlessly (for what is untested is not without danger), and to expose the one convicted of anything, so that one does not commune with the sin and others do not stumble into it but rather learn from it (1 Tim. 5:22).”<sup>1672</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one chosen not to present himself for preaching on his own initiative but to await the timing of the good pleasure of God and to make a beginning of

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<sup>1667</sup> Everett Ferguson, “Origen and the Election of Bishops.” *Church History* 43, no. 1 (1974): 26–33: pp. 27–30, 32.

<sup>1668</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 1–16 (FOTC 83).

<sup>1669</sup> SC 286.279; see Thomas Halton, *The Church (Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 4)* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1985): p. 21.

<sup>1670</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 2 (FOTC 13:5–7; PG 32:224C–225A).

<sup>1671</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.1 (PP 51:253).

<sup>1672</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.2 (PP 51:257).

preaching when commissioned to preach to those to whom he has been sent (Matt. 10:5–6).”<sup>1673</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one called to preach the Gospel to obey immediately and not delay (Luke 9:55–60).”<sup>1674</sup>

“That it is necessary to teach those entrusted to one all that is prescribed by the Lord in the Gospel and through the apostles and whatever follows from these (Matt. 28:19–20).”<sup>1675</sup>

“That if the one entrusted with the Word of the Lord’s teaching is silent concerning anything necessary for pleasing God, he is liable for the blood of those endangered by doing what is forbidden of by failing to do the good that is expected of them (Luke 11:52).”<sup>1676</sup>

“That it is not permitted to lay upon others a requirement which one has not met oneself (Luke 11:46).”<sup>1677</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one set over the Word to set an example for others of every good, first practicing what he teaches (John 13:12–15).”<sup>1678</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one set over the Word not to be lackadaisical in his duty, but to recognize that it is the proper and particular work of the office he has been given to improve those entrusted to him (Matt. 5:13).”<sup>1679</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one set over the Word to go around to all of the villages and cities that have been placed in his hands (Matt. 4:23).”<sup>1680</sup>

“That it is necessary to call everyone to obey the Gospel and to proclaim the Word most frankly and to testify to the truth even if some would hinder you or even persecute you—indeed, even to the point of death (Matt. 10:27–28).”<sup>1681</sup>

“That the mark of one who loves the Lord is that, having great affection for those he teaches, he cares for them in every way with all zeal, even unto death if necessary, persevering in teaching both collectively and individually (Acts 20:20–21).”<sup>1682</sup>

“That it is necessary for one set over the Word to be merciful and compassionate, especially to those disfigured in soul (Matt. 9:36).”<sup>1683</sup>

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<sup>1673</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.3 (PP 51:257).

<sup>1674</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.4 (PP 51:259).

<sup>1675</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.6 (PP 51:261).

<sup>1676</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.7 (PP 51:261).

<sup>1677</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.9 (PP 51:263).

<sup>1678</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.10 (PP 51:265).

<sup>1679</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.11 (PP 51:265).

<sup>1680</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.12 (PP 51:267).

<sup>1681</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.13 (PP 51:267).

<sup>1682</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.19 (PP 51:273).

<sup>1683</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.20 (PP 51:275).

“That it is necessary also with respect to bodily necessities to show compassion for those entrusted to one and to care for them (Matt. 15:32).”<sup>1684</sup>

“That it is necessary for one set over the Word not to neglect the zeal due to greater things because he is earnest to work, himself, at the lesser (Acts 6:2–4).”<sup>1685</sup>

“That it is necessary not to make a display of or put on a show with the Word of teaching, flattering the listeners for the satisfaction of one’s own desires or needs, but to be such as speak for the glory of God in his very presence (Matt. 23:5–10).”<sup>1686</sup>

“That it is necessary for one set over the Word not to misuse his authority to abuse those under him nor, of course, to lord it over them, but rather to make his rank an occasion for humbling himself before them (Matt. 24:45–51).”<sup>1687</sup>

“That it is necessary not to preach the Gospel out of contention or envy or rivalry with anyone (Phil. 1:15–17).”<sup>1688</sup>

“That it is necessary not to suppose that success in preaching is attained by our own contrivances, but to rely wholly upon God (2 Cor. 3:4–6).”<sup>1689</sup>

“That it is necessary for the one charged with preaching the Gospel not to acquire anything more than what he requires to meet his needs (Matt. 10:9–10).”<sup>1690</sup>

“Of what sort the Word desires Christians to be: ... As heralds of the kingdom of heaven unto the destruction of the one who holds the power of death in sin (Matt. 10:7).”<sup>1691</sup>

“As an example of the rule of piety for setting aright in all things those who follow the Lord and a rebuke for the distortions of those who in any way whatsoever defy him (Phil. 3:13–16).”<sup>1692</sup>

“As an eye in the body, discerning the good and the bad and conducting the members of Christ to the proper portion of each (Matt. 6:22).”<sup>1693</sup>

“As shepherds of the sheep of Christ, who shrink not even from laying down their life for them if this is called for, for the sake of delivering them to the gospel of God (John 10:11).”<sup>1694</sup>

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<sup>1684</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.21 (PP 51:277).

<sup>1685</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.22 (PP 51:277).

<sup>1686</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.23 (PP 51:277).

<sup>1687</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.24 (PP 51:279).

<sup>1688</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.25 (PP 51:281).

<sup>1689</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.27 (PP 51:283).

<sup>1690</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 70.28 (PP 51:285).

<sup>1691</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.1, 13 (PP 51:313, 317).

<sup>1692</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.14 (PP 51:319).

<sup>1693</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.15 (PP 51:319).

<sup>1694</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.16 (PP 51:319).

“As physicians who heal the passions of souls with great compassion and according to their knowledge of the Lord’s teachings, so acquiring their health and endurance in Christ (Rom. 15:1).”<sup>1695</sup>

“As fathers and rearers of their own children, who are well disposed out of their love in Christ to deliver to them not only the Gospel of God but even their own souls (1 Cor. 4:15).”<sup>1696</sup>

“As coworkers with God who give their whole selves up for the Church solely to do the worthy works of God (1 Cor. 3:9).”<sup>1697</sup>

“As planters of the cuttings of God, who allow nothing alien to the vine, which is Christ, nor anything fruitless but who cultivate with all care that which is his and is fruitful (1 Cor. 3:6).”<sup>1698</sup>

“As builders of God’s temple, shaping the souls of each to fit well together upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (1 Cor. 3:10–11).”<sup>1699</sup>

#### **834. Do the responsibilities of one’s local diocese hinder one from actively participating in the universal Church?**

**St. Basil the Great** successfully followed St. Athanasius’ example in his concern for the universal Church. His friend St. Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of this in his eulogy at St. Basil’s funeral. It is important for the bishop to attend to the needs of the universal Church alongside his duties towards the diocese with which he is entrusted.

St. Basil the Great wrote to St. Athanasius: “Although it is quite enough for most men to watch over their own responsibilities, this does not suffice for you. On the contrary, you have as great a care for all the churches as for the one particularly entrusted to you by our benign Lord. For, indeed, you never cease reasoning, admonishing, writing, and on every occasion sending the best counselors.”<sup>1700</sup>

And **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says of St. Basil, “When he had settled affairs at home to his satisfaction ... he conceived a far greater and loftier design. While all other men had their eyes only on that which lay at their feet and considered how they might safeguard their own interests—if, indeed, this is to safeguard them—without going any further or being capable of conceiving or accomplishing any great or noble purpose, Basil, though he observed moderation in other respects, in this knew no measure. But lifting his head high and

<sup>1695</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.17 (PP 51:321).

<sup>1696</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.18 (PP 51: 321).

<sup>1697</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.19 (PP 51: 321).

<sup>1698</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.20 (PP 51: 321).

<sup>1699</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Christian Ethics* 80.21 (PP 51:323).

<sup>1700</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 69 FOTC 13:164–165).

casting the eye of his soul in every direction, he obtained a mental vision of the whole world through which the word of salvation had been spread.”<sup>1701</sup>

**835. What are the most dangerous pitfalls to which priests, shepherds, and servants are prone?**<sup>1702</sup>

In the inaudible prayers at the beginning of the divine liturgy, the priest lifts up his heart and prays: “Grant O Lord that our sacrifice may be accepted before You for my own sins and for the ignorance of Your people,” attributing sins to himself while considering the errors of the people more as weaknesses.

Scripture cautions those who serve in the Church against the warfare of the devil: “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, then I will turn My hand against the little ones” (Zech. 13:7). The most dangerous sin that a priest, servant, preacher, or teacher can fall into, is to deceive oneself. This sin manifests itself in the following:

- a. The leader pridefully enumerates his achievements and services, without attributing these achievements to God. **St. Basil the Great** says, “Let not the rank of cleric elate you but let it, rather, make you humble, for advancement in the spirit is advancement in humility; defection and disgrace are born of haughtiness. The nearer you approach the higher ranks of sacred orders, the more you should abase yourself, recalling with fear the example of the sons of Aaron. Knowledge of holy living is knowledge of meekness and humility. Humility is the imitation of Christ; high-mindedness and boldness and shamelessness, the imitation of the Devil. Become an imitator of Christ, not of Antichrist; of God and not of the adversary of God; of the Master, not the fugitive slave; of the merciful One, not the merciless; of the lover, not the enemy, of mankind; of the inmates of the bridal chamber, not the inhabitants of darkness. Be not eager to wield authority over the community, that you may not place upon your own neck others’ burdens of sin.”<sup>1703</sup>
- b. He is mostly concerned with the number of people who listen to him, and not with establishing the kingdom of God within himself and within those whom he serves.
- c. He thinks that his talents and abilities are worthy of more honor than his current position, so he seeks a bigger church with more populous meetings, or believes he is exceptional and should lead specific services such as Youth Meetings or Servant Preparation meetings. Or he thinks of himself as the most capable of starting new projects, publishing books, or recording sermons.

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<sup>1701</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Funeral Oration on St. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea* 41 (FOTC 22:62).

<sup>1702</sup> Cf. Dayton Hartman, *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

<sup>1703</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Renunciation of the World* (FOTC 9:30–31).



- d. He believes that he has a fiery heart with regards to the spiritual life, inflamed with holy zeal. But what he *really* desires to do is to show off the strength of his service and his knowledge of the divine truth, and so service becomes a tool for him to achieve his personal goals, and not to grow in the knowledge of God or in love for those whom He died for.
- e. He is always concerned with having a leading role especially in the media, or he struggles internally to attain a prestigious position in local or ecumenical conferences.
- f. The servant deceives himself when he thinks that he is called to make major reforms, driven by his unique capabilities.
- g. Some believe that they are successful in their service, though what concerns them is only the growth of their own fame or popularity.

The remedy for all these kinds of issues is to practice the true ministry whereby the servant sings with the apostle saying, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

**St. Augustine** believes that the servant’s role is for “the proud to be put in their place, the desperate set on their feet, those engaged in quarrels reconciled; the needy have to be helped, the oppressed to be liberated, the good to be given your backing, the bad to be tolerated; all must be loved.”<sup>1704</sup>

The servant should not think that Christ needs him, or that the Church will cease to exist without him. It is God’s grace that grants him a place to serve alongside the members of the Church, as one team. The prophet says, “Do not seek great things for yourself” (Jer. 45:5).

### **836. What practical remedies can be offered to shepherds (or pastors)?**

Having talked about the negativities in the pastors’ lives, Hartman offers a practical remedy to build a spirit of ministry and evangelism, that focuses on two essential factors:

**First:** the ability to continuously encounter and cherish the Bible, and to present the practical aspect of Biblical life, so that everyone can enjoy fellowship in Christ Jesus.

**Second:** Hartman calls for the need to read writings from Church history extensively, or the writings of the early Church Fathers, as we say in the Orthodox Church.

He writes, “One of the most useful and humbling resources I have found for my own development as a preacher has been church history ... When I look over the manuscripts of even my best sermons, they read like poorly written knock-offs of good sermons from men

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<sup>1704</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume IX: Sermons 306-340A*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1994) 340.3: p. 293.

like John Chrysostom (349–407) ... one of the greatest preachers in church history. I strongly encourage regular reading of his sermons and biblical commentaries. This is from one of his Easter sermons, talking about the resurrection defeating hell:

Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with.  
It was in an uproar because it is mocked.  
It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed.  
It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated.  
It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive.  
Hell took a body, and discovered God.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.  
It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see.  
O death, where is thy sting?  
O Hades, where is thy victory?  
Christ is Risen, and you, O death, are annihilated!  
Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!  
Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!  
Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;  
for Christ having risen from the dead,  
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.  
To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!<sup>1705</sup>

“While the style is better suited to Chrysostom’s fourth-century Constantinople than to modern America, this is still better than your (and my) best Easter sermon. No wonder it is read aloud every year in Eastern Orthodox churches! Even though none of us have ever preached something this good, reading great sermons from the past constantly prompts me to think through this question: ‘How do I preach like that in a twenty-first century context?’

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<sup>1705</sup> John Chrysostom, “*Hell Took a Body and Discovered God*,”  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/aprilweb-only/13.0b.html>..

Reading church history will humble you and equip you to be a better pastor and a better preacher.”<sup>1706</sup>

### 837. Does the bishop need the prayers of his congregation?

The apostle Paul was chosen from the womb to preach. Our Lord publicly called him on the road to Damascus and he received numerous spiritual gifts. Yet, he felt in grave need for the people’s prayers so that God would support his spiritual perseverance and his missionary work. He says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:18–19).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “We pray for the bishop, so that he may proclaim the word of truth in purity, for those present (with us), and for the brethren in the whole world.”<sup>1707</sup>

### 838. Why does God sometimes allow priests and bishops to be overcome by their own passions and weaknesses?

**St. John Chrysostom** often pointed out that God allows priests and bishops to be overcome by their weaknesses and passions so that they may learn from their weaknesses to be compassionate with sinners, and to forgive others. This happened to St. Peter in the New Testament and Elijah the prophet in the Old Testament.<sup>1708</sup> This does not mean, however, that God provides excuses for the sins of the priests: “The sin to which the priest consents may be committed by many seculars, but his chastisement shall be far more severe.”<sup>1709</sup>

### 839. How can believers who desire to consecrate their lives to God decide on whether to take the path of service or that of monasticism?

Discernment requires purity of heart. **St. Basil** believes that the secret behind the purity of the believer’s heart is his keenness to grow himself spiritually through the practice of spiritual stillness and silence. He says, “**silence is the beginning of purifying the soul.**”

Silence is necessary for the believer, especially when making a correct decision about consecration. If someone feels called to the priesthood or longs for monasticism, he needs to submit himself to the Holy Spirit and take his time — in silence — to make a decision in accordance with God’s will. **St. Basil the Great** says, “When the mind is not engaged by

<sup>1706</sup> Dayton Hartman, *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017): pp. 20–22.

<sup>1707</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Cor.* 2.8. See also his *De incomprehensibili* 3.6; *De prophetarum obscuritate*, 2.5, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3.5; and *Homilies on John*, 78.4.

<sup>1708</sup> St. John Chrysostom, 2 Tim., Homily 2.2–3; Jo. Homily 87.4.

<sup>1709</sup> St. John Chrysostom, John, Matt., Homilies 26.6; 76.6. See also *De Virginitate* 24 in *De virginitate and De non iterando coniugio*, trans., Sally Ann Shore (Ph.D. Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1980).

external affairs, nor diffused through the senses over the whole world, it retires within itself. Then, it ascends spontaneously to the consideration of God.”<sup>1710</sup>

#### **840. How was the archbishop John Chrysostom successful in his pastoral work?**

This Father’s pastoral work remains a living model worthy of imitation in our present time, despite all the hardships he faced due to his illnesses from his early youth and the persecution of the imperial palace because he did not accept to flatter the emperor, the empress, or the court. Moreover, he also faced the opposition of some archbishops, priests, and monks because he did not participate in the banquets held in the imperial palace, and neither did he hold banquets for the nobles.

One of the key factors that made him so successful was his understanding of pastorship. On the one hand, he asked the priest (and all the clergy) to be a father to all the world; to the believers, nonbelievers, and even to the opponents of the Church. It befits the priest, no matter what his rank is, as well as the laity, to imitate God “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

The second factor was his view of the people. He would say to said to them, “You are the bishop.” A young child, consecrated to God, can serve other children, drawing to the gospel those who will accept it with joy. A woman can serve other women in the market, in the spirit of the gospel, those whom the bishop cannot reach or deal with. St. John wants every believer to be a spiritual leader, regardless of gender, age, culture, or social status. The life of St. John Chrysostom remains a practical lesson for all priests and for every true believer throughout all generations.

#### **841. What concepts did St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. Jacob of Sarug use when writing a eulogy to mourn a priest who had departed?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** considered **St. Ephrem the Syrian** as his spiritual father, though St. Jacob was born about seventy years after the latter had died. They both bear the same spirit and thought in their writings. When mourning a departed priest, they consider the following:

- a. In their eulogies, their goal was not to narrate the departed priest’s life. They often **did not even mention the priest’s name** or disclose his ecclesial rank (if he was a priest or bishop). What concerned them was not that person himself, regardless of their personal relationship with him, but revealing the role of the priest — or any member of the Church — in the life of the Church on his way to heaven, to encounter the heavenly Bridegroom face-to-face.
- b. Regardless of anything with which a priest may be endowed — talents, gifts, or capabilities to serve the kingdom of God — he should always remember that at one

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<sup>1710</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 2 (FOTC 13:7; PG 32:228A).

point, his soul will depart his body and the body will dwell in the grave among the dead. Since Christ the Lord of Glory — the Holy One, whose body was incorruptible — experienced death with us, was buried in a tomb and lay with those who are dead, He blesses them with the fellowship of His resurrection, its glory and power. So, we should not be disturbed by a priest's death and burial.

- c. The priest's death can never destroy his love for his people, the flock of Christ, since he will never stop praying and supplicating for them before God.
- d. The death of a saintly priest adds to the Church's treasure in heaven, as she now has someone to pray on her behalf in heaven, and thus drawing the hearts of all the believers to heaven as their eternal dwelling place.
- e. In one of his homilies, St. Jacob imagines a dialogue between the departed priest and his brothers the priests, as well as with his beloved congregation. Thus, he reveals the authentic unity between the struggling faithful on earth and those who have fallen asleep in Christ Jesus.
- f. St. Ephrem and St. Jacob's homilies urge us to **realize the truth of our heavenly citizenship in the heavenly Christ**, so that we should not be disturbed if the world ignores us or takes an attitude of enmity towards us. We are sojourners and strangers proceeding on an enjoyable and delightful journey toward the glorious heavenly haven, in the midst of hardships.
- g. If the priest urges us to have **a living faith**, his life should translate into a spiritual behavior that befits the children of God, the members of the body of Christ, so that they may never cease to struggle, relying on the unfathomable grace of God.



## 22

### The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

#### 842. What was the first ever marriage?

**St. Jacob of Sarug** tells us about the first ever marriage that was between our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (paradise). He says:

“[God] adorned Eve as a virgin bride and gave her to Adam, and into her dowry He put the sea, the dry land, and the air.

All the worlds gathered for the great marriage feast that He had prepared, the bridal couple were radiant in their crowns and their raiment.

He covered them in magnificent light and in elegant radiance, and He left them among the trees to enjoy their delights.

He gave them every tree and their fruits as a wedding present, and the garden exulted in the bride and bridegroom for they were beloved.

The tree of life was in the great bridal chamber of Eden; it was concealed, to be for that luminous couple when they were perfected.”<sup>1711</sup>

#### 843. What is our understanding of Christian marriage?

In this sacrament, Christ unites the bride and groom in Himself, to experience a taste of the heavenly wedding and its eternal joy. The Holy Spirit affirms that marriage is not just an official contract, nor is it purely a social event, but it is tasting a token of God’s kingdom. The bride and groom are called by the Holy Spirit, not to live together in isolation, but to enjoy being united with the Lord. God views us as kings and queens and He created this beautiful world as a royal palace for us and granted us freedom to be His ambassadors and stewards. He stretches out His hand to sanctify our marriages, to establish from them a new home for Himself and an embassy for heaven. He makes the man and woman into one flesh, bearing a symbol of Christ’s heavenly marriage to His Church. The rule of the Christian home is mutual love and putting the other’s interests before their own. “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31–32). The purpose of God’s work is to unite with His faithful humanity, as His heavenly bride. He works in the lives of everyone, the married couple, the celibates, the old, and the young.

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<sup>1711</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Creation of Adam and the Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. Edward G. Mathews (Gorgias Press, 2014) On the Creation of Adam 4.159–168: pp. 30–32.

**Origen** says, “Marriage is a spiritual gift, but not so for non-believers, for God’s Spirit is not given to dwell in those who are non-believers.”<sup>1712</sup> The Holy Spirit calls the couple not to live in isolation alone, but to taste and enjoy being in unity with Him.

**Tertullian** says, “What kind of yoke is that of two believers, (partakers) of one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service?”<sup>1713</sup> He also says, “How shall we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives His consent?”<sup>1714</sup>

#### **844. What do we mean when we say that marriage is from God?**

Marital love in the life of the believer is a mystery that we practice within our living faith, and not merely to fulfill our sexual desires or our social needs by establishing a family according to the laws of nature. Marital love, first and foremost, is the acceptance of God’s work in our life to satisfy us from every aspect in this world, in order that we may be elevated to the joyful eternal life. If heaven is, in its essence, a communion of love and a life of unity with God (who is heaven’s focal point), then a true marital life is in essence a union based on marital love, through which the two become one.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Our Savior went to a wedding to sanctify the origin of human life.” “Marriage is more than human it is a miniature kingdom, which is the little house of the lord.” “Marriage is a sacred image that must be kept pure from any defilement. It is fitting to rise with Christ from our slumber, and then go back to sleep with gratitude and prayer.” “Hearts of beloveds have wings ... Love can turn into hatred if mutual disrespect crept in.” “Whoever seeks only the physical pleasure turns his marriage into adultery.” And, “Who are the two or three who gather in the name of Christ with the Lord in their midst (Matt. 18:20)? By three does he not mean husband, wife, and child? A wife is united with her husband by God (Prov. 19:14).”<sup>1715</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Thus when a certain wise man says, ‘It is by the Lord that a man is matched with a woman’ (Prov. 19:14), he means this: God made marriage, and not that it is He that joins together every man that comes to be with a woman. For we see many men and women that come to be with one another for evil, even by the law of marriage, and this we should not ascribe to God.”<sup>1716</sup>

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<sup>1712</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 3.34.42–45.

