

The Preaching of Christ and Those who Hear it.

From the time of Christ's appearance in Judea after His struggle and fast in the desert, there have been two kinds of people who hear His preaching: Those who hear His preaching and say within themselves "Surely this man is deluded, making Himself out to be the Son of God. If there is a creator of the universe, could he be bound in the form of a man? Of these, some consider "It would be better for mankind to remove such a beguiling belief system from society, so that it ceases being a source of temptation for those who are less intellectually capable". Such are those who reject the divinity of Christ

Then there are those hear it and reason within themselves: "I know that there is a Creator, and that He loves mankind. I also know that the reasoning processes active in the mind of man have created a plethora of religious philosophies. It is reasonable to assume that the Creator, if He exists, would send a messenger to show mankind the path to true religion, a messenger who would reveal the truth about the Creator who sent him. Further, I see that there are prophecies concerning the coming of this messenger, the Messiah, and that these prophecies were clearly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. I will make myself a disciple of this man and see where it takes me in my life". Such are those who accept the divinity of Christ.

Of those who reject the divinity of Christ, there are those who were, and some who still are, active in their persecution of His followers, such as the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Pagan Roman Emperors, the Hagarenes, Communists and others. Then there are those who are more subtle in their efforts to ignore, diminish, or even do away with what they perceive as a beguiling yet deceptive belief system. Such individuals use the tools of vain philosophy and cunning political processes to realize their goals, and are found in the Freethinking and Masonic movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, amongst the myriads who teach in institutions of higher learning, and more recently among those who create policy in institutions of modern secular thought.

It is apparent to the perceptive Orthodox Christian that they find themselves living in a secular society that was formed by, and cultivated on, freethinking principles, a society that subtly suppresses all things Orthodox, a society that is in a constant state of flux as it undergoes periodic bouts of social re-engineering by freethinking secular humanists. How should we conduct ourselves in times such as these? Is our confession of faith pleasing to God? How can we endure the efforts of those who have created a society that subtly strives to smother our Orthodox faith, and replace it with the pseudo-religion of secular humanism? For secular humanism is truly a system of belief, one that denies the creator, one that seeks to replace the parish priest with the psychologist or therapist, one that embraces syncretism and has no patience for dogma and tradition, one that readily identifies itself with those who deny Christ's divinity.

Before one can answer such perplexing questions it is necessary to acquire an understanding of what religion "is" in secular society, from the perspective of the Orthodox Faith. Such an investigation does not require a scholarly analysis of the history of the development of secular society, a multitude of scholarly works exist that deal with this subject. It does however require an Orthodox theological perspective on the development of religious attitudes in secular society and the willingness to look within ourselves and through introspection asses if we are secular Orthodox Christians or confessing Orthodox Christians. Are we Orthodox in name but secular in spirit, or do we truly believe and confess that Christ is the Son of the Living God?

The Origins of Secular Humanism – the Denial of Christ’s Divinity

From the time of Christ’s earthly life the Jewish people have suffered persecutions. From the earliest of those times they suffered persecution from the Roman Emperors, and in the Christian era, from cruel and insensitive governing hierarchies in Christian societies. The situation worsened for Jewish people who found themselves under the yoke of Islam. Islamic law openly advocated the persecution of both Christian and Jewish peoples from the time of Islam’s violent ascendancy, to the modern era. These persecutions led the Jewish religious leadership to adopt political strategies that had the dual purpose of gaining both political influence, and religious freedom of expression for their people.

Part of this effort by the Jewish leadership was directed at obtaining influence in centers of religious and secular education throughout the *western* world. From the time of the Renaissance, Jewish scholars became active in centers of learning, where they sought out and engaged in dialogue with individuals who were identified as sympathetic to the concepts of freedom of thought and freedom of religious assembly. The Jewish religious leadership, which refused to accept the divinity of Christ, also secretly sought out and entered into dialogue with likeminded individuals. Often these dialogues were conducted in secret, because of the threat of incarceration from civil authorities, who were under the direct or indirect control of the Roman Church, and were instructed to suppress such activities. This suppression by the civil authorities led to the formation of various secret societies whose misunderstood activities spawned the many paranoid conspiracy theories that abound today. A much simpler understanding of the goals and missions of these secret societies is realized when one considers that both the Jewish and Gentile participants who were active in them used these societies as a means of bringing about changes in the political structure of society that would engender freedom of religious assembly and equal opportunity, independent of an individual’s religious persuasion.