<sup>1713</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* 2.8 (ANF 4:48).

<sup>1714</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* 2.8 (ANF 4:48) amended.

<sup>1715</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis, Books 1–3*, 3.10.68.1 (FOTC 85:298).

<sup>1716</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 23.1 (NPNF I/11:511) amended.



**845. What do we mean when we say that marriage is a holy mystery?**

In Christianity, marriage is holy, and the bed is pure. Christianity raised that status of marriage to its highest level, as it considered the union between spouses a union with God Himself, like that unity between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22–24), not only to establish a new home, but to establish a holy church in which the Lord dwells and rests. Therefore, the believer feels that the sacrament of matrimony is a holy mystery in which Christ unites the newlywed couple together with a holy bond by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that they may taste the sacramental union between Christ and the Church, His bride, and live together in their house for God as one body without division. For this reason, the following should be taken into account in any Christian marriage:

- a. Approval of the bishop.<sup>1717</sup>
- b. By the end of the second century, the sacrament of marriage was associated with the sacrament of the eucharist. **Tertullian** says, “How shall we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives His consent?”<sup>1718</sup>

Although Christ permits divorce in case of adultery (Matt. 19:9), divorce did not occur immediately in this event, and instead an opportunity for repentance was given and the person was denied from communal prayers for a long time. **St. Jerome** says, “It is only heretics who condemn marriage and tread under foot the ordinance of God, but we listen with gladness to every word said by our Lord in praise of marriage. For the Church does not condemn marriage, but only subordinates it.”<sup>1719</sup>

**846. Why did Christ begin His ministry by attending the wedding at Cana of Galilee?**

**St. Augustine** says, “The Lord, in that He came to the marriage to which He was invited, wished, apart from the mystical signification, to assure us that marriage was His own institution. For there were to be those of whom the apostle spoke, forbidding to marry (1 Tim. 4:3), and asserting that marriage was an evil, and of the devil’s institution.”<sup>1720</sup>

**St. Cyril, the Great** says, “Himself also being bidden Comes together with His own disciples, to work miracles rather than to feast with them, and yet more to sanctify the very beginning of the birth of man: I mean so far as appertains to the flesh. For it was fitting that He, Who was renewing the very nature of man, and refashioning it all for the better, should

<sup>1717</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 5.2 (ANF 1:95).

<sup>1718</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* 2.8 (ANF 4:48) amended.

<sup>1719</sup> St. Jerome, St. Jerome, *Letters* 48.11 (NPNF II/6:71).

<sup>1720</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 9.2 (NPNF I/7:63).

not only impart His blessing to those already called into being, but also prepare before grace for those soon to be born, and make holy their entrance into being...

“It had been said to the woman by God, *In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children* (Gen. 3:16). How then was it not needful that we should thrust off this curse too, or how else could we escape a condemned marriage? This too the Saviour, being loving to man, removes. For He, the Delight and Joy of all, honoured marriage with His Presence, that He might expel the old shame of childbearing. *For if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation and old things have passed away*, as Paul says, *they are become new* (2 Cor. 5:17).”<sup>1721</sup>

“The Savior does not go to the wedding of his own accord but because he was invited by the many voices of the saints. But the wine failed the feasters, for the law perfected nothing; the Mosaic letter did not suffice for perfect gladness. Neither did the measure of implanted sobriety reach the point where it could save us.”<sup>1722</sup>

#### **847. What is the pillar of marital life?**

**Abba Theonas** says, “I will not refuse the affection of marriage; no, I will embrace it with still greater love. For I acknowledge and honor my wife assigned to me by the word of the Lord. And I do not refuse to be joined to her in an unbroken tie of love in Christ.”<sup>1723</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “‘Husbands love your wives’ (Eph. 5:25). Although formed of two bodies, you are united to live in the communion of wedlock. May this natural link, may this yoke imposed by the blessing, reunite those who are divided.”<sup>1724</sup> He also says, “Let husbands listen as well: here is a lesson for them. A viper vomits forth its venom in respect for marriage; and you, will you not put aside the barbarity and the inhumanity of your soul, out of respect for your union?”<sup>1725</sup>

#### **848. How did Christ fulfil the commandment: “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5)?**

**St. Augustine** says, “He left His Father, in that here He did not show Himself as equal with the Father; but ‘emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant’ (Phil. 2:7). He left His mother also, the synagogue of which He was born after the flesh. He clave to His Wife, that is, to His Church.”<sup>1726</sup>

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<sup>1721</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 1 On 2:1–4 (LFHCC 43:155; PG 73:276).

<sup>1722</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 2 On 2:14 (LFHCC 43:158).

<sup>1723</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 3.21.9 (NPNF II/11:506–507).

<sup>1724</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7.5 (NPNF II/8:93).

<sup>1725</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7.6 (NPNF II/8:93).

<sup>1726</sup> PL 15:1639.

**849. How should a married couple view procreation?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “In this role man becomes like God, because he co-operates, in his human way, in the birth of another man.”<sup>1727</sup>

**850. What makes a husband and wife equal?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Let us recognize, too, that both men and women practise the same sort of virtue. Surely, if there is but one God for both, then there is but one Educator for both. One Church, one virtue, one modesty, a common food, wedlock in common, breath, sight, hearing, knowledge, hope, obedience, love, all are alike [in man and woman]. They who possess life in common, grace in common, and salvation in common have also virtue in common and, therefore, education too.”<sup>1728</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Let a husband also guide his wife like a steersman, honor her as the partner of his life, share with her as a joint heir of grace.”<sup>1729</sup> He also says, “One who is without a wife is regarded as being without a home.”<sup>1730</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “To love therefore is the husband’s part, to yield pertains to the other side (the woman). If then each one contributes his own part, all stands firm. From being loved, the wife too becomes loving; and from her being submissive, the husband becomes yielding. And see how in nature also it has been so ordered, that the one should love, the other obey ... Not because your husband loves you, you become puffed up. For this cause He has made you to be loved, O wife, that you may easily bear your subjection. Fear not in being a subject; for subjection to one that loves you has no hardship.”<sup>1731</sup>

“Take then yourself the same provident care for her, as Christ takes for the Church. Yes, even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her! Yes, and to be cut into pieces ten thousand times! Yes, and to endure and undergo any suffering then, whatever, refuse it not.”<sup>1732</sup>

“Though you see her looking down upon you, disdain, and scorning you, yet by your great thoughtfulness for her, by affection and kindness, you will be able to subject her to you. There is nothing more powerful to sway than these bonds, and especially for the husband and wife! ... Yes, in spite of what you would suffer, in some issues, on her account, do not upbraid her; for Christ did not do this.”<sup>1733</sup>

<sup>1727</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 2.10 (FOTC 23:164).

<sup>1728</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 1.4.10 (FOTC 23:11–12).

<sup>1729</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters 1–91* 59 (FOTC 26:361).

<sup>1730</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Paradise* 11.50 (FOTC 42:329).

<sup>1731</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 10 (NPNF I/13:304) amended.

<sup>1732</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF I/13:144) amended.

<sup>1733</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF I/13:144) amended.

St. John Chrysostom calls both to love each other, for he says, “For there is nothing which so welds our life together as the love of man and wife.”<sup>1734</sup> “For a young woman who is discreet and ingenuous, and whose heart is set on piety, is worth more than the whole world’s money. Tell her that you love her more than your own life. For this present life is worth nothing.”<sup>1735</sup>

**Origen** says, “A husband and wife are one, as wine and water are one when mixed together. A non-believing spouse corrupts the believer. For this reason, him who is not yet married, should be attentive, either not to marry at all or marry in the Lord.”<sup>1736</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “If, therefore, there is a like rule in the said law of marriage between man and woman, to such an extent that not merely of the woman has the same apostle said, ‘The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.’ But he has not been silent respecting him, saying, ‘And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does’ — if, then, the rule is similar, there is no necessity for understanding that it is lawful for a woman to put away her husband, except for the cause of fornication, as is the case also with the husband.”<sup>1737</sup>

### **851. What is the correct understanding of the wife’s submission to her husband?**

Many people misunderstand the apostolic phrase: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). They consider it a call for women’s surrender and servility, or an assertion of men’s superiority. In Christianity, “submission” is not servility, weakness, or lack of dignity. This is what the incarnate Word of God showed when He declared His obedience and submission to the Father, even though He is of one essence with Him. He, therefore, elevated the virtue of submission to make it a sought-after matter, by which we attain the likeness of Christ, the submissive and obedient.

Luke the Evangelist says that Christ was subject to St. Mary and St. Joseph the Carpenter (Luke 2:51). Although He is their Creator and Savior, His obedience did not hinder Him from fulfilling His work on earth. He humbly and clearly said, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Submission is not surrendering at the expense of one’s will, nor is it blind obedience, but it is being open-hearted and accepting the other’s will, in a mature state of mind.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Be subject for God’s sake, because this adorns you, he says, not them. For I mean not that subjection which is due to a master, nor yet that alone which is of nature, but that for God’s sake ... For it is possible for one who loves even, to be bitter. What he says then is this. Fight not; for nothing is more bitter than this fighting, when it takes

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<sup>1734</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF I/13:144) amended.

<sup>1735</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 20 (NPNF I/13:144) amended.

<sup>1736</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 3.36.2–5.

<sup>1737</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.16.43 (NPNF I/6:19).

place on the part of the husband toward the wife ... From being loved, the wife too becomes loving; and from her being submissive, the husband becomes yielding. And see how in nature also it has been so ordered, that the one should love, the other obey ... Do not therefore, because your wife is subject to you, act the despot; nor because your husband loves you, you become puffed up. Let neither the husband's love elate the wife, nor the wife's subjection puff up the husband. For this cause has He subjected her to you, that she may be loved the more. For this cause He has made you to be loved, O wife, that you may easily bear your subjection. Fear not in being a subject; for subjection to one that loves you has no hardship. Fear not in loving, for you have her yielding. In no other way then could a bond have been."<sup>1738</sup>

He also says, "The woman by submission to the man turns him to a meek person towards her ... for all resistance is taken away by Love. If the man was a non-believer, he would then accept the faith quickly. If he is Christian, he will become better."<sup>1739</sup>

### **852. To what extent is one responsible for one's own spiritual life?**

We cannot blame others for our own weaknesses. **St. Ambrose** says, "This is a warning that no one ought to rely on himself, for she who was made for assistance needs the protection of a man (Gen. 2:18). The head of the woman is man, who, while he believed that he would have the assistance of his wife, fell because of her (1 Cor. 11:3). Wherefore, no one ought to entrust himself lightly to another unless he has first put that person's virtue to the test. Neither should he claim for himself in the role of protector one whom he believes is subservient to him. Rather, a person should share his grace with another. Especially is this true of one who is in the position of greater strength and one who plays the part of protector."<sup>1740</sup>

### **853. Should the wife obey her husband if he asks her to break one of God's commandments?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, "If the father be a gentile or a heretic, we ought no longer to obey (in what is against the Lord's command), because the command is not then, in the Lord."<sup>1741</sup>

**St Augustine** says, "a Christian husband may leave his wife without any blame, although joined in lawful union, if she refuses to live with him because of the fact that he is a Christian"<sup>1742</sup>

<sup>1738</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 10 (NPNF I/13:304) amended.

<sup>1739</sup> "The Characteristics of Loving Spouses" in *Brotherly Love* (Arabic) 1964: pp. 358, 360.

<sup>1740</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Paradise* 4.24 (FOTC 42:302).

<sup>1741</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 21 (NPNF I/13:153).

<sup>1742</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Eight Questions of Dulcinius* 1 (FOTC 16:436).

#### **854. What is the role of the wife as a helper to her husband?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “For with perfect propriety Scripture has said that woman is given by God as a help to man. It is evident, then, in my opinion, that she will charge herself with remedying, by good sense and persuasion, each of the annoyances that originate with her husband in domestic economy. And if he did not yield, then she will endeavor, as far as possible for human nature, to lead a sinless life ... considering that God is her helper and associate in such a course of conduct, her true defender and Savior both for the present and for the future; making Him the leader and guide of all her actions, reckoning sobriety and righteousness her work, and making the favor of God her end. Gracefully, therefore, the apostle says in the Epistle to Titus that: ‘the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed’ (Titus 2:3–5).”<sup>1743</sup>

#### **855. What is the secret behind a wife’s true beauty?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that a woman’s true adornment is not wrought by others (external adornment), but she is adorned by her own exertions (spiritual adornment). He says, “It is the work a woman performs with her own hands that creates true beauty. It exercises her body and at the same time adorns her, not with some ornament made by others, inelegant, undignified, and gaudy, but something labored over and woven by the modest woman herself with her own hands at the time she needed it. In fact, it is never right for women who live in obedience to God to go about attired with articles bought at the market, but only with the products of her own hands in her house.”<sup>1744</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do you wish to be beautiful? Clothe yourself with almsgiving. Put on kindness. Adorn yourself with purity. Be free from pride. All these things are more precious than gold. These things make the beautiful, splendid and the ugly beautiful. When you adorn yourself excessively, O woman, you become worse than the naked for you take off your beauty ... tell me, if someone gave you a royal garment and you put on the clothing of a slave over it, would this not be shameful? You have put on the Lord of the angels, do return to earth? Tell me, why do you adorn yourself? To please your husband? Do this at your home!”<sup>1745</sup> In choosing a wife, he advises that a man should not “look for money, for high birth, for beauty of body, or anything else but nobility of soul.”<sup>1746</sup>

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<sup>1743</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.20 (ANF 2:432).

<sup>1744</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor or Christ the Educator* 3.11.67 (FOTC 23:250–251).

<sup>1745</sup> St. John Chrysostom, extract from *Brotherly Love* (Arabic), 1964: p. 262.

<sup>1746</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, How to Choose a Wife (PP 7:113)

### 856. Is it necessary for marriage to be between two believers?

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** says, “But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God.”<sup>1747</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Since the marriage ceremony ought to be sanctified by the priestly veiling and blessing, how can that be called a marriage ceremony where there is no agreement in faith?”<sup>1748</sup>

In the fourth century, Emperor Constantine declared that the marriage of a Christian to a Jew is illegal. And in 338 A. D., a Roman Christian law declared the marriage to a non-Christian is equivalent to committing adultery.<sup>1749</sup>

**Tertullian** says, “Together they pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting (Col. 3:16), mutually sustaining. Equally (are they) both (found) in the Church of God; equally at the banquet of God; equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments ... The sick is visited, the indigent relieved, with freedom. Alms (are given) ... Such things when Christ sees and hears, He rejoices.”<sup>1750</sup>

Someone might object based on the apostle’s words: “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). **St. John Chrysostom** responds, “It is quite clear that the woman also who is joined to an idolater is one body. Well: it is one body; nevertheless she becomes not unclean, but the cleanness of the wife overcomes the uncleanness of the husband ... Because here there is hope that the lost member may be saved through the marriage ... For the question now is not about those who have never yet come together (in marriage), but about those who are already joined. He did not say, ‘if any one wish to take an unbelieving wife,’ but, ‘if any one has an unbelieving wife’ ... What then, is the Greek (non-believer) holy? Certainly not: for he said not, He is holy; but, He is sanctified in his wife. And this he said, not to signify that he is holy, but to deliver the woman as completely as possible from her fear and lead the man to desire the truth.”<sup>1751</sup>

### 857. Can one spouse deprive the other of sexual intercourse?

The apostle Paul says, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her and likewise also the wife to her husband ... Do not deprive one another except with consent for

<sup>1747</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 5 (ANF 1:95).

<sup>1748</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* 35(19) To Vigilius 23.7 (FOTC 26:XX).

<sup>1749</sup> Carl A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church: Foundations for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983): p. 187.

<sup>1750</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* 2.8 (ANF 4:48) amended.

<sup>1751</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 19.4 (NPNF I/12:107).

a time, so that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again so that Satan does not tempt because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:3–5).

**St. Augustine** says, “It is not arduous and difficult for faithful married persons to do for a few days what holy widows have undertaken from a certain period to the end of their lives and what holy virgins do through- out their entire lives. And so, in all these classes, let devotion be enkindled, let self-elation be checked.”<sup>1752</sup>

**Origen** says, “What this means is that [prayer] ‘as we ought’ is thwarted unless the mysteries of marriage, which are to be honored with silence, are performed with holiness, deliberately, and without passion.”<sup>1753</sup> He also says “God allows us to marry, for not every person is capable of keeping the exalted state fitting of absolute chastity.”<sup>1754</sup> “You are abstaining from your wife whom you are associated with. You think that you are not offending her, and you can live in greater chastity and purity. Look how your miserable wife has broken up as a result of your behavior. She is incapable of standing your chastity! You have to intimately know her, not for your sake but for hers!”<sup>1755</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “But I am not ashamed to speak thus, since not even Paul was ashamed to say, ‘Do not deprive one another’ (1 Cor. 7:5), which seems more shameful than what I have said; yet he was not ashamed. For he did not pay heed to words, but to the acts that were set right by words.”<sup>1756</sup> “Why so? Because great evils spring from this sort of continence. For adulteries and fornications and the ruin of families have often arisen from hence. For if when men have their own wives they commit fornication, much more if you deprive them of this consolation ... It is possible then to live with a wife and yet give heed unto prayer. But by continence prayer is made more perfect. For he did not say merely, ‘To pray,’ but said: ‘So that you may be able to pray,’ as though what he speaks of might cause not uncleanness but much occupation ... Do you see the strong sense of Paul how he both signifies that chastity is better, and yet puts no force on the person who cannot attain to it; fearing lest some offense arise?”<sup>1757</sup>

## 858. What is the role of Christ and the Church in the Christian family?

A couple can experience Christ’s love, their Bridegroom, through the husband’s love for his wife; and the Church’s obedience to Christ through the wife’s obedience to her husband. Their children, then, experience God’s fatherhood and the Church’s motherhood through the fatherhood of their father and the motherhood of their mother. In a true Christian family, all members taste the fellowship of the saints together in Christ. In other words, a holy marital

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<sup>1752</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* 209.3 For the Lenten Season (FOTC 38:97).

<sup>1753</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen: etc.*, trans., Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 2.2: p. 83.

<sup>1754</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 3.6, 5.4.

<sup>1755</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 3.33.23–25.

<sup>1756</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians* 5 (NPNF I/13:346).

<sup>1757</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 19.3 (NPNF I/12:106).



life offers all its members as well as others (outside of the family) an image of how the eternal relationships in heaven will be.

**St. Augustine** says, “His fundamental duty is to look out for his own home, for both by natural and human law he has easier and readier access to their requirements. St. Paul says: ‘But if any does not take care of his own, and especially of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever’ (1 Tim. 5:8). From this care arises that peace of the home ...”<sup>1758</sup>

### 859. What are the main rules that must govern a family?

**First: Love** is the primary rule. **St. Basil the Great** says, “With animals, invincible affection unites parents with children. It is the Creator, God Himself, who substitutes the strength of feeling for reason in them. From whence it comes that a lamb as it bounds from the fold, in the midst of a thousand sheep recognizes the color and the voice of its mother, runs to her, and seeks its own sources of milk. If its mother's udders are dry, it is content, and, without stopping, passes by more abundant ones. And how does the mother recognize it among the many lambs? All have the same voice, the same color, the same smell, as far at least as regards our sense of smell. Yet there is in these animals a more subtle sense than our perception which makes them recognize their own.”<sup>1759</sup>

He again says, “‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’ ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’ (Ex. 20:12). Does not nature say the same? Paul teaches us nothing new; he only tightens the links of nature. If the lioness loves her cubs, if the she-wolf fights to defend her little ones, what shall man say who is unfaithful to the precept and violates nature herself; or the son who insults the old age of his father; or the father whose second marriage has made him forget his first children?”<sup>1760</sup>

**Second: Chastity and Purity.** **St. Jerome** says, “If Christ loves the Church — holy, chaste, and spotless — let husbands also love their wives in chastity. And let everyone know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, as the Gentiles who know not God (1 Thess. 4:7).”<sup>1761</sup>

**St. Clement of Rome** says, “Let us direct our wives to that which is good. Let them exhibit the lovely habit of purity [in all their conduct]; let them show forth the sincere disposition of meekness.”<sup>1762</sup>

<sup>1758</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God, Books XVII–XXII* 19.14 (FOTC 24:222).

<sup>1759</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9.4 (NPNF II/8:104).

<sup>1760</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 9.4 (NPNF II/8:104).

<sup>1761</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.16 (NPNF II/6:360).

<sup>1762</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 21 (ANF 1:11).

### **860. Is a life of celibacy holy in the eyes of God?**

Christ, the incarnate Word of God, offered Himself as a unique example. **St. Jerome** says, “Christ Himself, though in the flesh was celibate, had in the spirit one wife, the Church.”

Church history offers us a beautiful portrait of people who practiced chastity in their marital lives, by being moderate in their physical intercourse. Some of them even completely abstained from intercourse with consent from both parties. Entire families were inflamed with divine love, that they chose to live a life of virginity and monasticism with true joy, happiness, and harmony, as mentioned by our fathers and teachers, as Tertullian said.<sup>1763</sup>

According to **St Jacob of Sarug**, celibacy was the state of Adam and Eve before sin. He says:

“Celibacy is elevated above all heights, and all the heights of the world are set under her feet.

It is the first state in which Adam was raised. He boasted about it before he ate from the tree.

In this exalted, glorious state, full of beauty, Eve was also created before the serpent spoke to her.

Celibacy surpassed all heights, soared in the air, and crossed the place with the magnificent chariot of fire...

The wings of celibacy are great and fast, soaring high towards the dwelling of the heavenlies.

Earthy concerns and troubles have been taken away from her, for she does not desire to dwell or stay in the world.

She is not concerned with having boys or girls, for she loves the sweet name and boasts in it.

This world is not the place of celibacy, and she does not want to raise heirs to inherit it.

Her (celibacy) eyes are fixed on the high place, on the house of angels who are exalted above marriage...

This exalted state is what Adam had before he sinned; this celibacy which is mingled with the angels.”<sup>1764</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** sees the ultimate beauty of celibacy in St. Mary. He says, “The ultimate beauty of celibacy is Mary, who became a mother to the Creator of infants in the

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<sup>1763</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* Book 1 (ANF 4).

<sup>1764</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 205 on celibacy, adultery and the marriage of righteousness*.

wombs. He dwelt in the Virgin and gave (her) the crown of virginity, to show that her path is the most exalted among all paths. There is no other beauty that can attain the supremacy of celibacy, and no other dwelling would have been worthy of Him (Christ) other than hers.”<sup>1765</sup>

**Athenagoras of Athens** says, “Nay, you would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in hope of living in closer communion with God.”<sup>1766</sup>

**St. Augustine** also asked spiritual Christians, if possible, to control themselves with regards to sexual intercourse and to practice it only up to the extent needed for procreation, without impacting their marital love towards each other.<sup>1767</sup> Here, we must note that abstaining from sexual intercourse is not an act of holiness in and of itself, but is a type of fasting, just like someone who abstains from certain foods or drinks.

**St. Ignatius the Theophoros** explains that celibacy should not arise from a contempt for marriage, for the relationship between husbands and wives is like Christ’s relationship with the Church.<sup>1768</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Celibacy and marriage have their distinctive services of the Lord, their different ministries.”<sup>1769</sup> Some people have devoted their lives to worship with their free will, for their love of God and their fervent desire to grow in their unity with Him.

**Origen** views celibacy as a wreath of flowers that adorns the Virgin Church, and those who are celibate are in a rank that directly follows the rank of the martyrs.<sup>1770</sup> He says, “Celibacy saves from earthy troubles and is liberated by its chastity as she awaits the blessed Bridegroom.”<sup>1771</sup>

### 861. Why did the Law of Moses allow divorce?

**St. Augustine** says, “For He who gave the commandment that a writing of divorcement should be given, did not give the commandment that a wife should be put away; but whosoever shall put away, says He, let him give her a writing of divorcement, in order that the thought of such a writing might moderate the rash anger of him who was getting rid of his wife. And, therefore, He who sought to interpose a delay in putting away, indicated as far as He could to hard-hearted men that He did not wish separation. And accordingly the Lord Himself in another passage, when a question was asked Him as to this matter, gave this reply:

<sup>1765</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 205 on celibacy, adultery and the marriage of righteousness*.

<sup>1766</sup> St. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 33 (ANF 2:146).

<sup>1767</sup> See St. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 1.22 (NPNF I/6:253).

<sup>1768</sup> Cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 5 (ANF 1:95).

<sup>1769</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis, Books 1–3* 3.12.79.5 (FOTC 85:305).

<sup>1770</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6–10 9.1.7 (FOTC 104:194).

<sup>1771</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 3.39.51–52.

‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives’ (Matt. 19:8). For however hard-hearted a man may be who wishes to put away his wife, when he reflects that, on a writing of divorcement being given her, she could then without risk marry another, he would be easily appeased. Our Lord, therefore, in order to confirm that principle, that a wife should not lightly be put away, made the single exception of fornication; but enjoins that all other annoyances, if any such should happen to spring up, be borne with fortitude for the sake of marital faithfulness and for the sake of chastity; and he also calls that man an adulterer who should marry her that has been divorced by her husband.”<sup>1772</sup>

### **862. Is it lawful for widows or widowers, or divorced men or women to remarry?**

For the early Church Fathers, it was undesirable for the divorcees to remarry, even if it was due to adultery, while the divorced partner is still alive. They also did not encourage widows or widowers to remarry, even though the Church never condemned this second marriage. It was not prohibited but was never encouraged. A widow or widower ought to give her life to God. In the year 150 A. D., the number of consecrated widows serving in Rome was 150.<sup>1773</sup>

**Shepherd of Hermas** says, “If a wife or it may be, a husband fell asleep, and one of them marries (another), does the one who marries sin? He sins not, but if he remains single, he invests himself with more exceeding honor and with great glory before the Lord; yet even if he should marry, he sins not.”<sup>1774</sup>

**St Jerome** says, “The Samaritan woman in the Gospel, when she declares that her present husband is her sixth, is rebuked by the Lord on the ground that he is not her husband. For my own part, I now once more freely proclaim that digamy (second marriage) is not condemned in the Church — no, nor yet trigamy (third marriage) — and that a woman may marry a fifth husband, or a sixth, or a greater number still as long as it is a lawful marriage; but while such marriages are not condemned, neither are they commended ... ‘All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful’ (1 Cor. 6:12).”<sup>1775</sup>

### **863. Is it lawful for a man or woman to continue to live with a spouse who has committed adultery and refused repentance?**

**Shepherd of Hermas** says, “If a man has a wife who believes in the Lord, and if he finds her in adultery, does the man sin if he continues to live with her? If the husband knows that his wife has gone astray, and if the woman does not repent, but persists in her fornication,

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<sup>1772</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.14.39 (NPNF I/6:17).

<sup>1773</sup> Carl A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church: Foundations for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983): p. 83.

<sup>1774</sup> *Shepherd of Hermas* Book 2, Commandment 4.4 (ANF 2:22).

<sup>1775</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 48.18 (NPNF II/6:77).

and yet the husband continues to live with her, he also is guilty of her crime, and an accomplice in her adultery.”<sup>1776</sup>

#### 864. What is St. John Chrysostom’s advice to parents about raising their children?

**St. John Chrysostom** views the role of the parents in raising their children as sacred, and they practice it to offer God the sacrifices of thanksgiving that are pleasing to Him. He affirms that he is not asking every child to assume the monastic life or to be prepared for it, but he exhorts parents to “Raise up an athlete for Christ and teach him though he is living in the world to be reverent from his earliest youth.”<sup>1777</sup> Since he calls it a holy matter (raising of children), it is fitting for both parents to approach their children, not just from their birth but even when they are in their mother’s womb, as divine sanctities in a spirit of godliness, supported by the Holy Spirit that they may offer to God the best of them. Children are the gift of God, and fathers and mothers are entrusted with this precious gift.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Having children is a matter of nature; but raising them and educating them in the virtues is a matter of mind and will.”<sup>1778</sup> “By the duty of raising them I mean not only not allowing them to die of hunger, as people often limit their obligation toward their children to doing. For this, is needed neither books nor rubrics, for nature speaks of it quite loudly. I am speaking of the concern for educating children’s hearts in virtues and piety—a sacred duty which cannot be transgressed without thereby becoming guilty of the children’s murder, in a certain sense.”<sup>1779</sup>

“This obligation belongs to fathers as well as mothers. There are fathers who spare nothing in order to secure for their children teachers of pleasure and to pander to their cravings as wealthy heirs. But so that the children would be Christians, so that they would exercise themselves in piety, is of little need to them. O criminal blindness! It is this very crude inattention that is responsible for all the disorder that causes our society to groan. Let us suppose that you have acquired large property for them. However, if they do not know how to conduct themselves sensibly this property will not last long with them. It will be squandered; it will perish with its owners, and will be their most grievous inheritance.”<sup>1780</sup>

“Your children will always be sufficiently wealthy if they receive from you a good upbringing that is able to order their moral life and behavior. Thus, strive not to make them

<sup>1776</sup> *Shepherd of Hermas* Book 2, Commandment 4.1 (ANF 2:21).

<sup>1777</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 19.

<sup>1778</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 1.

<sup>1779</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 2.

<sup>1780</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 3.

rich, but rather to make them pious masters of their passions, rich in virtues. Teach them not to think up illusory needs, reckoning their worth according to worldly standards. Attentively watch their deeds, their acquaintances and their attachments—and do not expect any mercy from God if you do not fulfill this duty.”<sup>1781</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** focused on the following, with regards to the raising of children:

**First: Our possessions should not distract us from bringing up our children.** “First of all educate your son’s soul, and he will acquire possessions later. If his soul is bad he will not receive the slightest benefit from money. And vice versa, if he has been given the proper upbringing, then poverty will not harm him in the least. Do you want to leave him wealthy? Teach him to be good. For children who have not received the proper upbringing poverty is better than wealth.”<sup>1782</sup>

**Second: Do not rebuke them as outcasts but as children.** “Let us not suffer them to do anything which is agreeable but injurious; nor let us indulge them, as though they were but little children.”<sup>1783</sup> “Do not provoke your children to wrath, as many do by disinheriting them, and disowning them, and treating them overbearingly, not as free, but as slaves.”<sup>1784</sup>

**Third: Teach them the love of true wisdom.** “If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide. If a child learns a trade, or is highly educated for a lucrative profession all this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions or surround himself with wealth, but who requires nothing.”<sup>1785</sup>

**Fourth: Give them the great things, not the little things.** “Do not ask how he can enjoy a long life here, but how he can enjoy an infinite and eternal life in the age to come. Give him the great things, not the little things. Do not strive to make him a clever orator, but teach him to love true wisdom . . . I do not mean that worldly learning is worthless and to be ignored, but it should not be an exclusive preoccupation.”<sup>1786</sup>

**Fifth: Leave them in God’s hands!** “Why do you refuse to imitate the holy men and women of old? Tell me! Especially you mothers; think of Hannah’s example; look at what she did. She brought Samuel, her only son, to the temple, when he was only an infant! (1

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<sup>1781</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 4.

<sup>1782</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 37.

<sup>1783</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy* 9 (NPNF I/13:436) amended.

<sup>1784</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 21 (NPNF I/13:153).

<sup>1785</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 16.

<sup>1786</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 16.

Sam. 1:28) ... Hannah commended Samuel into the hands of God. She had only one object: how from the very beginning she could dedicate her hearts delight to God. Be ashamed, you men, at the wisdom of this woman.”<sup>1787</sup>

**Sixth: Follow the footsteps of those parents who cared for their children.** “Imitate Job, who continually looked after his children and offered sacrifices for mercy towards any secret misdeeds they might have committed (Job 1:5). Imitate Abraham, who concerned himself less with the acquisition of riches than with the keeping of God’s law by every member of his house, and about whom the Lord witnessed: For I know that he will order his sons, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do justice and judgment (Gen. 18:19).”<sup>1788</sup>

**Seventh: Early attention to the upbringing of children.** St. John Chrysostom urged the people of God to start as early as possible in upbringing their children. The child at the beginning of his life is more receptive to instruction.<sup>1789</sup> If one delays in paying attention to their child, it becomes more difficult to change the child’s personality or to instruct him to what is better.<sup>1790</sup> “If the Apostle commands us to take more care for others than for ourselves, and if we are guilty when we neglect their benefit, then is it not a much greater guilt when this concerns those who are so near to us? Was it not I, the Lord will say to us, Who gave place to these children in your family? Was it not I Who entrusted them to your care, making you masters, guardians and judges over them? I gave you complete authority over them; I placed all care for their upbringing in your hands. You will tell me that they did not want to bend their necks to the yoke, that they threw it off. But this should have been averted from the very beginning; you should have mastered their first impressions placed the reins on them before they had the power to break away from them. You should have bent their young souls under the yoke of duty, accustomed them to it, educated them in accordance with it, bound the wound when it first opened. You should have uprooted the tares when they first began to sprout around the young plant, and not have waited until they put down deep roots, when the passions have become uncontrollable and untamable through gradual strengthening in their formation.”<sup>1791</sup>

<sup>1787</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 16.

<sup>1788</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 11.

<sup>1789</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 20.

<sup>1790</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 21.

<sup>1791</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 5.

“Children who are submissive and faithful to God in their obedience to His law will have found an abundant source of happiness, even in this temporal life. A poor man with Christian morals inspires respect and love from others. Meanwhile, with an evil and depraved heart, all your riches will not save you from the displeasure and aversion of everyone around you.”<sup>1792</sup>

“The youth to whom you give a good upbringing will not only enjoy general respect, he will also become dearer to you yourselves! Your attachment to him will not be a mere natural attraction—it will be the fruit of his virtue. For this, during your old age, you will in turn receive from him the services of his filial love. He will be your support. For just as those who do not revere the Lord also have contempt for their own parents, those who revere God, the Father of all men, will have every respect for those who gave them life.”<sup>1793</sup>

### **865. What are the most important practical pieces of advice that St. John Chrysostom gives to parents?**

**First: Choose the child’s name thoughtfully.** St. John Chrysostom believes that the first lesson to be offered by the parents to their children is picking their name. He addressed this issue in some length, requesting that the child should not be called after a family member, but after a martyr, saint, or bishop.<sup>1794</sup> He wanted parents to realize that the child belongs to the heavenly family, much more than to them or their families. A child should take pride in his name which was given to him, so that he may imitate the martyrs, apostles and bishops, devoting all his heart to God. Based on this advice, some people believe that the best gift to be offered to a child, after his birth or baptism, is an icon of the saint after whom he was named.

**Second: Teach children to be satisfied and content.** The wise says: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred” (Prov. 15:16–17).

**Third: Guide them towards scripture.** Parents are the first to reap the very first fruits of this kind of guidance, for Scripture trains the child to obey his parents and so, the parents will find in their children the spirit of meekness and obedience towards them.

“Having made the necessary exhortation to children, the Apostle addresses himself also to the fathers, saying: You fathers ... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in

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<sup>1792</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 7.

<sup>1793</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 8.

<sup>1794</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 47.



the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Do not think that it is not necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be, Honor thy father and mother (Ex. 20:12), and immediately you will begin to reap your reward. Do not say, Bible is for monks; am I turning my child into a monk? No! It is not necessary for him to be a monk. Make him into a Christian!”<sup>1795</sup>

**Fourth: Entrust them into God’s hand.** “Entrust him to the One who is able to make him great. And who is that? God. Hannah commended Samuel into the hands of God. The high priest Eli had no real ability to form him, since he even failed to form his own children. It was the mothers faith and zeal that made everything possible.”<sup>1796</sup>

**Fifth: Realize that God personally cares about children’s upbringing.** These souls are valuable in His eyes, for He is the one who placed the virtue of fatherhood and motherhood in parents, and through this drive (parenthood), both parents feel committed to the upbringing of their children.

“God Himself takes great care over the upbringing of children. That is why He placed such a natural attraction in parents toward their children—in order to put parents in unescapable necessity of caring for their children. Subsequently, He created laws concerning their care, and, establishing the feasts, commanded us to explain their meaning. He summed up the meaning of the Passover in this instruction: ‘And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, “This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt”’ (Ex. 13:8). He does the same in the Law. For, telling of the first-born, He adds again: ‘So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What is this?” that you shall say to him, “By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem”’ (Ex. 13:14–15). Through all of this He commands him to lead the children to the knowledge of God. Even to the children themselves He commands much with respect to the parents, rewarding the obedient and punishing the disobedient, thereby making them even more dear to their parents.”<sup>1797</sup>

**Sixth: Value children and their abilities.** St. John Chrysostom looks at children with awe and pride, seeing in children philosophers in formation, athletes in training, and citizens

<sup>1795</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 14.

<sup>1796</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 16.

<sup>1797</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 26.

shaped and prepared to dwell in heaven.<sup>1798</sup> The saint views children as a city with walls and many gates. This city is ruled by good rulers or judges as well as by evildoers. Thus, the child needs laws to end wrong behaviors, since leniency will lead to the destruction of that city.<sup>1799</sup> The city gates, which need guarding, are the five senses: the tongue (taste and speech), sight, smell, touch, and hearing.<sup>1800</sup>

**Seventh: Show compassion and restraint with physical punishments. St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “If you truly love your child and want to reveal to him the sweetness of the perfect eternal love, you ought to be more compassionate, for through your righteous acts you entrust your children to God.”

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that a wise father (or mother) ought to refrain from continuously using physical punishments (which he refers to as “the rod”). If the “rod” is constantly used, the child will learn to despise it, will not care about the punishment, and will therefore not learn to love virtue.<sup>1801</sup> **St. Augustine** says, “Chastisement should be preceded with mercy, not anger.”

**Eighth: Let the education and training of children be according to their individual abilities.**<sup>1802</sup>

**Ninth: Educate children by being a role model.**

**Tenth: Surround children with people who will have a positive impact on them.**

**Eleventh: Sanctify children’s senses.** The **Didache** says, “The glory of fathers is the holiness of their children.”

**Twelfth: Parents should lead their children towards purity of heart.**<sup>1803</sup>

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<sup>1798</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): chs. 38–39.

<sup>1799</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): chs. 23–26.

<sup>1800</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): chs. 27–37.

<sup>1801</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 30.

<sup>1802</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 52.

<sup>1803</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): chs. 66–74.

**Thirteenth: Do not allow children to go to the theatre,<sup>1804</sup> and encourage them to marry young.**

**Fourteenth: Do not introduce false ideas into children’s minds.**

**Fifteenth: Care about the salvation of your children.** “We demand an account from them of what they learned in their secular institutes—why do we not demand an account from them of what they heard in the Lord’s house?”<sup>1805</sup>

**Sixteenth: Encourage children to be consecrated.** “The holy children who consecrate their lives and hearts (to God), become a help for their fathers’ sake. Because of David the Prophet, God blessed his son, Solomon, and some of his grandchildren such as Hezekiah the King. Samuel the Prophet was also the fruit of the prayers of his mother, and he himself was a blessing to his mother.”

**Seventeenth: Teach your children before time teaches them (at much greater cost!).** “If good fathers would strive to give their children a good upbringing, then we would need neither laws, judges, courts, nor punishments. Executioners exist because we have no morality.”<sup>1806</sup>

**Eighteenth: Prepare them for a holy marriage.** “Let us take wives for them early, so that they would unite themselves to their brides with pure and incorrupt bodies.”<sup>1807</sup>

### 866. What is the best advice we can offer to our children?

**St. Jerome** says, “Be subject to your parents, imitating the example of your spouse.”<sup>1808</sup> **Origen** says, “Children, we should learn to be subject to our parents ... Jesus understood that Joseph was greater than he in age, and therefore he gave him the honor due a parent. He gave an example to every son. Sons should be subject to their fathers; and, if they have no fathers, they should be subject to those who serve as fathers ... If Jesus, the Son of God, is subject to Joseph and Mary, shall I not be subject to the bishop? God appointed him a father to me. Shall I not be subject to the presbyter whom the Lord’s choice set over me?”<sup>1809</sup>

In a letter by **St. Jerome** to a mother and her daughter who had a dispute, he said, “The Lord Jesus was subject to His parents. He revered that mother of whom He was Himself

<sup>1804</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children,” trans. Max L. W. Laistner, in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1951): ch. 77.

<sup>1805</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 13.

<sup>1806</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 12.

<sup>1807</sup> Orthodox Christian Information Centre. *Admonitions for Parents: Lessons by Our Holy Father John Chrysostomos on Raising Children*, 36.

<sup>1808</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 22.17 To Eustochium (NPNF II/6:28) amended.

<sup>1809</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 20.5 (FOTC 94:86).

the parent; He respected the foster-father whom He had Himself fostered ... Well, I shall say no more to the mother, for perhaps age, weakness, and loneliness make sufficient excuses for her; but to you the daughter I say: is a mother's house too small for you whose womb was not too small?"<sup>1810</sup>

He also wrote to **Laeta**, guiding her on how to bring up her daughter: "You must yourself be her teacher, a model on which she may form her childish conduct. Never either in you nor in her father let her see what she cannot imitate without sin ... your example will teach her more than your precepts."<sup>1811</sup>

He again says, "Scripture, you will argue, bids us obey our parents (Eph. 6:1). Yes, but whoso loves them more than Christ loses his own soul (Matt. 10:37)."<sup>1812</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, "But you will say, I am afraid lest I offend those above me. By all means be afraid of offending them, and so you will not offend God. For you who are afraid lest you offend those above you, see whether there be not One above him whom you are afraid of offending ... Run now over the list of those who are above you. First are your father and mother, if they are educating you properly; if they are bringing you up for Christ; they are to be heard in all things, they must be obeyed in every command; let them enjoin nothing against one above themselves, and so let them be obeyed."<sup>1813</sup>

He also says, "For indeed the father ought not to be angry, when God is preferred before him. But when a father commands that which is not contrary to God; he must be heard as God is: because God has enjoined us to obey one's father."<sup>1814</sup>

**Note:**

*If this is the Church's view of marriage, what is her view of monasticism? We will address this after we finish talking about the sacraments of the Church.*

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<sup>1810</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 117.2 To a Mother and Daughter Living in Gaul (NPNF II/6:216).

<sup>1811</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 107:9 To Laeta (NPNF II/6:193) amended.

<sup>1812</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 14.3 To Heliodorus the Monk (NPNF II/6:14).

<sup>1813</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 12.8 (NPNF I/6:300) amended.

<sup>1814</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 71.2 (NPNF I/8:315) amended.

## 23

### Unction of the Sick

#### 867. Why did James the Apostle talk about the unction of the sick?

The Church, as a bride, partakes in the pain of those who are sick. So, the priests, the congregation, and the family of the sick person, pray for him so that the person may receive healing of the soul and the body. “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14–15). In the unction of the sick, Christ kneels down to pour out His divine love upon the suffering sick person.

The Church prays through the Spirit of her Bridegroom to heal her children, but according to His will and not according to our own personal human will. It could be for the benefit of the sick person, even if his sins were forgiven, to remain in his illness for the sake of his edification, chastisement, or for any other reason according to God’s wisdom. This is what happened with St. Paul in his illness: “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Thus, the Church prays, saying, “You raised up the son of the widow, and the daughter of the ruler from death; and commanded them to rise up; and raised up Lazarus after he had been dead four days from Hades by the authority of Your Godhead; **raise up this Your servant from the death of sin**, and if You bid him to rise again, give unto him help and assistance that he may please You in his living all the days of his life. And **if you bid his soul be taken**, grant that by the hands of angels of light he may have power that will save him from the demons of darkness. Translate him into the paradise of joy, that he may be with all the saints; through Your blood which was shed for our salvation, and with which You purchased us for You are the hope of Your servants.”<sup>1815</sup>

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<sup>1815</sup> *First Service, Coptic Rite of the Unction of the Sick.*

**868. How did the Church Fathers comment on the words of James the Apostle: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:14–16)?**

**Origen** believes that it is fitting for the believer to enjoy, along with his brethren, the forgiveness of sins and a holy life in Christ. In his homilies on Leviticus (Ch. 1–16), he lists some of the events in which the believer receives this gift:

First: When we are baptized, we receive the forgiveness of our sins (Mark 1:4).

Second: If God allows us to go through the sufferings of martyrdom, we receive forgiveness.

Third: When we give to the poor, we receive forgiveness of our sins, as the Lord says: “But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you” (Luke 11:41).

Fourth: We receive forgiveness when we forgive our brethren, for the Lord the Savior Himself says: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15).

Fifth: He offers us forgiveness by saying, “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

Sixth: Sins are forgiven when there is an overflow of love, according to the Lord’s words: “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 5:47). Also, the apostle says, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Pet. 4:8).

Seventh: Forgiveness of sins through remorse, albeit with difficulty and effort, where the sinner drenches his couch with tears (Ps. 6:7).

Eighth: James the Apostle gives an opportunity for the sick person to call for the priests of the Church, that they may lay their hands on him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick and his sins will be forgiven (James 5:14–15).

**Origen** therefore believes that a wise believer, even if he prays for the healing of his body, submitting his life into the hands of his Savior to do what is good for him, he remains concerned with his eternal life and looks at his sickness as an opportunity for him to offer a true repentance and to confess, asking God for the forgiveness of his sins.

In his discourse on Christian Priesthood, St. John Chrysostom distinguishes between parents' love for their children in the flesh, and the priests' love for their children in the spirit. Parents are more concerned that their children would not offend any authoritative figure which is not really beneficial for them; but what concerns the priest is the reconciliation between the sick person and God Himself, rather than rulers and kings.

**Caesarius of Arles** believes that James the Apostle encourages believers to turn to the Church when they suffer from any illness, and not to sorcerers or fortune-tellers, as the Church prays for the healing of their bodies and the salvation of their soul.

**869. What do we receive in the joyful sacraments of the Church?**

The sacraments of the Church reveal God's ultimate love for us in the following:

- a. They make the believer a special child of God (in the **sacrament of baptism**).
- b. The believer becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit who guides his life and grants him victory (in the **sacrament of chrismation**).
- c. The believer is given a heavenly table for his nourishment (in the **sacrament of the eucharist**).
- d. The believer is cleansed from all defilement that he may grow in the Spirit and become an icon of Christ (in the **sacrament of repentance and confession**).
- e. The believer partakes of Christ's priesthood (in the **sacrament of priesthood**).
- f. The believer's home is transformed into an embassy of heaven (in the **sacrament of marriage**).
- g. Lastly, when the believer suffers, he finds Christ kneeling down with love to embrace him. He also finds all the other members suffering with him and praying for him (in the **sacrament of the unction of the sick**).

This is the mystery of divine love, the mystery of the heavenly wedding.





## 24

**The Coptic Church and the Monastic Movement****870. Is asceticism, as it is practiced in the Coptic Church, biblical?**

The Coptic Church is known for its ascetic inclinations, not only due to the monastic movement that started in it, but asceticism is also considered one of the essential characteristics manifested in her life as a whole and her worship. These inclinations exist not because asceticism is a goal in and of itself, nor on the basis that the flesh is evil in nature; but rather on a biblical and heavenly understanding: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). “Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor ... and follow Me” (Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22). “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27).

This biblical understanding was found to be sweet by the Copts, whose hearts were inflamed with eternal love.

**871. What is the goal of ascetic life according to the Copts?**

While most ancient civilizations were attached to the temporal life and so they pursued worldly pleasures, the Egyptian mind was consumed with the world to come. Ancient Egyptians believed in the so-called “resurrection,” which is the belief in the resurrection of the dead to eternal life, if certain rituals were performed. This is why bodies were mummified in sealed tombs, such that no one would be able to visit the tomb or live in it except for the soul. The tombs were supplied with one’s daily needs (clothes, food, drink, vessels, knives, chairs, weapons, chariots, jewelry, toys for children ... etc.).

When the Copts accepted Christianity, their longing for the world to come grew, and their hearts were inflamed with longing for it, but now on a biblical basis. Instead of being concerned with the souls’ return to their bodies in the tombs, they desired for their souls, thoughts, and hearts to be lifted up to enjoy the heavenly life even when their bodies were still treading on the earth. In other words, their longing for the world to come drove them to lead an ascetic life on a biblical basis.

**872. What is the motive of asceticism for the Copts?**

Asceticism in the Coptic Church is not a goal in its own, but it is one’s practical response to the divine love. If our Lord offered His life for us, it is fitting for us to desire to offer our lives as a sacrifice of love to God. We despise worldly pleasures as a sign of our inner longing to enjoy the eternal joy of the new life in Christ Jesus. Believers, especially monks, have a

single goal, that is to enjoy the inner Kingdom of God as a preliminary step to encountering God face to face in eternity.

### **873. What is the relationship between asceticism and the ecclesiastical life?**

I have spoken often of asceticism in the Coptic Church, its theological understanding, its life of worship, and its behavioral implications. It will be sufficient, then, to add the following few points:

1. The influence of the ascetic life on the Coptic worship is clear. There are many hymns that bring joy to the soul; the Church fasts more than half of the year; her liturgies are centered around waiting for the coming of Christ with an eschatological mindset.

2. The Coptic Church is known for her numerous martyrs, to the extent that some scholars regard the fact that the Coptic Church still exists till our present day as a divine miracle. Entire cities were martyred, and the martyrs faced their persecutors with joy, waiting for their crown of martyrdom.

3. Ascetic and spiritual thought influenced Alexandrian theology, which bears a salvific mindset, so that her theology was centered around salvation (Soteriology). Theology is not about some philosophical ideas for research, as much as it is tasting God's salvific work in the believer's life.

4. The ascetic life does not mean being in enmity with the flesh, but rather viewing the flesh as being sacred and a helper for the soul.

5. The ascetic life paved the road to start the ascetic movements in all their forms (solitude, coenobitism, and semi-eremitism). These movements aimed for a life of unity with God, in one form or another. This is why the believers understood solitude not as isolation from people, but as solitude with God. Even if a monk lives in the wilderness alone, his heart is never isolated from the rest of humanity, but he rather bears them with love in his heart, as he prays for them and suffers with their sufferings, longing for the salvation of everyone.

6. Many Egyptian fathers resisted exaggeration in asceticism, especially if done without discernment or wisdom.

### **874. How did the monastic movement start in Egypt?**

From Egypt, all other monastic orders spread out to the whole world. In the fourth century, this movement served to restore the heart of the Church to the inner life after the state had accepted Christianity, and the doors of the emperor were opened to bishops and priests. These monastic orders established by the Copts did not emerge through a pre-organized plan by the Church, but through the powerful love that inflamed the hearts of many of the early Christians.

In the apostolic age, many practiced a kind of monasticism, seeking to enjoy the perfection of the Gospel. The eschatological direction of the Church made the believers long for the coming of their Bridegroom, so some preferred to live a life of virginity, consecrating all their time for worship to prepare themselves for the heavenly wedding. In the second century, the Christian virgins in Smyrna and Corinth used to walk in liturgical processions behind the priests and in front of the widows. Moreover, many groups of virgins were found living in Alexandria and in many cities around the world. Articles about virginity represented an essential aspect of the writings of the Church Fathers in the first three centuries.

Virgins used to live together, while men preferred to leave the cities to live in simple huts in villages and were often called “consecrated.” Some people felt a thirst for the angelic life so they fled to the wilderness. We know of only a few of these, such St. Paul the Hermit who lived in the wilderness for almost ninety years (between 250–340 A. D.).

St. Anthony established the monastic movement and is considered the father of all monks in the entire world, even though many preceded him. This is because of his strong relationship with St. Athanasius, who wrote about him to the Roman world. It is also because he opened his cave after twenty years of solitude to disciple monastic leaders, converse with philosophers in the simplicity of his faith, and receive rulers. He had an active role in the Church and went to Alexandria to support the martyrs and stand against the Arians.

St. Pachomius, founder of cenobitic monasticism, felt that the order of solitude may not work for all those who want to become monks, so he started a monastic community within the walls of monasteries, and the hermits praised him for doing so.

St. Macarius the Great, St. Ammonas and others started the order of communities (or the semi-eremitical order). Many came from around the world to practice the ascetic life in Egypt, and to write about it and take these orders back to their countries. It is important to note that the leaders of the three orders were not biased for their monastic styles, but instead they used to visit each other and praise each other’s orders.

The monastic movement of women started side by side with that of men, and monks helped build convents. Female leaders arose and had great influence, like Amma Sarah, Amma Theodora, and Amma Synclitica. Moreover, some Egyptian and foreign women were disguised in the apparel of men and led ascetic lives in monasteries of men, and their asceticism, struggles, and spirituality exceeded many.

### **875. Who were the most important monastic leaders?**

**St. Paul of Thebes (the first hermit):** St. Jerome documented his biography in 374 or 375 A. D. St. Paul grew up in northern upper Egypt and was well educated in Greek and Egyptian sciences. When he was sixteen years old, he received a big inheritance from his parents. During the persecution of Decius (around 250 A. D.), he went into the wilderness after his brother, Peter, took his share of the inheritance by force. When he was 113 years

old, after leading an angelic life on earth, St. Anthony the Great met him. St. Paul addressed him by name, and they talked about the wonders of God and praised Him. At sunset, a raven flew down from a palm tree and brought a full loaf of bread to them, even though it was the raven's habit to bring only half a loaf to St. Paul. On the third day, St. Paul asked St. Anthony to bring him St. Athanasius' vestment, which he then gave to St. Anthony to bury him in it. When St. Anthony returned, he found that St. Paul had departed while bowing down in prayer. Then, two lions came and dug in the sand to bury St. Paul.

**St. Anthony the Great:** He was born around 251 A. D. in the city of Coma, Egypt (Qiman El-Arous). When he was eighteen years old, he heard the Gospel reading: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21), and so he sold his possessions, placed his sister in a house of virgins, and dwelt in a small hut to learn from a saintly hermit there. After some time, he went into the western desert to struggle on his own in a tomb, that was carved in the mountain. At the age of thirty-five, he settled at the eastern bank of the Nile at Pispir (Dayr al-Maymūn), where he lived as a hermit, so many came to him and became his disciples. He went into the inner desert at Mount Colzim to live in peace and silence. Nonetheless, his love compelled him to visit Alexandria to support the martyrs in 316 A. D., and to support St. Athanasius against Arianism in 352 A. D. Many people came to be his disciples, and he departed in 352 A. D.

**St. Pachomius (Father of the Koinonia):** He was born in upper Egypt around the year 290 A. D. He became Christian in the city of Esna in Upper Egypt because of their generosity and their love for their enemies. He left the army and was baptized around the year 290 A. D. He became the disciple of St. Palamon the hermit, till an angel appeared to him and guided him to establish the system of the monastic communal life (coenobitic monasticism). He was a successful leader who loved the salvation of souls, so he established many monasteries in Upper Egypt following strict rules. He also established a convent for nuns under the leadership of his sister. His monastic rules were translated to Greek and Latin. St. Basil the Great used them, and they were used in the Gaul in the fifth century. They were also adopted by Benedict, the father of western monasticism, and by Caesarius of Arles.

**St. Ammonas:** He was contemporary of St. Anthony. He was born in 275 A. D., and when he was twenty-two years old, his uncle forced him to get married, so he lived with his wife as ascetics in Nitria. After eighteen years, his wife asked him to live in solitude away from her, so he went out to Mount Nitria and many gathered around him. So, he established the semi-eremitic monasticism, in which the monks are not required to have daily fellowship in worship or in meals, except for Saturdays and Sundays only. Usually, the monks of this order lived in cells or caves that were close to each other, around the church.

**St. Macarius the Great:** (around 300–390 A. D.) He is the founder of the semi-eremitic order of monasticism in the wilderness of Scetis. He visited St. Anthony at least twice. His father forced him to get married, but then God allowed his virgin wife to depart. He led an

ascetic life in a small hut in a village for about ten years under the guidance of an ascetic. He longed for solitude, and so he moved to Scetis and a cherub accompanied him on the way. He loved worship and asceticism, so many came from the East and the West to the wilderness to become his disciples.

**St. Shenoute the Archimandrite:** He was the abbot of the White Monastery in Athribis (or Atripe), in the wilderness of Thebes for over fifty-six years (fourth or fifth century A. D.). He led 2200 monks and 1800 nuns. He was called the “Archimandrite” as he practiced solitude from time to time, and he encouraged the monks at his monastery to retreat to the wilderness after practicing the life of fellowship. In the year 431 A. D., he accompanied St. Cyril the Great to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus. He is known for purifying Coptic literature of Hellenistic cultural influences, and did not allow any foreigners to join his monastic communities. For this reason, he was regarded as a political leader and a social reformer, besides the depth of his spirituality.

**Amma Sarah:** The first monastic group of women in the world was in the city of Alexandria, following the rule of St. Syncletica. St. Athanasius documented her biography and teachings. Moreover, St. Pachomius established two convents for nuns, while many nuns lived in solitude in the desert. Many mothers came from foreign convents to Egypt, like St. Melania the Elder (374 A. D.) and her granddaughter Melania the Younger (418 A. D.). Also, we cannot forget to mention St. Mary of Egypt who repented in Jerusalem and lived for forty-seven years in the wilderness across the Jordan not seeing the face of another human being, except St. Zosima twice in the last two years of her life.

Many nuns were given the gift of true leadership and spiritual discernment, like St. Sarah of whom it was said that she lived for sixty years on the banks of a river, but never lifted her eyes to look at it. Many of her sayings were preserved in the sayings of the desert fathers and mothers.

**St. Hilaria:** In the fourth century, the daughter of Emperor Zeno fled to Scetis where she led a life of asceticism in the attire of a male monk. When her sister, Theopiste, was possessed by an evil spirit, the elders of the wilderness sent her to St. Hilaria to pray for her, and did not know that St. Hilaria was a woman. She prayed all night for her and embraced her. Theopiste was healed, and she told the emperor about the monk, “Hilarion,” who healed her and was embracing her, so her father was disturbed. He called for her to come to the palace, where she revealed to him that she was his daughter after he had promised not to prevent her from going back to her cave.

**St. Syncletica:** Some historians regard her to be the equal of St. Anthony, the star of the wilderness; for as St. Anthony was the father of all monks, St. Syncletica was a mother to that group of virgins which transformed the fertile valley of Egypt into a dwelling place for the grace of God. She was born to noble parents who settled in Alexandria to be close to the School of Alexandria. They had two sons and two daughters, so they wanted to educate them in all sciences, which were only offered in the School of Alexandria. This family was shocked

at the death of Syncletica's youngest brother in his childhood, while the older one departed on the night of his wedding. These two shocks caused Syncletica to ponder and contemplate the pleasures of the world and see them as nothing but a deceptive mirage. Syncletica persevered in her fasting, prayer, asceticism, and worship in her parents' house till they departed to heaven. Then, she distributed her money on the poor and took her sister to their family's tomb, where they lived for a few years. During this period, she redoubled her fasts, prayers, and ascetic practices. A substantial number of young women went to visit her. Some went simply to see her and take her blessing, while others came seeking solutions to their problems. It was natural for some of them to be influenced by her example and desire to stay with her and participate in the life of asceticism and contemplation.

She left her family's tomb and took her colleagues to live with her in a building outside the city, where she devoted her life to serve them, becoming a role model and a living example to what she called for in her teachings. For this reason, her colleagues loved her, were loyal to her, and happily obeyed her. Year after year, the number of young women who became her disciples increased; some of them would spend some time with her and then return to their homes, bearing the grace that they received from St. Syncletica's example back to their families.

When this saint was eighty years old, she was in very good health, but became suddenly ill. Sores covered her body from head to toe, to the point where she lost the ability to speak. The pain of the sores was intensified by a severe fever. The saint's patience was comparable to that of Job, for she endured all that befell her with thanksgiving and long-suffering. Three days before her departure, she saw a multitude of angels with a group of virgins, who approached her saying, "We came to call you, so come with us." As soon as she heard these words, she became a new person and was engulfed in bright light. She lived after that for three full days during which the nuns were enlightened with a heavenly light that was reflected on them from their ill abbess, then she departed to the Church of the firstborn.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic wanted to make her greatness more widely known, so he began to write her biography; but he departed before finishing it, so one of her disciples completed it after his departure. He wrote the biography of St. Anthony describing him as the father of monks and wrote the biography of St. Syncletica describing her as the mother of nuns and virgins.

### **876. How did Egyptian monasticism influence the Christian world?**

Egyptian monasticism, the strongest movement of spiritual revival in the history of the Church, attracted monks from many countries. Greeks, Romans, Cappadocians, Libyans, Syrians, Nubians, Ethiopians, and others came to Egypt. In short, Coptic monasticism had its influence on the Christian world through the following:

1. St. Athanasius spread monastic thought during his exile in Trier (336–337 A. D.) and when he fled to Rome in 339 A. D. He also wrote “The Life of Anthony,” which spread to the entire world in 357 A. D.
2. “The Rule of St. Pachomius” was translated into Greek by Palladius and into Latin by St. Jerome. St. Basil visited the Pachomian monasteries (337–358 A. D.) and was touched and influenced by them.
3. “The Rule of Saint Benedict” (480–550 A.D.) was inspired by the Pachomian order.
4. When St. John Cassian lived in Egypt for seven years, he wrote his two famous books about Coptic monasticism: “The Institutes” and “The Conferences.”
5. Evagrius Ponticus (346–329 A. D.) who is a central figure in the history of the Roman Church, lived as a monk in Nitria for two years, and in Kellia for fourteen years.
6. St. Jerome (342–450 A. D.) and Rufinus of Aquileia (345–410 A. D.) visited Egypt.
7. Palladius of Helenopolis is the historian who documented early monasticism, spent many years with the Egyptian monks, and became the disciple of Evagrius Ponticus. He wrote “The Lausiatic History” around 419 A. D.
8. Mar Awgin was a disciple of St. Pachomius, and he founded a monastery in Nusaybin (or Nisibis) in Persia. He also translated the Pachomian rules to Persian and Syriac in mid-fourth century. According to the Chaldean tradition, it is said that seventy Egyptian monks helped him to build many monasteries there.
9. St. Hilarion of Gaza was a disciple of St. Anthony, and when he returned to his country, he practiced the life of asceticism.
10. St. Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus (315–403 A. D.) was influenced by Coptic monasticism.
11. Sulpicius Severus<sup>1816</sup> dialogues written in 430 A. D. and Postumianus<sup>1817</sup> pilgrim’s account of his visit to Egypt in 399 A. D., offered a great description of Coptic monasticism.
12. The Spanish nun Etheria (Egeria) visited Egypt in the fourth century.
13. St. Melania the Elder, the Roman, visited Egypt’s wilderness.
14. St. John Chrysostom lived in one of the Pachomian monasteries in Upper Egypt from 373 to 381 A. D.

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<sup>1816</sup> Sulpicius Severus, was a Christian ascetic born 363 A. D. in France and died 420 A. D. His notable works are “Chronical” “Dialogues” and “Life of St. Martin”

<sup>1817</sup> In Sulpicius Severus’ first dialogue, “Concerning the Virtues of the Monks of the East,” he talked about what his dear French friend, Postumianus, told him about his visit to the monks of Egypt.

**877. What is the Coptic monastic movement today?**

One of the most notable characteristics of the Coptic Orthodox Church today is the constant increase in the number of those wanting to join the monastic life, leading to the restoration of many of the deserted monasteries. Monasteries for men are spread in the wilderness, whereas convents are located within the towns and cities.

Pope Cyril VI reconstructed the monastery of St. Mina, close to Alexandria. Likewise, Pope Shenouda III renovated the monastery of St. Pishoy in the Wadi Natrun, where he established a patriarchate because of his great love for monasticism, and he regularly spent approximately half of each week there.

Moreover, many of the youth who immigrated to the United States, Canada, and Australia joined monasteries after succeeding in their careers.



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**ANF** = *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**NPNF** = *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**FOTC** = *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Catholic University of America Press.

**LCL** = Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press.

**LFHCC** = *Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*. J. G. & F. Rivington, London: John Henry Parker, Oxford.

**LXX** = *Septuagint Translation of the Old Testament* (Orthodox Study Bible).

**PG** = *Patrologia Graeca*.

**PL** = *Patrologia Latina*.

**PP** = *Popular Patristics*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

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# Index of Bible Verses

Bible references refer to standard translations such as the New King James Version.

References to the Septuagint version of the Old Testament are followed by “LXX.”

References are to the Question Number. E.g., “1:24. 144; 375” means Question numbers 144 and 375.

## 1. Old Testament

### Genesis

*1:1.* 212; 402  
*1:2.* 138; 218–219; 409; 677  
*1:3.* 220  
*1:4.* 216; 221  
*1:10.* 216; 221; 230  
*1:11.* 223  
*1:12.* 216; 221  
*1:18.* 216; 221  
*1:21.* 216; 221  
*1:25.* 216; 221  
*1:26.* 114; 180; 233; 307; 449  
*1:26–27.* 152  
*1:27.* 190  
*1:31.* 216; 221; 325  
*2:2.* 262  
*2:3.* 233  
*2:5.* 190  
*2:7.* 233  
*2:8.* 152; 233  
*2:9.* 635  
*2:16.* 69  
*2:17.* 195  
*2:18.* 852  
*2:22.* 233  
*2:24.* 552; 848  
*3:8.* 75; 307; 585  
*3:14–15.* 452  
*3:15.* 324; 342  
*3:16.* 846  
*3:17–18.* 746  
*3:21.* 334; 827  
*3:22.* 323  
*3:23–24.* 379  
*5:3.* 393  
*6:15–16.* 59  
*8.* 476  
*8:8, 11.* 476  
*11:1–7.* 138

*11:7.* 180  
*17:16–19.* 123  
*18.* 626  
*18:19.* 864  
*19:1.* 616  
*21:12.* 11  
*22:2.* 11  
*22:18.* 336  
*23:12.* 616  
*24.* 427  
*24:10.* 428  
*24:12–18.* 724  
*24:53.* 428  
*24:56.* 428  
*27:11.* 513  
*28:11–15.* 585  
*28:17.* 452  
*29.* 500  
*29:2.* 500  
*29:18.* 500  
*29:25.* 500  
*33:3.* 616  
*42:6.* 616  
*49:9.* 114  
*49:10.* 342  
*50:19–20.* 168

### Exodus

*3:2–4.* 37  
*3:5.* 600; 785  
*3:14–15.* 156; 373  
*7:8–13.* 457  
*12:1–14.* 803  
*12:15–20.* 803  
*13:8.* 865  
*13:14–15.* 865  
*14:15.* 44; 499  
*15:10.* 677  
*15:11.* 270

*15:25.* 672; 677  
*16:20.* 550  
*16:29.* 79  
*17:5.* 816  
*17:6.* 410  
*17:12* Peshitta. 36  
*17:12–13.* 404  
*19:19.* 667  
*20:3.* 107  
*20:4.* 618  
*20:4–5.* 615  
*20:10.* 79  
*20:12.* 859; 865  
*20:25.* 603  
*20:26.* 603; 827  
*25:9.* 585  
*25:18–24.* 618  
*25:22.* 615  
*26:8–25.* 590  
*28:33.* 788  
*28:33–35.* 665  
*28:36–38.* 725  
*29:7.* 725  
*30:1–8.* 650  
*30:29.* 639  
*30:34–38.* 649  
*32:14.* 291  
*32:24.* 440; 448  
*33:11.* 14; 146  
*33:18.* 390  
*33:20.* 155; 390  
*33:21–23.* 390  
*33:22–23.* 390  
*34.* 810  
*34:21.* 79  
*34:23.* 812  
*37:24.* 812  
*39:25.* 788

**Leviticus**

4:3. 831  
6:1. 59  
7:30. 828  
7:33. 828  
8:7f. 831  
10:7. 829  
10:9–10. 787  
11:44. 470  
15:31. 786  
16:34. 725  
18:5. 338  
19:2. 470  
20:7. 470  
25:11. 526  
26:12. 34

**Numbers**

1–2. 451  
4. 479  
11:29. 418  
16:24–32. 804  
16:44–47. 650  
18:20. 831  
21:8–9. 615; 618  
22:31. 616  
27:16–17. 825  
27:18. 717

**Deuteronomy**

1:31. 194  
4:7 LXX. 270  
4:15. 174  
5:14. 79  
6:4. 107; 180  
7:7. 303  
13:4. 450  
17:8. 404  
17:8–9. 566  
18:15. 347; 396  
23:3. 546  
27:5. 470  
32:6. 181; 528  
32:7. 762

**Joshua**

2:17. 521  
2:18–21. 521  
9. 479  
24:26–27. 404

**Judges**

3:27. 667  
13:2–3. 123

**1 Samuel**

1:1–20. 121  
1:10. 681  
1:28. 864  
2:2. 280  
2:9. 302  
2:29–34. 804  
3:10. 762  
6:15. 404  
7:12. 404  
16:1. 114  
17:49–51. 404  
18:38. 778

**2 Samuel**

7:12–13. 336  
7:22. 157

**1 Kings**

2:9. 616  
6:27–29, 32. 615  
7:25. 618  
7:29. 618  
8:26–27. 520  
10:1–13. 307  
17:3. 414  
18:30. 585  
18:33–38. 677

**2 Kings**

5:14. 550; 677  
9:13. 667  
13:21. 388; 622  
18:4. 615  
21:2. 179

**2 Chronicles**

3:7. 615  
3:17. 656  
13:22. 81  
24:27. 81

**Nehemiah**

8:4. 657  
13:1. 546  
13:19. 79

**Job**

1:5. 51; 864  
10:8–20. 333  
14:4 LXX. 28  
26:7. 295  
31:34. 743  
38:7. 207  
40:24. 408

**Psalms**

2:9. 503  
5:7. 616  
6:6. 746  
6:7. 868  
6:6–8 LXX. 731  
9:2. 44  
11:2. 10  
11:7. 149; 820  
15:1. 582  
16:5. 789fn  
16:10. 345  
18:2. 669  
18:6. 451  
19:1. 208; 400  
19:4. 428  
19:10. 15; 137  
22. 378  
22:1. 128  
22:2. 549  
22:6–7. 128  
22:6–8. 344  
22:16. 350  
22:16–18. 344  
22:22. 391  
23:1–2. 475  
23:2. 387  
23:6. 521  
23:9. 610  
24:7. 485  
27:1. 697  
27:4. 521; 542  
27:8. 174  
27:10. 662  
29:1–2. 669  
29:2 LXX. 731  
29:3–4. 700  
29:11–12 LXX. 731  
30:12. 758  
32:11. 44  
33:1. 44

33:8. 626  
33:8–9. 212  
34:8. 370  
34:11. 700  
35:9. 413  
36:6. 479  
36:8–9. 413  
37:4. 440  
38:5–7. 750  
40:2. 390  
41:10. 362  
42:4. 589  
43:3. 697  
43:4. 723  
44:7–8. 307  
45:3. 499  
45:6–7. 721  
45:6–8. 372  
45:6–9. 377  
45:7. 416; 421; 724; 726  
45:7–8. 721  
45:9. 654  
45:10. 501; 507  
45:11. 501  
45:13. 377  
45:13–15. 501  
46:4. 415; 444  
47:1. 44  
50:3. 118  
50:7 LXX. 28  
50:7, 9–10. 700  
51:9. 723  
51:5. 294  
51:10. 379  
51:12. 430  
52:8. 223  
56. 255  
66:12. 700  
67:2. 44  
67:3 LXX. 44  
67:3. 44  
67:5. 44  
68:18. 346  
69:21. 344  
71:12. 380  
72:1–2. 377  
72:8. 377  
77:24–25 LXX. 778  
81:6. 36  
84. 584

84:7. 179  
87:1–3. 606  
89:3–4. 342  
89:29. 342  
89:35–37. 342  
90:2. 149  
90:4. 163  
91:2–5. 265  
92:13. 223  
98:4. 44  
99:5. 616  
101:1. 749  
101:4. 750  
103:5. 723  
103:11. 291  
103:11, 13. 181  
104:2. 697  
104:15. 307; 421  
104:18. 390  
104:24. 39; 310; 402  
104:24–28. 267  
104:29–30. 139  
105:15. 721  
107:31. 657  
110:1. 490  
110:4. 490  
110:1–4. 348; 458  
112:5. 44  
113:5–9. 263  
115:2. 413  
115:5. 749  
118:20. 610  
118:21. 516  
118:22. 372  
118:22–26. 404  
118:131 LXX. 413  
118:163 LXX. 731  
119:8. 51  
119:40. 51  
119:47. 51  
119:48. 51  
119:53. 758; 759  
119:89. 183  
119:103. 43  
119:105. 43  
119:113. 568  
119:133. 307  
119:158. 750  
119:163. 748; 749; 750  
121:4. 392

121:6–7. 451  
124:7. 551  
126:1. 450  
127:1. 302; 303; 450  
127:1–2. 307  
127:2. 51  
132:13. 700  
137:2, 4. 785  
137:7. 785  
137:9. 785  
139:7–8. 135; 149  
139:8. 132  
141:2. 601  
145:8–9. 149  
148:7. 222  
150. 255  
150:6. 112

#### **Proverbs**

3:11. 286  
4:25 LXX. 103  
5:15. 413  
8. 55  
8:21. 294  
8:30. 186; 492  
10:11. 410  
15:16–17. 865  
18:13. 811  
18:17. 743  
19:14. 844  
21:31. 302  
30:4. 307; 349  
30:19. 390

#### **Ecclesiastes**

11:1 LXX. 307

#### **Song of Solomon**

1:2. 413  
1:7. 387  
1:12. 650  
2:3. 190  
2:5. 451  
2:12. 451  
3:11. 672  
4:7. 736; 766  
5:2. 728  
8:5. 704

**Isaiah**

1:2. 528  
1:18. 451; 723; 731; 751  
2:2. 461  
3:16. 499  
5:2. 672  
6. 626  
6:3. 180  
6:8. 37; 180  
7:9 LXX. 7; 22  
7:14. 336; 343; 350  
9:6–7 LXX. 376  
9:6–7. 349  
11:1–5. 342  
11:2. 422; 447; 718  
12:3. 410  
19:1. 343  
19:19–21. 602  
28:16. 114; 404  
29:11. 51  
29:11–12. 52  
32:20. 307  
40:6. 223  
40:11. 812  
43:11. 521  
44:3–4. 413  
44:6. 107  
45:21. 335; 521  
46:10. 271; 274  
48:22. 499  
49:14–15. 291  
49:15. 231  
50:4. 721  
50:6. 344  
53. 350; 406  
53:1–12. 344  
53:7–8. 114  
53:12. 381  
54:1. 461  
61:1. 372; 721; 724  
61:1–2. 343  
61:6. 831  
61:10 LXX. 454  
61:10. 786

62:5. 291  
62:11. 200  
63:16. 181  
64:1 LXX. 155  
64:8. 181  
65:2. 341  
65:15. 284  
66:12. 415  
66:12 LXX. 413

**Jeremiah**

2:12. 413  
2:21. 451  
7:3. 521  
7:4. 521  
7:4–5. 34  
7:5. 521  
7:6. 521  
7:9–10. 521  
7:11. 521  
10:12–13. 212  
22:17. 103  
23:5. 377  
23:23. 270  
23:23 LXX. 270  
31:8. 682  
45:5. 835

**Ezekiel**

1:18. 626  
1:28. 155  
13:2. 811  
16:9–14. 678  
18:4, 20. 760  
18:23. 753; 763  
33:1. 753  
36:25–26. 699

**Daniel**

2:44. 461  
5:1–4. 804  
6:23. 10  
7:10. 378.  
7:13–14. 377; 378

9:24–27. 350  
10:9. 616  
10:9, 16, 18. 155

**Hosea**

6:1–2. 345  
11:1. 343  
13:4. 335; 521

**Joel**

2:23. 413  
2:28. 411  
2:32. 377  
3:10. 736

**Jonah**

3:6–10. 746  
4:10–11. 291

**Micah**

5:2. 343; 350

**Zephaniah**

3:17. 559

**Zechariah**

1:12–13. 344  
2:5. 190  
3:8–9. 404  
6:12. 596; 697  
9:9. 344; 350  
13:7. 812; 835  
14:8. 410

**Malachi**

1:6. 609  
1:11. 602  
2:10. 181  
3:1. 350  
3:6. 164  
4:1. 697  
4:2. 224; 596; 697; 812  
4:5. 350

## 2. Deuterocanonical Books

### **Judith**

8. 570

### **Wisdom of Solomon**

1:7. 432  
1:13. 254  
2:18–21. 341  
9:1–2. 374  
18:15. 374

### **Sirach**

3:16. 824  
11:18. 2  
13:2. 568  
15:9. 44  
24:19–21. 370  
27:11. 225  
32:9. 824  
45:9–10. 788  
51:23. 81

### **Ecclesiasticus**

16:3. 310

### **Additions to Daniel**

13:22–23. 532

### **2 Maccabees**

1:19. 439

## 3. New Testament

### **Matthew**

1:5. 181  
1:16. 697  
1:20. 200  
1:20–21. 114  
2:1–12. 351  
2:2. 377  
2:4–6. 350  
2:13. 2  
3:1–6. 709  
3:6. 743  
3:11. 679  
3:12. 464  
3:14. 315  
3:15. 450  
3:16. 677; 701; 721  
3:16–17. 115; 182  
3:17. 351; 394  
3:26. 498  
3:29. 498  
4:1–11. 695  
4:11. 626  
4:17. 42  
4:19. 632  
4:23. 833  
4:24. 148  
5:3–10. 561  
5:4. 470; 760  
5:6. 370  
5:8. 32; 257; 295

5:13. 470; 833  
5:14. 95  
5:17. 82; 618  
5:20. 339  
5:21–22. 618  
5:23. 796  
5:24. 602  
5:39. 567  
5:45. 298  
5:46. 495  
5:48. 115  
6:1–4. 824  
6:9. 109; 177; 673  
6:12. 421  
6:14–15. 868  
6:22. 833  
6:26. 265  
6:26–34. 259  
7:7. 50; 274  
7:8. 169  
7:9–11. 291  
7:22. 371  
7:24. 551  
7:24–27. 390  
7:25. 390  
8:17. 381  
8:20. 184  
8:23–27. 353  
8:31. 309  
9:2. 177; 524

9:6. 184  
9:12. 746; 805  
9:13. 511  
9:15. 778  
9:18. 353  
9:20–23. 619  
9:29. 24  
9:36. 833  
9:37–38. 833  
10:1–4. 474  
10:5–6. 833  
10:7. 833  
10:9–10. 833  
10:10, 16. 114  
10:19. 811  
10:26. 754  
10:27–28. 833  
10:28. 750  
10:29–30. 272  
10:29–31. 263  
10:30. 277  
10:37. 866  
10:42. 136  
11:3. 131  
11:5. 721  
11:19. 184; 728  
11:27. 109; 166; 430  
11:28. 546  
11:29. 124; 499  
11:30. 307

12:6. 786; 787  
12:19–20. 728  
12:23. 470  
12:30. 547; 685  
12:34. 754  
12:36. 136  
13:4. 626  
13:32. 423  
13:47. 464  
14:11–12. 124  
14:13. 124  
14:13–22. 353  
14:25. 353  
14:29. 12  
14:31. 12  
15:3. 82  
15:18. 568  
15:32. 833  
15:34. 353  
16:13. 378  
16:15–16. 372  
16:15–17. 115  
16:16. 97  
16:18. 390; 473; 551  
16:19. 823  
16:26. 870  
17:1–5. 393  
17:2. 451; 671  
17:5. 115; 182  
17:20. 24; 423  
18:3. 451  
18:10. 173; 197  
18:12–13. 544  
18:18. 823  
18:20. 135; 151; 564; 844  
19:5. 848  
19:8. 861  
19:9. 845  
19:13–15. 691  
19:17. 149  
19:21. 875  
19:28. 178  
19:30. 824  
20:28. 114; 128; 387  
21:12–13. 451  
21:13. 521  
22:11–13. 758  
22:21. 241  
22:41–42. 372  
23:3. 462

23:5–10. 833  
23:10. 430  
23:20–21. 617  
24:12. 518  
24:27. 596; 697  
24:30. 634  
24:35. 216; 325  
24:45–51. 833  
25:1. 672  
25:24. 333  
25:34. 307  
25:41. 307; 436  
26:21. 755  
26:22. 755  
26:26. 640  
26:26–28. 776; 805  
26:28. 28; 294; 744; 751  
26:64. 445  
26:69–75. 730  
27:3–8. 344  
27:11. 451  
27:25. 525  
27:51. 52; 393  
27:52. 551  
28:2. 626  
28:19. 70; 97; 180; 307; 546;  
662; 679  
28:19–20. 182; 474; 761; 833  
28:20. 428; 473

#### **Mark**

1:4. 868  
1:5. 743  
1:9–11. 182  
1:12. 417  
1:13. 626  
1:14–15. 812  
1:23–27. 177  
3:14. 812  
3:14–15. 474  
4:11. 146  
4:34. 824  
5:25–34. 353  
5:41–42. 388  
7:13. 82  
7:29. 372  
7:34. 696  
8:25. 691  
8:36. 244; 325  
9. 351

9:3. 704  
10:21. 870  
10:38. 712  
10:45. 387  
10:47. 408  
11:23. 423  
12:17. 566  
14:66–72. 730  
15:2. 451  
16:16. 32; 680  
16:17. 371  
16:18. 717  
16:19. 134

#### **Luke**

1:2. 63  
1:4. 1  
1:5–25. 123  
1:15. 417; 418  
1:26–27. 626  
1:31. 114; 409  
1:32–33. 377  
1:34. 409  
1:34–35. 118  
1:35. 123; 182; 409; 417  
1:37. 149  
1:41. 418  
1:41–42. 417  
1:46. 68. 417  
1:52. 128  
1:67. 418  
1:79. 307  
2:8–15. 351; 626  
2:19. 85  
2:21–35. 709  
2:25–32. 417  
2:25–38. 351  
2:26. 418  
2:30–31. 44  
2:34. 525  
2:40. 297  
2:49. 851  
2:51. 851  
2:52. 297  
3:8. 752  
3:16. 448  
3:22. 182  
3:23–38. 675  
4:1, 8. 417  
4:34. 32

4:39. 732  
4:40. 691  
5:17–22. 524  
5:47. 868  
6:12–16. 474  
7:11–17. 353  
7:12–14. 778  
7:37. 502  
7:41. 526  
7:48. 177  
8:45. 778  
9:20. 372  
9:55–60. 833  
10:1. 474  
10:17. 371  
10:19. 451  
10:25–37. 72; 392  
10:34. 546  
10:35. 55  
11:8. 432  
11:9. 274  
11:9–10. 432  
11:13. 421  
11:23. 685  
11:41. 868  
11:46. 833  
11:49. 422  
11:52. 833  
12:7. 277  
12:12. 202  
12:32. 459; 544  
12:35. 831  
12:37, 43. 451  
12:49. 831  
13:10–11. 545  
14:24. 531  
14:33. 831  
15:7. 282  
15:8–10. 549  
15:11–32. 55  
15:22. 704  
15:22–24. 750  
15:23. 831  
15:24. 181  
16:2. 241  
16:8. 697  
16:13. 148  
16:24. 739  
17:10. 307

17:21. 17; 103; 147; 451; 455;  
486; 521; 670  
18:7. 432  
18:8. 432; 518  
18:13. 408  
18:22. 870  
18:38. 408  
19:5. 385; 728  
19:8. 508  
19:41. 728  
21:3. 23  
22:11. 704  
22:19. 783; 812  
22:48. 385  
22:53. 697  
22:67. 378  
22:70–71. 378  
23:1–3. 377  
23:34. 509; 728  
23:42. 114  
23:43. 508; 626  
24:32. 52; 731  
24:50. 691  
24:50–52. 485  
24:51. 134

#### **John**

1:1. 115; 183; 374  
1:1–3. 116  
1:3. 112; 116; 148; 214; 402  
1:4. 143; 678  
1:11. 126  
1:12. 293; 307  
1:12–13. 678  
1:14. 115; 118; 121; 135; 390;  
490; 585  
1:14–15. 615  
1:16. 35; 303; 307  
1:16–17. 293; 294  
1:18. 112; 155; 197  
1:21. 396  
1:26. 400  
1:27–33. 180  
1:29. 114; 489  
1:29, 36. 380  
1:32. 416  
1:36. 351  
1:49. 378  
1:51. 378  
2:1–12. 177

2:16. 585  
2:19. 362  
3:3. 663; 699  
3:5. 675; 676; 678  
3:9–21. 675  
3:13. 117; 454  
3:14–15. 39  
3:16. 62; 177; 329; 409; 452  
3:16–17. 124  
3:18. 114  
3:19. 135  
3:29. 451; 459; 672  
3:35. 191  
3:35–36. 177  
4:6. 387  
4:10. 307; 413; 418; 421  
4:14. 139; 812  
4:24. 149  
5:14. 728  
5:17. 177; 263; 484  
5:19. 184  
5:22. 407  
5:24. 413  
5:37. 174  
5:39. 40; 50  
5:45–46. 465  
6. 645  
6:15. 451  
6:35. 408; 421  
6:45. 430  
6:46. 173; 197  
6:53. 768; 778  
6:53–56. 772  
6:54. 768  
6:55–57. 766  
6:57. 778  
6:60. 40  
6:63. 413  
6:65. 25  
6:68. 413; 537  
7:37. 413  
7:37–38. 413  
7:37–39. 410; 418  
7:38. 307; 414  
7:39. 139; 412  
8:1–12. 728  
8:7–11. 451  
8:10–11. 451  
8:12. 408  
8:19. 109

8:23. 118  
8:24. 758  
8:34. 746  
8:44. 282  
8:48. 392  
8:49. 109  
8:56. 465  
8:58. 373  
9. 735  
9:1. 43  
9:1–12. 177  
9:7. 550  
9:16–34. 435  
9:39. 310  
10:1. 50  
10:1–6. 50  
10:7. 491; 512  
10:7, 9. 114  
10:9. 731  
10:11. 114; 561; 612; 833  
10:11, 14. 812  
10:16. 467  
10:17–18. 360  
10:30. 187; 409; 489  
11. 353  
11:25. 307  
11:25–26. 143  
11:35. 385  
12:26. 354  
12:31. 238; 436  
13:8. 755  
13:9. 755  
13:12–15. 833  
13:14–15. 124  
13:34–35. 565  
13:36. 425  
14:6. 114; 307; 352; 354; 426;  
491; 512; 726; 731  
14:7, 9. 489  
14:8. 726  
14:9. 177; 187; 393  
14:9–10. 115  
14:10. 116; 187; 330  
14:17. 726  
14:20. 34  
14:16. 138; 180; 202; 409;  
426; 726  
14:16–17. 182  
14:17. 177

14:26. 177; 182; 426; 430;  
431; 473  
14:28. 184  
15. 678  
15:1. 395; 467  
15:1–5. 632  
15:4–6. 447  
15:5. 307  
15:10. 109  
15:12. 124  
15:12–15. 385  
15:26. 193; 203; 426; 430;  
431  
15:26–27. 430  
16:5–7. 672  
16:6. 484  
16:7. 201; 409; 416; 425; 426;  
430; 721  
16:8. 177434–436  
16:9. 434  
16:11. 436  
16:13. 202; 430  
16:13–14. 409  
16:14. 193; 329; 672; 675;  
721  
16:15. 409  
16:20. 484  
16:22. 484  
16:23. 491  
16:24. 739  
16:27. 118  
16:28. 118; 193  
16:33. 380  
17. 383  
17:3. 143; 184  
17:10. 386  
17:17. 307  
17:21–22. 467  
17:21–26. 185  
17:24. 185  
18:36. 451  
18:37. 377  
19:26–27. 385; 634  
19:34. 812  
19:35. 63  
20:17. 109; 115; 385  
20:21–23. 474; 729  
20:22. 434; 721  
20:23. 730  
20:28. 113

21:15. 385  
21:16. 810  
21:25. 66; 353

#### **Acts**

1:3. 364  
1:5. 138  
1:8. 177; 445  
1:9–11. 134; 365  
1:11. 367; 596; 697  
1:14. 470  
1:21–22. 63  
2:3. 705  
2:3–4. 810  
2:21. 114  
2:24. 379; 470  
2:33. 435  
2:36. 114; 373  
2:37. 743  
2:37–38. 680  
2:47. 455  
3:6. 451  
3:6–8. 371  
3:15. 139  
4:12. 114  
5:1–2. 23  
5:3–4. 202  
5:15. 622  
5:31. 114  
5:32. 63  
5:36. 50  
6:2–4. 833  
6:6. 717  
7:22. 217  
7:55. 458  
7:56. 400; 458  
8:1. 455  
8:2. 94  
8:4. 458  
8:12. 371  
8:13. 32  
8:14–17. 448; 714; 717; 718  
8:16. 697  
8:17–18. 717  
8:26–39. 458  
8:30–31. 51  
8:32. 114  
8:35. 94  
8:37. 98  
8:38. 660



9. 458  
9:4. 385  
9:6. 762  
9:12. 762  
9:14. 114  
9:15. 287  
9:31. 458  
10:4. 495  
10:5. 762  
10:5–6. 94  
10:9. 422  
10:20. 430  
10:35. 546  
10:38. 372; 721  
10:44–48. 434  
10:48. 682  
11:25. 566  
11:26. 455; 761  
14:2. 52  
14:23. 455; 813  
15. 89  
15:3. 455  
16:4. 93  
16:31–34. 103  
16:33. 682  
17:28. 4; 116; 162; 270  
17:23. 4  
17:27–28. 37  
18:26. 673  
19:1–6. 714  
19:5. 697  
19:6. 717  
19:11–12. 622  
19:32. 459  
19:39–40. 459  
20:20–21. 833

#### **Romans**

1:1. 128  
1:7. 296; 462  
1:11–12. 63  
1:19–20. 154  
1:20. 310  
1:21. 39  
1:21, 25. 310  
1:30. 304  
2:4. 728  
2:12. 149  
2:14. 34  
2:15. 154

2:15–16. 39  
2:23. 758; 760  
3:3. 171  
3:23–25. 28; 294  
4:25. 435  
5:3. 315  
5:5. 436  
5:8. 164  
5:10. 385  
5:12. 254; 322  
5:12–14. 379  
5:14. 429  
5:17. 355  
5:20. 52  
6:4. 701  
6:3–4. 663; 682  
6:9, 14. 307  
6:14. 307  
6:15. 306  
7:14–15. 753  
7:17. 753  
7:18–20. 327  
7:24. 753  
8:1–4. 355  
8:9. 430  
8:11. 139; 521  
8:13. 307  
8:14. 307  
8:15. 195; 378; 417  
8:15–16. 678  
8:15–23. 189  
8:17. 126; 130; 138; 623  
8:21. 195; 293; 377  
8:23. 499  
8:26–27. 726  
8:28. 272  
8:30. 464  
8:34. 489; 725  
8:38–39. 130  
9:4. 195; 552  
9:20. 288  
10:4. 30  
10:4–5. 338  
10:6–13. 114  
10:9. 113; 373; 697  
10:14–15. 340  
10:15. 811  
10:17. 42  
10:21. 341  
11:17. 447

11:33. 149; 287  
11:33–34. 154  
11:34–36. 287  
12:1. 377  
12:5. 422  
12:6. 294  
13:1. 566  
13:1–5. 568  
13:8–10. 565  
13:12. 697  
13:13. 755  
13:14. 405  
14:2. 819  
14:8–9. 373  
14:19. 478  
14:23. 28; 42; 778  
15:1. 833  
16:14. 307  
16:25. 670  
16:26. 149

#### **1 Corinthians**

1:2. 462  
1:18. 310  
1:23. 310  
1:24. 116; 176; 374; 375; 445;  
462  
1:30. 39; 429  
2:1–11. 175  
2:2. 821  
2:7. 75; 821  
2:9. 154; 247; 377; 427  
2:10–11. 290  
2:11. 430  
2:12. 193  
3:1. 499  
3:1–2. 819  
3:2. 720  
3:5. 373  
3:6. 833  
3:6–7. 303  
3:9. 833  
3:10–11. 833  
3:11. 464; 512  
3:16. 34; 103; 293; 307; 418;  
420; 438; 467; 721; 726;  
831  
3:21, 23. 103  
4:1. 743  
4:15. 814; 833

4:19. 373  
5:5. 310  
5:7. 380  
5:7–8. 803  
6:12. 51; 862  
6:17. 413  
6:17–19. 585  
6:19. 441  
6:19–20. 448  
6:20. 672  
7:3–5. 857  
7:10. 66  
7:14. 500; 681; 856  
7:23. 672  
8:6. 187  
9:2. 818; 821  
9:14. 66  
9:19. 92  
9:22. 298  
9:27. 870  
10:1–2. 677  
10:1–4. 709  
10:4. 410; 451  
10:11. 824  
10:16. 782  
10:16–17. 640  
10:17. 451; 776  
10:18. 552  
10:20–21. 765  
10:21. 602  
11:3. 852  
11:12. 422  
11:22–23. 787  
11:23. 63; 66; 781  
11:26. 356; 774  
11:27–29. 771  
11:29. 783; 784; 786  
11:34. 64  
12:3. 113; 201; 373  
12:6. 422  
12:8. 824  
12:8–10. 422  
12:8–11. 307  
12:9. 423  
12:11. 422; 726  
12:13. 138  
12:18. 422  
12:21. 422  
12:25. 422  
12:26. 422; 509

12:27. 99; 467  
12:28. 824  
13. 55  
13:2. 423  
13:9–10. 394  
13:9–12. 160  
13:11–12. 288  
13:13. 27  
14:33. 99  
14:37. 373  
15. 670  
15:1–4. 64  
15:3–4. 363; 697  
15:6. 364  
15:10. 99; 303; 307  
15:20. 362  
15:21–22. 379  
15:24. 409  
15:43–44. 129  
15:44–49. 379  
15:49. 241  
15:51–52. 142  
15:55–57. 307  
15:56. 750  
16:7. 373  
16:20. 796

## **2 Corinthians**

1:3. 109  
1:18–20. 144  
1:21–22. 447–448; 502; 678;  
717; 722  
1:22. 504  
2:6. 757  
2:15. 43; 307; 696; 721  
2:16. 310  
3:4–6. 833  
3:6. 52; 60; 293  
3:10. 394  
3:13–16. 52  
3:14. 52; 59  
3:15. 52  
3:16. 52  
3:16–17. 52  
3:17. 52; 306  
3:18. 2; 179; 550; 721  
4:4. 393  
4:5. 373  
4:7. 43; 429  
5:3. 437

5:4. 827  
5:5. 447  
5:10. 136  
5:16. 620  
5:17. 330; 846  
5:19. 187; 330  
5:21. 170; 381  
6:16. 521; 546; 831  
7:10. 759; 760  
8:5. 373  
10:8. 373  
10:18. 373  
11:2. 459; 505; 672  
11:3. 536  
11:14. 831  
11:29. 750  
12:2. 154  
12:9. 867  
12:21. 760  
13:14. 178; 180

## **Galatians**

1:1. 63  
1:8–9. 463  
2:2. 762  
2:9. 656  
2:17. 484  
2:20. 4; 62; 329; 354; 412;  
523; 835  
3:28. 561  
3:13. 361; 381  
3:26. 102  
3:26–27. 678  
3:27. 678  
3:28. 113  
4:1, 2. 394  
4:1–7. 568  
4:6. 115; 284; 417; 430  
4:10. 526  
4:19. 384; 814  
4:24. 52  
4:26. 528  
5:4. 463  
5:6. 2; 30; 32; 42; 108  
5:13. 306  
5:16. 757  
5:17. 421  
5:24. 356  
6:14. 23

**Ephesians**

*1:4–5.* 552  
*1:6.* 294  
*1:7–8.* 361  
*1:9–10.* 146  
*1:13.* 678  
*1:13–14.* 448; 718  
*1:20.* 135  
*2:4–6.* 678  
*2:6.* 140; 354; 457; 484  
*2:13.* 548  
*2:14–16.* 634  
*2:18.* 180; 491  
*2:19.* 465; 548; 673  
*2:20.* 459; 552  
*2:20–22.* 464  
*2:21.* 459  
*3:9–11.* 482  
*3:14–15.* 109  
*3:17–19.* 175  
*4:3–7.* 140  
*4:4.* 187  
*4:5.* 467  
*4:6.* 176  
*4:10.* 365  
*4:11–12.* 474  
*4:12.* 467  
*4:12–13.* 95  
*4:13.* 38; 303; 738  
*4:14–16.* 467  
*4:15–16.* 384  
*4:23.* 421  
*4:24.* 238  
*4:30.* 448; 718; 727  
*5:1.* 189  
*5:2.* 62; 757  
*5:8.* 436; 757  
*5:22.* 851  
*5:22–24.* 845  
*5:25.* 847  
*5:25–26.* 552  
*5:25–27.* 459; 470  
*5:26.* 29. 459  
*5:27.* 451; 576  
*5:30.* 459  
*5:31.* 454  
*5:31–32.* 843  
*5:32.* 247; 552  
*6:1.* 681; 866  
*6:3.* 390

*6:4.* 865  
*6:11.* 721  
*6:12.* 241; 516; 697  
*6:14.* 721  
*6:16.* 10  
*6:18–19.* 837

**Philippians**

*1:2.* 455  
*1:15–17.* 833  
*1:23–24.* 307  
*2:5.* 128  
*2:5–8.* 124  
*2:6–8.* 118; 184  
*2:7.* 297; 848  
*2:7–8.* 128  
*2:8.* 307; 379; 786  
*2:9.* 129; 362  
*2:9–10.* 370; 371  
*2:10–11.* 113  
*2:11.* 109; 373  
*2:12–13.* 2  
*2:13.* 307  
*3:1–9.* 709  
*3:8.* 394  
*3:10.* 356  
*3:13–16.* 833  
*4:8.* 565  
*4:9.* 85  
*4:13.* 721

**Colossians**

*1:13.* 307  
*1:15.* 184; 186; 393  
*1:16.* 148; 374; 388  
*1:16–17.* 116  
*1:18.* 129; 384  
*1:22.* 384  
*1:24.* 315  
*1:26–27.* 355  
*2:6.* 352  
*2:6–7.* 85  
*2:8.* 64; 82  
*2:11.* 681  
*2:12.* 132; 678; 701  
*2:14–15.* 380  
*2:15.* 436  
*3:1.* 75  
*3:3.* 2; 377  
*3:5–6.* 750

*3:10–11.* 94  
*3:11.* 470  
*3:16.* 44; 856  
*4:4.* 757  
*4:6.* 552

**1 Thessalonians**

*2:13.* 64  
*2:15.* 64  
*4:1.* 85  
*4:7.* 859  
*4:16.* 667  
*4:17.* 439; 505  
*5:19.* 433

**2 Thessalonians**

*3:6.* 85

**1 Timothy**

*1:1.* 368  
*1:10.* 75  
*2:2.* 563  
*2:4.* 99; 298; 758; 840  
*2:5.* 121; 597  
*2:5–6.* 383  
*2:16.* 197  
*3:1.* 824  
*3:6.* 64  
*3:7.* 753  
*3:15.* 459; 467  
*4:3.* 846  
*4:4–5.* 470  
*4:10.* 380  
*4:14.* 717  
*5:22.* 717; 833  
*6:9.* 753  
*6:12.* 30  
*6:16.* 153  
*6:20.* 473; 516

**2 Timothy**

*1:6.* 717  
*1:9.* 470  
*2:3.* 465; 499  
*2:19.* 448; 464  
*2:26.* 753  
*3:2–6.* 810  
*3:8.* 83  
*3:12.* 830

4:18. 459

**Titus**

1:5. 64; 813  
2:3–5. 854  
3:4–6. 421  
3:5. 421; 675  
3:10–11. 463

**Philemon**

15–16. 113

**Hebrews**

1:1. 422  
1:1–2. 13  
1:3. 116; 186; 393  
1:4. 371  
1:14. 207; 282  
2:2. 338  
2:9. 388  
2:14. 552  
2:14–15. 361  
2:18. 126  
3:1. 487; 488  
4:14. 484; 490  
5:1. 382  
5:3. 114  
5:4–6. 382  
5:5. 457  
5:14. 819  
6:1–2. 717  
6:9–14. 678  
6:11. 345  
6:19. 456; 458; 488  
6:20. 345; 452; 487; 489; 490  
7:16. 457  
7:21–22. 457  
7:23–25. 114  
7:24. 457  
7:25. 489; 725  
7:28. 814  
8:1. 365  
8:1–6. 492  
8:5. 585  
8:7. 457  
9:7. 725  
9:12. 457  
9:19–22. 334  
9:24. 491; 492  
10. 765

10:1. 526  
10:2. 195  
10:4. 478  
10:5–7. 124  
10:20. 459; 485  
10:29. 463  
11. 37  
11:6. 2; 10  
11:11–12. 11  
11:14. 75  
11:19. 11  
11:24–26. 37; 217  
11:27. 257  
12:1. 140  
12:1–2. 465  
12:6. 568  
12:7. 568  
12:9. 528  
12:22. 528  
12:22–23. 513  
13:10. 765  
13:13. 499  
13:15. 831  
13:20. 812

**James**

2:7. 114  
2:19. 32  
2:19–20. 108  
5:14–15. 867  
5:14–16. 868

**1 Peter**

1:3–4. 675  
1:4. 459  
1:9. 2; 10  
1:12. 419  
1:13. 368  
1:16. 470  
1:19. 380  
1:20. 389  
1:21–22. 180  
1:23. 352; 678  
1:26. 114  
2:4–5. 372; 467  
2:4–6. 95  
2:9. 831  
2:16. 306  
2:25. 812  
3:18–19. 357

3:18–21. 677  
3:19. 378  
4:1. 126  
4:5. 407  
4:8. 868  
5:4. 812  
5:8. 114  
5:14. 796  
5:14–15. 868  
5:20. 868

**2 Peter**

1:3. 178  
1:4. 2; 124; 307; 451  
1:20–21. 94  
2:20. 711  
2:22. 451  
3:8. 163  
3:11–13. 136; 216

**1 John**

1:1. 63; 68  
1:1–2. 323; 335  
2:1. 383  
2:1–2. 380  
2:2. 512  
2:20. 726  
2:22–23. 109  
2:27. 447  
2:28–29. 109  
3:1–10. 109  
3:2. 451  
3:4–5. 119  
3:20. 149  
3:24. 447; 722  
4:8. 9; 145; 171; 175; 185;  
436; 495  
4:9. 164  
4:13. 307  
4:15. 307  
4:16. 757

**2 John**

10. 463  
12. 64

**3 John**

13–14. 64

**Jude**

3: 2; 62

9, 14–15. 83

**Revelation**

1:6. 114; 449; 725

1:8. 625

1:8, 11. 401; 402

1:10. 43

2:7. 323

2:8. 455

2:14–15. 83

3:7. 51

3:12. 656

3:18. 704

3:21. 482

4:4. 704

4:8. 149

5:1. 51

5:5. 114; 403

5:8. 601

5:9. 257; 584

5:10. 114; 725

6:11. 704

6:13. 704

7:39. 411

9:13. 603

14:15. 453

17:14. 114

19:8. 451

19:9–16. 407

19:10. 396

19:16. 342

20:6. 725

21:2, 9. 459; 552

21:3. 520

22:1–2. 410

22:14–15. 323

22:17. 459

22:20. 113



# Index of Questions

## **Book 1: Introduction to the Coptic Catechism Egypt that is Within Us and the Open Heavens**

### **1(a). Catechism**

1. What does the word catechism mean?
2. What is the purpose of a catechism (teaching through questions and answers)?

### **1(b). The Coptic Catechism Through the Ages**

3. How did the Church preserve the correct faith through the ages?
4. What are the stages of development of Coptic Catechism through the ages?

### **2. The Basic Principles of Catechism**

5. What are the basic principles of catechism in the Coptic Orthodox Church?
6. What are the most important practical principles of catechism?

### **3. Faith That Works Through Love**

7. What is faith?
8. What is the importance of faith for unbelievers?
9. Is it necessary to believe in the existence of God?
10. Do we challenge the devil by faith?
11. How was Abraham, the father of the fathers, armed?
12. How was Peter armed while on the water?
13. Did God send the law to prepare us to believe in it?
14. Does faith abolish the gift of reason?
15. What does faith ask of the Lord Christ?
16. What did Moses ask of God in his first meeting with Him when He called him to serve?
17. Why is God called Theos?
18. Why do some people reject faith?
19. How do we win those who reject the faith?
20. Is faith incompatible with intellectual understanding and scientific research?
21. What is the relationship between faith and scientific and spiritual knowledge?
22. Which is first: knowledge or belief?
23. How do we pay our debts with faith?
24. What do the Fathers say about the majesty of faith?
25. How is our faith strengthened?
26. What is the relationship of faith to virtues?
27. How do we proceed in true faith?
28. How do we face all the worldly corruption?
29. What role do tribulations play in faith?
30. What is the role of faith in the virtues and acts of love?

31. What is the role of faith in hope?
32. How can we discern between the faith of demons and the faith of saints?
33. Can a believer deviate and fall?
34. How is faith established in our inner souls?
35. Can we find God's heroes of faith throughout the ages?
36. Are the gifts of the people of faith the same for everyone?
37. Does God have favorites among the believers?
38. What are the signs of a living faith?

#### **4. The Holy Bible**

39. Why the Holy Bible?
40. Why do we need to study the Scriptures deeply?
41. Is the Holy Bible inscribed in the pure heart and preserved in it?
42. What is the believer's view of the Holy Bible?
43. What is the Church Fathers' view of the Holy Bible?
44. How does the Holy Bible invite us, along with all nations, to extol and praise?
45. What is the purpose of the Holy Bible?
46. How can we delight in the mysteries of the Holy Bible?
47. How does the Holy Bible present the Lord to us as compassionate and just?
48. Why is it said that "The Word of God endures forever?"
49. What is the subject of preaching?
50. How do heretics differ in their approach to the Holy Bible?
51. Why are some people scandalized by the Old Testament?
52. What is meant by the veil that lies on the hearts of some?
53. How shall the veil be lifted from us?
54. What is the interpretive approach of the School of Alexandria?
55. What is the difference between Allegory and Typology?
56. What is the Fathers' stance on Allegory and Typology, after Origen?
57. What is St. Clement's justification for the use of allegorical interpretation?
58. What is Origen's justification for using allegorical interpretation?
59. How does Origen explain allegorical interpretation?
60. What are St. Cyril of Alexandria's views regarding the interpretation of the Holy Bible?

#### **5. Holy Tradition**

61. What does the word "tradition" mean?
62. What is the material of tradition?
63. What was the role of tradition in the apostolic age?
64. How is apostolic tradition connected to the Gospel?
65. How has the Holy Bible been preserved till today?
66. How were the words and acts of Christ preserved?
67. What does Papias say about tradition?
68. What does St. Irenaeus say about tradition?



69. How did tradition confront Gnosticism and the heresies of the second century?
70. What does the scholar Tertullian say about tradition?
71. What does St. Clement of Alexandria say about tradition?
72. What does Origen say about tradition?
73. What does St. Cyprian say about tradition?
74. What does St. Gregory the bishop of Nyssa say about tradition?
75. What does St. Basil the Great say about tradition?
76. What does St. John Chrysostom say about tradition?
77. What does St. Epiphanius the bishop of Salamis say about tradition?
78. What does St. Augustine say about tradition?
79. What is the relationship between Christian tradition and Jewish tradition?
80. What are the important schools of Jewish tradition?
81. What are the important books or works of Jewish tradition?
82. What is our Lord Jesus' attitude towards Jewish tradition?
83. What is the Christian Church's attitude towards Jewish tradition?
84. Has the life of the Church taken anything from holy tradition?
85. Has ethical teaching taken anything from holy tradition?
86. Has Church worship taken anything from holy tradition?
87. Have the liturgies taken anything from holy tradition?
88. Have the rites taken anything from holy tradition?
89. What is the responsibility of the clergy and the laity in preserving holy tradition and its continuity?
90. What is the role of the laity in preserving the traditional life of the Church?
91. How can we hold fast to the tradition of the Church in contemporary life?
92. What does tradition mean in the ecumenical movement of the Church?

## **Book 2: Christian Dogma**

### **1. Christian Dogma**

93. What does the word "dogma" mean? And what is its purpose?
94. What are the main characteristics of Christian dogma?
95. Is believing in divine dogmas incompatible with growing in knowledge?

### **2(a). The Creed of Faith and the Origin of the Canons of the Church**

96. How did the canons of the Church originate?
97. What is the Apostles' Creed (Symbolum Apostolicum)?
98. How did the Creed of the Church evolve?

### **2(b). Regarding the Coptic Orthodox Creed**

99. What does the Church mean by "the Creed"?
100. What is the purpose of the Creed?
101. What did our Fathers of the Middle Ages transmit to us?
102. What is the connection between the Creed and the Lord's Prayer?
103. What does the Creed contribute to our interior richness?

## **2(c). Exposition of the Creed**

104. What is the extent of the connection between the Creed, preparation for baptism, and preservation of the Orthodox faith?
105. What are the articles of the present Creed?
106. Why do we begin the Creed by saying, “we believe”?
107. Why do we begin by affirming faith in One God?
108. What does “we believe in One God” mean?
109. How does the Father’s fatherhood to the Son differ from His fatherhood to the faithful?
110. Why do we call God called the Almighty (Pantocrator)? What does the word Pantocrator or Almighty mean?
111. Why do we cherish God as the Creator of all things?
112. Why did the Church employ the term “Creator of heaven and earth”?
113. Why do we believe in our Lord Jesus?
114. What does the title “the Lord Christ” mean to us?
115. Why does the Creed proclaim that He is the Only Begotten Son of God?
116. Why do we recite our faith that He is the one “by whom all things were made” (i.e., He is the Creator)?
117. How can we say “came down from heaven” when He is present everywhere?
118. Did He leave heaven?
119. Why do we say, “Who for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven”?
120. What does the Holy Bible say about the incarnation of the Son of God, of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary?
121. What does the phrase “was incarnate and became man” mean?
122. How is there only one nature in Christ?
123. Why does the Creed include the phrase, “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary”?
124. Was the incarnation essential?
125. Why did the Lord Christ keep His silence during the religious and civil trials?
126. Why does the Creed mention the suffering of Christ?
127. What is the significance of including “under Pontius Pilate” as part of the Creed?
128. How was the crucifixion transformed from being a humiliation into being honor and glory?
129. What is the mystery of dying and being buried with Christ?
130. Why did the Lord Christ die?
131. Why was He buried in a tomb?
132. Why did the Lord Christ descend into Hades?
133. Why do the Jews reject the resurrection of the Lord Christ?
134. What is the Gnostic understanding of the ascension?
135. By ascending, did the Lord Christ depart from the world?
136. What does the great day of the Lord mean in the mind of the Church?

- 137. What does the Lord Christ ask of us?
- 138. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives?
- 139. Why is the Holy Spirit called “the Giver of Life”?
- 140. What does it mean for the Church to be “catholic (universal)”?
- 141. What is the purpose of baptism?
- 142. What will be our fate when the earth passes away?
- 143. What is the life of the age to come?
- 144. What does the word “Amen” mean?

### **3. Faith in God and Our Knowledge of Him**

- 145. Is it necessary to believe in God?
- 146. Does faith cancel the gift of reason?
- 147. Why is God called Theos?
- 148. What are the characteristics of the One God?
- 149. Does the Holy Bible avoid discussion of the characteristics of the essence of God?
- 150. If God is Spirit, why does the Holy Bible describe God as having bodily members such as the heart of God, the eyes of the Lord, His ears, and hands?
- 151. If God is everywhere present, why is it said that He dwells in heaven, or in the Church, or in the believer?
- 152. Is it possible for a person to know the essence of God?
- 153. What does the Holy Bible say about our inability to know God’s essence?
- 154. Does the Holy Bible testify that it is possible for us to know God?
- 155. What does “no one can see Me and live” mean?
- 156. Why did God call Himself “Jehovah” (Ex. 3:14–15) when Moses the prophet asked for His name?
- 157. Why does the Holy Bible emphasize the oneness of God and that there is no other God beside Him (2 Sam. 7:22)?
- 158. What are the characteristics of God?
- 159. How can God possess all these kinds of characteristics, and yet be described as simple?
- 160. Why does the Holy Bible use human expressions to speak about God?
- 161. How are God’s divine characteristics related to His divine being?
- 162. What does it mean that God is all-sufficient?
- 163. What does it mean that God is without beginning or end?
- 164. What does it mean for God's characteristics to be unchanging?
- 165. What does it mean that God is everywhere present?
- 166. What does it mean that God is unseen and incomprehensible?
- 167. What is the foreknowledge of God?
- 168. What does the divine characteristic of being “all-wise” mean?
- 169. What is the characteristic of divine power?
- 170. What is the characteristic of divine holiness?
- 171. What are the characteristics of divine love and compassion?

- 172. What did Moses ask of God regarding service when he first encountered Him?
- 173. Do the angels, as far as they are able, see God?
- 174. What does God's absolute perfection mean?
- 175. Who is able to express divine love?

#### **4. The Holy Trinity**

- 176. What is the Church's teaching concerning the Holy Trinity?
- 177. How did the Lord Christ communicate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to us?
- 178. What are the earliest Trinitarian formulas?
- 179. What are the positions of the Old Testament and the New Testament on the doctrines of the oneness of God and the three Hypostases?
- 180. Does the Holy Bible explicitly teach the doctrine of the Trinity?
- 181. Why does the Old Testament focus on the Hypostasis of the Father?
- 182. What does the New Testament teach about the Holy Trinity being of one essence?
- 183. How can we accept the Trinitarian faith if the God's divine nature is simple? Does Trinitarian faith contradict divine unitary simplicity?
- 184. Which verses are used by those who deny the divinity of Christ?
- 185. How could the eternal God be Love before He created anything to love?
- 186. How can God have a Son?
- 187. How can we understand the oneness of the Holy Trinity?
- 188. Does the Son have a will that can contradict the will of the Father?
- 189. How does Trinitarian faith affect our daily life?
- 190. What analogies of the Holy Trinity did the Fathers use?
- 191. How do we understand the Hypostatic characteristics?
- 192. How do the Hypostatic characteristics constitute the divine essence?
- 193. What are the essential characteristics shared by the Holy Trinity? And what are the specific characteristics of each Hypostasis?
- 194. Who is the Father?
- 195. Who is the Logos or Son?
- 196. Is it possible to separate the Father from the Son?
- 197. Does the Son see the Father in His perfection?
- 198. Does the Father command us to heed the Son?
- 199. What are the most important names of Christ?
- 200. Why does Isaiah call Jesus a Savior?
- 201. Who is the Holy Spirit?
- 202. Is the Holy Spirit a divine Hypostasis or just a force that supports believers?
- 203. How do we know that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father?
- 204. Why did some Fathers use the expression: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son?"
- 205. Does the Holy Spirit work in each person according to their needs?
- 206. Is the Holy Spirit separate from the Father and the Son?

## **5. The Wondrous Creator, the Guardian of the World**

Questions about Creation

207. When were the heavenly hosts created?
208. What is the purpose of contemplating creation?
209. Did the Fathers ignore the scientific studies of their time?
210. Do we know why God created the world, and how He created it?
211. What do we know about the role of God in creation?
212. What is the testimony of the Holy Bible and holy tradition about the Creator of all?
213. Did God change by being called the Creator?
214. What is the role of the Son of God in the work of creation?
215. What is the connection between creation and time?
216. Was the plan of creation in the mind of God eternally?
217. Why did God choose Moses as the one to whom He described the creation and made known His divine mysteries?
218. What is the meaning of “and the earth was without form (invisible), and void” (Gen. 1:2)?
219. What is the meaning of “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2)?
220. Why did God begin by creating light?
221. Why does the book of Genesis repeat: “and God saw that it was good” (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)?
222. Why did God command waters to be above the firmament, waters to be below the firmament, and waters to be gathered in seas and rivers?
223. What is God's wisdom in saying on the third day, “Let the earth bring forth ...” (Gen. 1:11)?
224. If we are dazzled by the beauty of the sun, how much more should we be by the beauty of its Creator, the Sun of Righteousness?
225. What do we learn from the moon?
226. Why did God create reptiles in the rivers, seas, and lakes?
227. What do we learn from migratory fish?
228. How can we learn even from despised little creatures?
229. How do we benefit from the creation of wild animals?
230. What do these words of the Holy Bible mean: “God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10)?
231. Can the world exist without its Creator?
232. Can anyone describe the worth of the human soul, except for the Creator?!

## **6. The Exalted Nature of the Human Creation**

233. What did God bestow upon Adam when he was created?
234. Was the Paradise that God gave to Adam material or spiritual?
235. What is the tree of life, whose fruit Adam should have eaten in Paradise?
236. Why did God create Eve for Adam?

237. Why did God create Eve from Adam's rib?
238. What is the image of the Lord that was bestowed upon Adam?
239. What is the role of the soul in human life?
240. Why did God grant people free will?
241. How do we restore the image God in us?
242. How can the gifts of mind and discernment be sanctified?
243. What does the Original require of the image?
244. Who can describe the value of the soul that bears the image of God?
245. Can the image of God increase or decrease?
246. What is the royal palace that God prepared for Adam and Eve?
247. Were they king and queen, or bride and groom, in the Garden of Eden?
248. What was the state of Adam and Eve in Paradise?
249. Did Adam and Eve underestimate their bodies?
250. What was Adam's view of his bodily members, senses, and emotions?
251. Does the human soul rule over the body?
252. Does the body partner with the soul in everything?
253. Is the human being a creature that is both mortal and immortal?
254. Was man created mortal or immortal?
255. Who plants a paradise in my soul?
256. Are the heavenly creatures perplexed by humans?
257. The human being cannot see his own soul, so how can God call him to behold Him?
258. Do humans partake of God's goodness?
259. Who is the happiest being on the face of the earth?
260. Does the human being grow continually, both here and in the age to come?
261. Which sacrifices do human beings offer?

## **7. Divine Providence**

262. What is divine providence?
263. Is divine providence the work of the Holy Trinity?
264. What is the relationship between divine providence and divine grace?
265. What does the Holy Bible say about divine providence?
266. How did the Church Fathers experience God's protection?
267. How does God preserve the creation?
268. How does divine providence work in our lives?
269. How does the Church of Alexandria understand divine providence?
270. What is the extent of divine providence for the universe?
271. Does God have authority over the heavenly and earthly creations?
272. Do events happen in the creation through coincidence or destiny?
273. Do miracles break the laws of nature?
274. What does it mean that God manages the affairs of the world?
275. What is the role of divine providence in our creation?

- 276. Why did the beneficent God give a commandment to Adam and Eve in Paradise?
- 277. What is the extent of divine providence in human life?
- 278. Does divine providence include animals?
- 279. Does divine providence ever cease from working?
- 280. What is the purpose of divine providence for every human being?
- 281. What do the Alexandrians seek from divine providence?
- 282. Where do the angels, both good and evil, stand in relation to divine providence?
- 283. Why does God guarantee that we play our role as humans even though we rely on divine providence?
- 284. What do we benefit from divine providence?
- 285. Does God care for all humanity generally, or for each individual particularly?
- 286. Does discipline contradict divine providence?
- 287. Why is it dangerous to think that we can understand the providence of God?
- 288. Is the apostles' knowledge here the like their knowledge in the afterlife?
- 289. Are the heavenly orders capable of comprehending or apprehending God?
- 290. Who declares to us the provisions (judgments) of God?
- 291. How does God reveal His care for us?
- 292. What is the difference between God's foreknowledge of matters, and fate or destiny?

#### **8. Divine Grace**

- 293. How do we distinguish between the Almighty God's divine grace, divine providence, and divine economy?
- 294. What is divine grace?
- 295. What is the first work of divine grace?
- 296. Is the grace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit one?
- 297. Are there limits to the growth of the work of grace?
- 298. Is grace limited to a specific group?
- 299. Why did Lord not entrust grace to one of His creations?
- 300. Does everyone receive the same portion of Divine grace?
- 301. Do we still need divine grace after repentance and baptism?
- 302. Is grace necessary for those who strive?
- 303. Is labor necessary?
- 304. What is the work of divine grace in a person's life?
- 305. What is the role of grace after the fall of humanity?
- 306. What are the roles of the law and of grace?
- 307. What do we receive from grace after the fall of humanity?

#### **9. The Fall of Humanity**

- 308. Why did God not reject Satan?
- 309. Is Satan able to harm you?
- 310. How can we avoid fearing Satan?
- 311. Should we, then, hold the devil blameless?

312. Why is it not the devil who deceives you?
313. Isn't it deviation from the goal that harms the human being?
314. Can injustice harm us?
315. Does the harm befall the oppressor or the oppressed?
316. Can poverty harm us?
317. Can death harm us?
318. What was the state of the three youths?
319. What did Job endure? (according to St. John Chrysostom).
320. How did Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil bring death upon us?
321. Why was the tree called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
322. What is that death that came upon Adam and Eve because of their disobedience to God?
323. Why did God not permit Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Life?
324. Did Adam and Eve lose their hope of salvation after hearing the judgment that resulted from their disobedience?
325. Do you know who you are?
326. What did sin do to me?
327. How should God react to humanity's disobedience of the divine commandment?
328. Why was it not enough for God that humans repent of sin?
329. What is the divine economy for our salvation?
330. How does the Holy Trinity cooperate to work in us?
331. What is the role of each Hypostasis in my life?
332. Why was humanity sentenced: "you shall surely die"?
333. How did sin corrupt humanity's vision of God?
334. What does the story of the tunics of skin signify?
335. How did the blood sacrifices prepare us for the sacrifice of the New Testament?
336. What is the promise of divine salvation and the prophesy of the coming of the Savior after many generations?
337. What does reconciliation with God mean?

#### **10. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World**

338. Why does the Christian Church consider the Old Testament to be an integral part of the Holy Bible?
339. How was the Old Testament law inadequate without the Lord Christ?
340. Why does St. Paul rebuke his own Jewish race?
341. What is the chief concern of the Old Testament prophets?
342. What are the most important prophecies concerning the incarnation of the Word from the seed of King David of the Tribe of Judah?
343. What are the most important prophecies concerning the birth of the Lord Christ?
344. What are the most important prophecies about the Lord Christ's last week on earth?



345. What are the most important prophecies concerning the resurrection of the Lord Christ?
346. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven?
347. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Lord Christ as a prophet?
348. What are the most important prophecies concerning the Lord Christ as a priest?
349. What are the most important prophecies about the divinity of the Lord Christ?
350. What are the signs that confirm that the one born of St. Mary is the Messiah, the promised Savior?
351. Did anyone know that the one born of the Virgin was the Messiah, the Savior?
352. What are the principal teachings of Christ?
353. What are the signs that Jesus Christ performed?
354. How does the Lord Christ save us?
355. How does the death of the Lord Christ on the cross save us from sin, the curse, and death?
356. Is this salvation available to all people?
357. Why did St. Jacob of Sarug call the cross of the Lord Christ “The Divine Chariot”?
358. How did the Lord Christ come to be crucified when His life, teachings, and miracles testified to His Holiness?
359. Why does the Orthodox Creed mention that He suffered, was crucified, and was buried?
360. How could He, being God, suffer, be crucified, and be buried?
361. What does it mean that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sake?
362. Why did the Lord Christ make known His resurrection only to His own followers?
363. Where was His resurrection on the third day mentioned?
364. Why did the Lord Himself appear to His disciples during the forty days after His resurrection?
365. Does the Holy Bible testify to His ascension?
366. How did Jesus Christ sit on the right hand of the Father?
367. What does the Holy Bible say about the second coming of Christ?
368. What is the meaning of hope?
369. What does St. Cyril the Great say about our Advocate and Savior?
- 11. Titles and Names of the Savior that Witness to the Works of His Love**
370. Why is He given the name “Wonderful” (Isa. 9:6)?
371. Why is Jesus called “Savior”?
372. Why is Jesus called “the Messiah, the crucified King”?
373. Why is Jesus called “the Lord, Yahweh”?
374. Why is Jesus called “the Word of God”?
375. Why is Jesus called “the Power of God and Wisdom of God”?
376. Why is Jesus called “the Counsellor”?
377. Why is Jesus called “the King of Kings”?

378. Why is Jesus called “the Son of God” and “the Son of Man”?
379. Why is Jesus called “the New or Second Adam”?
380. Why is Jesus called “the Lamb of God”?
381. Why is Jesus called a “sin offering”?
382. Why is Jesus called “the Heavenly High Priest”?
383. Why is Jesus called “the one Mediator”?
384. Why is Jesus called “the Head of the body”?
385. Why is Jesus called “the beloved Friend”?
386. Why is Jesus called “the Good Teacher”?
387. Why is Jesus called “the Good Shepherd”?
388. Why is Jesus called “the Firstborn”?
389. Why is Jesus called “the Gate” and “the Gatekeeper”?
390. Why is Jesus called “the Rock”?
391. Why is Jesus called “Light and Fire”?
392. Why is Jesus called “the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25–37)?
393. Why is Jesus called “the image of the invisible God”?
394. Why is Jesus called “the Pearl of Great Price”?
395. Why is Jesus called “the True Vine” (John 15:1)?
396. Why is Jesus called “the Prophet”?
397. Why is Jesus called “the Faithful”?
398. Why is Jesus called “the Bridegroom”?
399. Why is Jesus called “the Truth”?
400. Why is Jesus called “Peace and Righteousness”?
401. Why is Jesus called “the Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:8, 11)?
402. Why is Jesus called “the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev. 1:8, 11)?
403. Why is Jesus called “the Lion” (Rev. 5:5)?
404. Why is Jesus called “the Stone”?
405. Why is Jesus called “the Garment of righteousness”?
406. Why is Jesus called “the Suffering Servant”?
407. Why is Jesus called “the Judge”?
408. What is “the Jesus Prayer”?

## **12. The Holy Spirit and Divine Salvation**

409. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our attainment of divine salvation?
410. What was Christ’s purpose in speaking the words He did on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles regarding the descent of the Holy Spirit?
411. What does John the Evangelist say about this divine promise?
412. Why did the Holy Spirit descend upon the Church after the Lord was glorified through His suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven?

413. What can we learn from the early Church Fathers' experiences in drinking from this spring of which the Lord Christ spoke when He described Himself as the Fountain that quenches the thirsty?
414. What is the meaning of the words, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture had said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38)?
415. Why does the believer not receive the gift of speaking in the tongues of many nations when he is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit?
416. Did Jesus need the Holy Spirit to descend upon Him at His baptism in the River Jordan?
417. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Lord Christ as Savior?
418. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments?
419. Is there evidence in the Holy Bible that the Spirit spoke through the prophets?
420. If the Spirit spoke through the prophets and descended upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire, does He also work in the faithful?
421. How do we become partakers of the Holy Spirit?
422. What are the most important gifts and talents endowed by the Holy Spirit?
423. What is faith, considered as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9)?
424. Who defies the violent winds of sin and the darkness of Satan?
425. Why did the Lord Christ say, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7)?
426. In whom can we find heavenly comfort amidst our struggles and battles with the vicious devil?
427. How is the mission of the head of Abraham's household a type of the mission of the Holy Spirit?
428. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of the Church after the ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven?
429. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer?
430. Were the disciples in need of another teacher to comfort them?
431. Who sent the Holy Spirit: the Father or the Son?
432. Do all enjoy the Holy Spirit to the same extent?
433. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19)?
434. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin" (John 16:8)?
435. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: "And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of righteousness" (John 16:8)?
436. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says of the Holy Spirit: "And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of judgment" (John 16:8)?
437. What concept of freedom does the Holy Spirit grant us?
438. What does the Holy Spirit bestow upon the soul when He accompanies it?

- 439. When will the Spring season of Resurrection begin and proclaim the hidden glory?
- 440. What do the fire of the Holy Spirit and the fire of the world offer you?
- 441. Can our souls abide in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit abide in us?
- 442. Was the human being deprived of wings with which to fly?
- 443. Before the Fall, were Adam and Eve clothed with the glory of God for a cloak?
- 444. Is the Holy Spirit with the hosts of heaven?
- 445. If the Holy Spirit is described as God's "power" (Acts 1:8), does this contradict His being a divine Hypostasis?
- 446. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the renewal of the Church?
- 447. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our continuous sanctification and our steadfastness in the Holy God?
- 448. What role does the Holy Spirit play in consecrating the heart to God?

### **Book 3: The Church: The Kingdom of God**

#### **1. The Church: The Kingdom of God**

- 449. What do we mean by "the Church is God's kingdom on earth"?
- 450. Who builds the Church and guards it?
- 451. What are the characteristics of this bride and what is her relationship with the Bridegroom the King of kings like?
- 452. What were the stages of God's wondrous salvation of His believers, the people of God?
- 453. Why does the Creed mention the Church after talking about the oneness of God and the Holy Trinity?
- 454. What are the fruits of our unity with Christ our head, and with each other as members of the one body?
- 455. When we use the word "church," what do we mean?
- 456. Have we entered into the holies while we are still in the world?
- 457. What is the difference between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Christ?
- 458. How did Stephen see the High Priest (Christ); was He sitting or standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56)?
- 459. What is the meaning of the Church or "Ecclesia Εκκλησία"?
- 460. What is the Church Fathers' view of the Church?
- 461. Did the Old Testament ever reveal the Church?
- 462. Do the so-called saints make up the Church?
- 463. Can Church members who cannot be rectified be cut off from the Church?
- 464. Why do some people believe that there are no saints in the contemporary Church?
- 465. Are all the saints, across all the generations, members of the Church?
- 466. What titles are given to the Church?
- 467. What do we mean by "One Church"?
- 468. Was there anyone in history who was an example of the desire for Church unity?

- 469. How can we practically enjoy the mystery of unity?
- 470. What do we mean when we say, “a holy Church”?
- 471. What do we mean when we say that the Church is Catholic (universal)?
- 472. What do we mean by the “Apostolic Church”?
- 473. What do we mean by the Church, “the teacher and guardian of the truth”?
- 474. What is the system of Church service?
- 475. What did the Psalmist say about the Church?
- 476. How do we see the Church in Noah’s Ark?
- 477. What is the role of the fiery Holy Spirit in the Church?
- 478. Can a believer isolate himself from his brothers and sisters?
- 479. Does the Church include believers of different spiritual degrees?
- 480. Should we be troubled by the presence of corrupt people in the Church?
- 481. What is the Church's stance on those who are corrupt and reckless?
- 482. What does the Apostle Paul mean when he says that the Church proclaims the mystery of salvation to the heavenly ones (Eph. 3:9–11)?
- 483. Does the Church love all humanity?

## **2. The Heavenly High Priest and the Church**

- 484. Why did sorrow fill the hearts of the disciples during Christ’s farewell speech?
- 485. How did the sorrow of the disciples turn into great joy, directly after the ascension?
- 486. What are the features of the Church of the New Covenant after the ascension of Christ?
- 487. Did the work of the Savior stop with His ascension to heaven?
- 488. What does he mean by saying, “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil” (Heb. 6:19)?
- 489. What is Christ’s role with regards to His unique heavenly priesthood?
- 490. How could He be the High Priest and the Forgiver of sins at the same time?
- 491. What does St. Paul mean by “the apostle of our confession”?
- 492. What does the apostle mean by saying, “Now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24)?

## **3. The Church as a Heavenly Wedding Feast**

- 493. Is the Church a heavenly bride or a social establishment?
- 494. What is our role in getting ready for the heavenly wedding?
- 495. Do we use the language of “the heavenly bride”?
- 496. What is the heavenly treasure of the Church?
- 497. What are the riches the heavenly bride wishes to acquire?
- 498. How did St. John the Baptist rejoice over the Church, the bride of Christ?
- 499. What are the unique features of the heavenly bride?
- 500. How is Jacob’s marriage a symbol of the Church, the bride?
- 501. Why is the Church called, “the sanctified daughter”?
- 502. What is the matrimonial ring offered by the heavenly bridegroom?

- 503. How will the Bridegroom wash away her defilements?
- 504. What is her bride-price (or dowry)?
- 505. Will He not give us here on earth a portion of the bride-price?
- 506. What is the garment worn by the bride and queen?
- 507. Is the Church His daughter or His bride?
- 508. How will the bride contribute?

#### **4 The Unique Work of the Church**

- 509. What is the most important work of the Church?
- 510. What is the Church's understanding of the heavenly powers?
- 511. What is the Church's role towards the powers of evil?
- 512. How can the believer view the Church as his place of refuge?
- 513. How can the Church make the believer a "firstborn whose name is registered in heaven"?
- 514. How can the church make the believer "a high mountain" that soars in the heavens above all worldly matters?
- 515. How can someone fulfill his role as an active living member of the Church?
- 516. What is the meaning of "the Church is the Gate of Zion"?
- 517. What is the meaning of "the Church is the New Israel"?
- 518. What is the role of Church as an interpreter of Scripture?
- 519. What are the limits of preaching the Gospel of Christ?

#### **5. The Church: House of Salvation**

- 520. What is the purpose of building God's house in the midst of His people?
- 521. Why did Jeremiah the prophet warn the people against saying: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these"?
- 522. What is the relationship between the Church and Christ the Savior?
- 523. Why does St. Ignatius the Theophorus say, "The Church is the place of the sacrifice (Thysiasterion Θυσιαστήριον)"?
- 524. Is it our duty to pray for the salvation of others?
- 525. What does Origen say about the Church, the house of salvation?
- 526. How does Origen interpret the ark of Noah and its dimensions as a symbol of the Church, the house of salvation?
- 527. Does the Church have the authority to forgive sins?
- 528. What is the role of the Church as "the mother of the believers"?
- 529. Does the Church grieve over sinners?
- 530. How are we going to drink from the new cup together with Christ in heaven (Matt. 26:29)?
- 531. Should all the faithful care for the salvation of their souls?
- 532. Is there a need for literal interpretation and moral interpretation while ignoring allegorical and spiritual styles of interpretation?
- 533. Is it fitting for the shepherd to compliment the people at the expense of their salvation?

## **6. The Eminence of the Church**

- 534. What do the Fathers say about the sublimity of the Church?
- 535. How can the Church be called a mother and virgin at the same time?
- 536. How can the Church be a virgin?
- 537. What does her heavenly Bridegroom call her?
- 538. Why does St. Ignatius, the Theophorus, call the Church “a congregation of love”?
- 539. Why does St. Ignatius the Theophorus call the Church “a congregation of thanksgiving and praise”?
- 540. How does Christ work in the members of His Church?
- 541. What is the Church’s role in the hearts of believers?
- 542. How can the believer know the will of God?
- 543. How does the Church urge the believer to work?
- 544. Why were the elect believers, or the holy Church, called “the little flock” (Luke 12:32)?
- 545. Why is the Church likened to the infirmed woman who was healed (Luke 13:10–11)?
- 546. Why is the Church called the “inn” that is open for all humanity (Luke 10:34)?
- 547. Can someone be saved while being separated from the Church?
- 548. What does it mean to be separated from the Church?
- 549. What does it mean to return back to the Church?

## **7. The Church and Daily Renewal**

- 550. How can the Church be continuously renewed from glory to glory?
- 551. Are there always going to be victories without end?
- 552. Do we cherish the Church because she is ancient or because she is new?

## **8. The Church and Society**

- 553. How can the Church practice her motherhood while staying committed to her spiritual and social life?
- 554. What is the Old Testament’s view of social life?
- 555. What is the New Testament’s view of social life?
- 556. What was the approach of the early Church to social life?
- 557. What were the principles of social work in the early Church?
- 558. What was the role of the early Church in society?
- 559. What is the stance of the Christian faith towards human culture?
- 560. What is the Christian faith’s view of the human mind?
- 561. Is “learning” a human right?
- 562. How did Christianity open the door to scientific advancement?
- 563. Is there a link between the Christian faith and social and familial relationships?
- 564. What is the Christian stance on companionship and friendship?
- 565. What is Christianity’s view on ethics and morals?
- 566. What is Christianity’s stance on defending oneself, family, and homeland?
- 567. How did the Mosaic Law prepare humanity for perfection in Christ Jesus?

568. What are the limits of discipline in the New Testament?

### **The Role of Women in Society and Church**

569. What is the role of women as leaders in society and in the early Church?

570. What did St. Clement of Rome say about the capabilities of believing women?

571. What was the role of Olympias the Deaconess?

572. How did Amma Sarah become a spiritual guide?

573. Why did St. Athanasius the Apostolic consider St. Syncletica to be an angel?

574. What was the role of women in the early Church for the Eastern Fathers?

575. What is the stance of the School of Alexandria on Abortion?

### **9. The Person of the Church**

576. Who is a person of the Church?

577. What is membership of the Church?

578. What is unity of the Church according to St. Clement?

579. What does the motherhood of the Church mean?

580. Why is the Church called “the assembly of the elect”?

581. Why is the Church called “the new world”?

582. What is the relationship between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven?

583. Is it possible to find a Church that is perfectly pure?

### **10. The Mystery of the House of God**

584. Is there any need for building a house of God?

585. How do we understand the church building?

586. What is the importance of the church building in the life of the Church?

587. Is a church built based only on architectural principles?

588. What do we mean by the liturgical life or the liturgical form of a church?

589. How does the church structure relate to the heavenly life?

590. How does the structure of the church building reflect the inner life of the believer?

591. Why were the catacombs used for worship, especially in the West?

592. What is the role of church architecture in Egypt?

593. What was the very first church in Egypt?

594. What was the style of churches built in Egypt afterwards?

595. Why did the early church choose to look towards the East in worship?

596. What is the meaning of looking towards the east in our worship and our churches’ structure?

597. What is the outer shape of a church building?

598. What is our understanding of the sanctuary of the church?

599. What is the “cathedra”? And what is the “apse”?

600. What rites are performed in the sanctuary?

601. What is the connection between the altar that is in the sanctuary and the inner altar of our souls?

602. If animal sacrifices were invalidated by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, why do we still need an altar?



603. What are the features of the Coptic altar?

604. How is an altar consecrated?

605. Why do we use covers for the altar?

606. What is the “altar board”?

607. What is the “throne”?

#### **11. The Iconostasis**

608. What are the different names of the iconostasis?

609. What is the role of the iconostasis?

610. What are the gates of the iconostasis?

611. What are the windows of the iconostasis?

612. How are the icons arranged on the iconostasis?

613. What hangs from the iconostasis?

614. What is the message of iconography?

615. How do we understand the commandment: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:4–5)?

616. Is it permissible to bow down to anyone other than God?

617. What is the importance of consecrating churches and icons?

618. Why do we revere sacred icons?

619. When did the use of icons of the Lord Jesus Christ begin?

620. Why was the early Church cautious about the depiction of Christ?

621. What are the physical features of Christ?

622. Why does the Church care about the icons of saints?

623. Is there a need for the icons of saints?

624. Where are the icons of four evangelists and the icon of the apostles placed?

625. What are the forms of the glorious halo in Coptic icons?

626. Why are we interested in icons of those in heaven?

627. How has iconography evolved over the ages?

628. To what extent were Copts involved in art, especially iconography?

629. What are the most important characteristics of Coptic iconography?

630. What is the impact of Coptic art on the world?

#### **12. Coptic Art and Symbolism**

631. What is the stance of the Coptic Church on symbolism?

632. What are the most important Coptic symbols?

633. How is the symbol of the cross related to church architecture, theology, and art?

634. How is the Cross incorporated into church architecture?

635. What are the various forms of the Coptic cross?

636. Are there examples of Coptic crosses found in Coptic monuments and antiquities?

637. What is the golden serpent?

638. What is a chest cross?

### **13. The Holy Utensils**

- 639. How are the sacred vessels consecrated to the service of the Lord?
- 640. What is the chalice?
- 641. What is the paten?
- 642. What is the dome?
- 643. What is the spoon?
- 644. What are the two cruets?
- 645. What is the throne or ark?
- 646. What is the ciborium or the antiphoron?
- 647. What is the gospel?
- 648. What are the liturgical fans?
- 649. What is the rite of censuring?
- 650. Why do we use incense?
- 651. What is the censer?
- 652. What other utensils are used?

### **14. The Church Nave**

- 653. What are the sections of the church nave?
- 654. What are the sections of the congregation section of church nave?
- 655. Why do church buildings have domes?
- 656. Why are there pillars in church buildings?
- 657. Why is there a pulpit in some churches?
- 658. What is the purpose of the water font situated in the western part of the nave?
- 659. What is the narthex?
- 660. Did the early church perform baptism in the open air?
- 661. Did the early church perform baptism inside church buildings?
- 662. Why is the baptistery located at the western end of the church nave?
- 663. What are the different architectural designs of the baptistery?
- 664. What are the features of the baptistery?

### **15. The Church Belfry**

- 665. What is the history of the usage of bells in the church?
- 666. Do we use handbells in our churches?
- 667. What are the uses of bells and trumpets?
- 668. What is the rite of ringing church bells?
- 669. What is the etiquette of attending the house of the Lord?

### **16. The Holy Sacraments**

- 670. What is the meaning of the word Mystery in the New Testament?
- 671. Why is physical matter used in Church Sacraments?
- 672. What is the purpose of the church sacraments?
- 673. What is the relationship between all the sacraments?
- 674. Why does the Orthodox Creed not mention any sacraments other than baptism?

### **17. The Sacrament of Baptism**

- 675. How did humanity become children of God once more?
- 676. What is the sacrament of baptism?
- 677. How did the Old Testament prepare us for Christian baptism?
- 678. What are the blessings of baptism?
- 679. When did baptism begin? And how?
- 680. What is required of those who wish to be baptized?
- 681. Why do we baptize infants?

**On the Rites of Baptism**

- 682. Is there a specific time for baptism?
- 683. Why were the names of those who sought baptism seekers registered, and how?
- 684. How long was the teaching phase of the catechumens?
- 685. Who taught the catechumens?
- 686. What were the catechumens taught?
- 687. What was the spiritual preparation for the sacrament of baptism?

**The Rites of Holy Baptism**

- 688. What are the rites of the holy baptism?
- 689. How does the celebrating priest prepare for baptism?
- 690. Who is responsible for examining the candidates for baptism?
- 691. Why does the priest perform the laying on of hands in the shape of the cross?
- 692. What is the purpose of the recitations that are read to exorcise unclean spirits?
- 693. Why do candidates for baptism remove their clothes?
- 694. Why are candidates for baptism anointed with oil?
- 695. Why are so many Fathers and baptism liturgies concerned with renouncing the devil?
- 696. What is the mystery of opening?
- 697. How do candidates for baptism confess their faith?
- 698. What are the main articles of faith in the baptismal confession of faith?
- 699. How are the waters of baptism consecrated?
- 700. What prayers are recited while pouring the Myron oil (Chrism) into the water?
- 701. When did the baptism by immersion start?
- 702. Do we have the custom of washing feet during baptism?
- 703. Is the newly baptized person anointed with the Holy Chrism?
- 704. Why do the newly baptized wear white clothes?
- 705. What is the rite of the crown and the girdle?
- 706. What is the commandment to the sponsor?
- 707. What does the procession of the newly baptized person while carrying lit candles mean?
- 708. What about the custom of feeding the newly baptized a mixture of milk and honey?
- 709. What is the prayer of loosening the girdle?
- 710. Why can baptism not be repeated?

711. What happens to the person who, because of carelessness, falls into sin after baptism?

712. What is the baptism of blood?

### **18. The Sacrament of Chrismation**

713. What is the role of the Holy Chrism in the life of the believer?

714. How did the Apostles perform this sacrament?

715. What is the role of the sacraments of baptism and chrismation?

716. Can Baptism be accomplished without the work of the Holy Spirit?

717. What do the laying on of hands and chrismation mean?

718. Why is the Chrism often referred to as God's seal upon the soul?

719. What is the connection between the hand of the Almighty and the hand of a human being?

720. How can the believer constantly grow and mature spiritually?

721. Why is this holy sacrament called an anointing?

722. Why is the Holy Chrism also called the "sacrament of confirmation"?

723. What is the difference between Christ's anointing and the anointing of the Chrism (or Myron) of those who are newly baptized?

724. What is the difference between the anointing of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament?

725. What is the role of the anointing of the priests in the Old Testament and the Myron (Chrism) oil in the New Testament?

726. What is the role of Chrismation in the life of the baptized person?

727. What is the meaning of "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30)?

### **19. The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession**

728. Why was our Lord Jesus called "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19)?

729. What was Christ's commandment to His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection?

730. What are the important obligations of the believer who repents?

731. Should someone who lives in sin constantly be in tears and fear? And with what hope must this person approach the Lord?

732. Who can heal my soul except You, O Physician, so that it may serve You?

733. Who can sanctify my corrupted will?

734. Sin has killed me and buried me in a tomb until I decayed; can God still accept my repentance?

735. What is the role of the tears of repentance in our lives?

736. What boldness do the tears of repentance give someone before God?

737. To what language does the heavenly Physician listen, if not to tears of repentance?

738. Why are tears of repentance often called a "second baptism"?

739. Are tears of repentance a gift from God?

740. Why do you fear the Friend of sinners?
741. The days are running out and the time of our departure from this world is approaching, so why postpone our repentance?
742. How can tribulations help us pursue the life of repentance?
743. Is it necessary to repent before God in our private rooms, and then again in the presence of the Father of Confession?
744. Why does God the Lover of humanity use different ways of chastisement?
745. How does one resist sin through the positive aspects of repentance?
746. Are there any practical steps to support us in the life of repentance?
747. How can we deal with those who refrain from big sins but tolerate lesser sins?
748. How can someone reach the level of hating sin (Ps. 119:163)?
749. How can the soul be completely convinced that God forgives its sins?
750. How can the soul be certain that it is purified from sin?
751. What happens to a person who sins after his baptism?
752. What are the fruits of true repentance?
753. Why is it that sometimes one feels sorrow and remorse without any effort (almost naturally) for a certain sin, but at some other times one feels very lukewarm and even if he forces himself, he still does not feel any regret in his heart?
754. What is our stance on those who conceal their sins?
755. What if a person says, “my conscience is clear”?
756. What is required of the repentant person when he falls into the same sin again?
757. What is the appropriate conduct of the repentant believer?
758. Is there a contradiction between shedding tears of repentance and having a cheerful personality?
759. What is grief according to God and grief according to the world? (cf. 2 Cor.7:10).
760. What kind of sorrow is praiseworthy (Matt. 5:4)?
761. Is discipleship necessary?
762. Why do I need discipleship to my Father in confession if I already knew the source of his teachings and instructions? I memorized the entire Bible and I even studied it much better than many priests!
763. Is there a model prayer for repentance?

## **20. The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

764. What is the mystery of communion in the eucharist?
765. Is the eucharist a sacrifice?
766. Why is the Sacrament of the Eucharist considered to be the pinnacle of Christian worship?
767. Is it possible to partake of the eucharist every week?
768. Is it permissible for a person to receive the body and blood of our Lord every day?
769. Why do we believe in the one Sacrifice that is offered on multiple altars?
770. Why do we mix the wine with water in the chalice?
771. How can we prepare ourselves to receive the body and blood of the Lord?

772. What results from partaking of the body and blood of the Lord?
773. How do we feel when we participate in the Divine Liturgy?
774. Will the Church continue to pray Divine Liturgy until the second coming?
775. What is the relationship between the table of the eucharist and the table of teaching?
776. What is the role of this banquet in the lives of those who partake of it?
777. What does the heavenly Bridegroom offer the faithful on His table?
778. Is the eucharist, true Body and true Blood?
779. Do you want to see Jesus Christ?
780. Who transforms the offerings into the body and blood of Christ?
781. How can St. Paul say, “because I received from the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:23) when he did not attend the Lord’s Supper?
782. What does the Apostle mean by the words, “the cup of blessing” (1 Cor. 10:16)?
783. Why did Christ say, “Do this in remembrance (anamnesis) of Me” (Luke 22:19)?
784. How can the altar, which is the source of many blessings, be a reason for judgement (1 Cor. 11:29)?
785. Can communion be received without true repentance?
786. How can we prepare ourselves for the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord?
787. Can the Eucharist be offered in an ordinary house?
788. How should a priest serve at the altar?
789. How can we preserve the sanctity of priestly garments?

**On the Main Features of the Coptic Liturgy**

790. What are the features of Egyptian liturgy?
791. Which eucharistic Liturgies does the Coptic Church currently use?
792. What are the main sections of the Coptic Liturgy?
793. Who reads the readings from scripture?
794. Who delivers the sermon?
795. What do the faithful do after the readings and the sermon?
796. Why is the holy kiss exchanged in the Divine Liturgy?
797. How do we begin the Liturgy of the Faithful?
798. Can someone leave before the Liturgy of the Faithful ends?
799. Who has the right to receive holy communion?
800. What does the Church focus on during the partaking of the Holy Mysteries?
801. What is the role of the congregation in the Divine Liturgy?
802. What do the priest and congregation say during the partaking of the Body and Blood?
803. What are the characteristics of the bread that is offered as the Lamb?
804. Of what does St. Basil the Great warn the priests when they are partaking of the blood of Christ?
805. How should the priest and the congregation feel while receiving holy communion?

806. What is the relationship between the eucharist and our awaiting the second coming of Christ the Lord?

807. How does the eucharist support the unity of the faithful together?

## **21. The Sacrament of Priesthood**

808. What is the biblical and ecclesial understanding of the ranks of the priesthood?

809. What are the limits of the episcopacy?

810. What are the chief qualities that qualify a believer for priesthood and pastoral service?

811. What is the work of the heavenly High Priest in the life of His priests, their preaching, and their pastoral work?

812. How did Christ the Lord appoint His twelve disciples and seventy apostles?

813. How did the apostles appoint priests in every church?

814. What is the role of the priest or bishop as a father?

815. What is the role of the priest or bishop as a physician?

816. What is the correct understanding of the leadership of clergymen, fathers, servants, and all Church leaders?

817. What is the role of the priest or bishop in offering sacrifices?

818. What is the role of the priest or bishop as an interpreter of scripture?

819. What is the role of the priest or bishop with regards to education?

820. What is the role of priests or bishops as pillars of the church?

821. What is the bishop's responsibility in disciplining new generations of bishops and priests?

822. How approach should the priests take in dealing with people's sins? And what is their authority?

823. How can the priest examine himself in order not to lose his authority?

824. How dangerous is vainglory for bishops?

825. How was Moses a brilliant example of how to appoint a successor?

826. Who is the true bishop in the eyes of God?

827. Why did Moses clothe Aaron, the high priest, and his sons (Lev. 8:7, 13)?

828. What is the priest's portion of the peace offering?

829. Is it necessary for the hearts of the priests to never depart from dwelling in God's house?

830. Why is the priest committed to a life of continual prayer?

831. What is the general priesthood?

832. What is the nature of the relationship between the clergy and the congregation?

833. Do a priest's administrative duties hinder his internal liberation?

834. Do the responsibilities of one's local diocese hinder one from actively participating in the universal Church?

835. What are the most dangerous pitfalls to which priests, shepherds, and servants are prone?

836. What practical remedies can be offered to shepherds (or pastors)?

- 837. Does the bishop need the prayers of his congregation?
- 838. Why does God sometimes allow priests and bishops to be overcome by their own passions and weaknesses?
- 839. How can believers who desire to consecrate their lives to God decide on whether to take the path of service or that of monasticism?
- 840. How was the archbishop John Chrysostom successful in his pastoral work?
- 841. What concepts did St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. Jacob of Sarug use when writing a eulogy to mourn a priest who had departed?

## **22. The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony**

- 842. What was the first ever marriage?
- 843. What is our understanding of Christian marriage?
- 844. What do we mean when we say that marriage is from God?
- 845. What do we mean when we say that marriage is a holy mystery?
- 846. Why did Christ begin His ministry by attending the wedding at Cana of Galilee?
- 847. What is the pillar of marital life?
- 848. How did Christ fulfil the commandment: “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5)?
- 849. How should a married couple view procreation?
- 850. What makes a husband and wife equal?
- 851. What is the correct understanding of the wife’s submission to her husband?
- 852. To what extent is one responsible for one’s own spiritual life?
- 853. Should the wife obey her husband if he asks her to break one of God’s commandments?
- 854. What is the role of the wife as a helper to her husband?
- 855. What is the secret behind a wife’s true beauty?
- 856. Is it necessary for marriage to be between two believers?
- 857. Can one spouse deprive the other of sexual intercourse?
- 858. What is the role of Christ and the Church in the Christian family?
- 859. What are the main rules that must govern a family?
- 860. Is a life of celibacy holy in the eyes of God?
- 861. Why did the Law of Moses allow divorce?
- 862. Is it lawful for widows or widowers, or divorced men or women to remarry?
- 863. Is it lawful for a man or woman to continue to live with a spouse who has committed adultery and refused repentance?
- 864. What is St. John Chrysostom’s advice to parents about raising their children?
- 865. What are the most important practical pieces of advice that St. John Chrysostom gives to parents?
- 866. What is the best advice we can offer to our children?

## **23. Unction of the Sick**

- 867. Why did James the Apostle talk about the unction of the sick?



868. How did the Church Fathers comment on the words of James the Apostle: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:14–16)?

869. What do we receive in the joyful sacraments of the Church?

**24. The Coptic Church and the Monastic Movement**

870. Is asceticism, as it is practiced in the Coptic Church, biblical?

871. What is the goal of ascetic life according to the Copts?

872. What is the motive of asceticism for the Copts?

873. What is the relationship between asceticism and the ecclesiastical life?


874. How did the monastic movement start in Egypt?

875. Who were the most important monastic leaders?

876. How did Egyptian monasticism influence the Christian world?

877. What is the Coptic monastic movement today?





This Coptic Orthodox Catechism in two volumes is important for every believer, regardless of their background or nationality. It is offered with the prayer that it may help those who read it to become sincere children of God with hearts inflamed with love for all humanity; yes, even for those who persecute the Church. It is intended to inspire the reader to experience the heavenly life, here and now on earth; to practice upright faith; and to grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. These two volumes contain over 1,400 questions and answers. I hope that future generations will re-present its contents in new ways that are more relevant and effective within the unique environment and culture of each Church community outside Egypt, while always remaining faithful to the authentic spirit of Orthodox Christianity.

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