The persons who participated in these secret societies, both Jewish and Gentile, became collectively known as “enlightened” freethinkers, and actively pursued political strategies aimed at liberating society from the “unenlightened” governing structures of the dark-ages, to “enlightened” governing structures, the forms of which were being defined during the age of enlightenment. The most successful of these governing structures shared the same fundamental ethics and form; law based on reason, ethics, and justice, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and all the other political characteristics that are found in modern secular democracies.

The Jewish people should not be condemned for wanting to achieve political and social freedom in order to preserve what they perceive as true religion, that is, Judaism. They did what they deemed necessary to preserve their religious heritage. What must be condemned is the denial of Christ that ensued as a result of the influence of freethinking political thought, and the adoption of freethinking political structures in western, and later, Orthodox societies.

The denial of Christ that took place was indeed a true denial. Those individuals who considered themselves freethinkers were named so because they had freed themselves from the yoke imposed on society by the fundamental belief in Christ’s divinity. They perceived the Roman Church as a sadly deceived institution that was incapable of adapting its understanding of God and morality to best serve the common interest of humanity, because it was intellectually chained by its dogmatic teachings, the foundation of which was the confession of the divinity of Christ. For this reason freethinking groups strove to restructure societies around political institutions that were ruled and governed by “enlightened” individuals who were not shackled by

these dogmas. This evolution in the structure of society was at times quite violent, at other times less so. However, the final result in all cases was the establishment of a rule of law dictated by secular political hierarchies that replaced the rule of law previously dictated by the Roman Church and the governing monarchies. A direct result of these political changes was that the only *acceptable* religious attitude in secular society was one that recognized all religions as equals. No longer should political structures in secular society be established to preserve and protect a *particular* religion.

This process eventually found its way into Orthodox societies, many of whom were protected from such influences by an Orthodox Monarchy, or by the Turkish Yoke. The Russian revolution is a horrendous example of an extremely violent transition from a Christ centered rule of law to a secular rule of law. For “enlightened” modern man, the transition from a rule of law dictated by Christian thought, or for that matter *any* form of religious thought, to a model based on “enlightened” political processes, is seen in a very positive light. No longer does the progress of humanity depend on a particular religious philosophy, it now depends on the outcome of secular debate, conducted by an educated populace, a populace that is educated by secular humanists who wish to do away with the influence of religious thought in secular debate.

The evolution of society from hierarchical structures established by monarchies to uphold specific religious doctrines to societies that do not condone any specific religious doctrine has been realized in a short period of time. The resulting secular societies are now governed by “enlightened” political hierarchies that are primarily secular humanist:

(Wikipedia) “Secular humanism: a humanist philosophy that upholds reason, ethics, and justice, and specifically rejects the supernatural and the spiritual as warrants of moral reflection and decision-making. Like other types of humanism, secular humanism is a life stance or a praxis focusing on the way human beings can lead good and happy lives.”

These societies *tolerate* religion, but do not advocate it. Thus we see the following progression of thought take place in society from the time of the age of enlightenment to the present: The rejection of Christ’s divinity by much of the educated populace, both Jewish and Gentile, leading to the rejection of a system of law established to preserve Christian revealed truth, to one established on a rule of law based on reason, ethics, justice, one that does not advocate but tolerates all religions as equals.

In response to the obvious anti-religious sentiment of secular humanism, contemporary religious leaders of all faiths have embraced the notion that they must present a united front to oppose secular humanism and its rejection of “the supernatural and the spiritual as warrants of moral reflection and decision-making”. A fundamental understanding that underlies the political and social apparatuses of this united front is that the “supernatural and the spiritual” source of religious moral authority is common to all religions. This is the attitude that permeates religious discussion in secular society today. The following discussions provide an Orthodox perspective on this religious attitude and the subtle but destructive influence those Orthodox who share this attitude have had on the confession of faith of “World Orthodoxy”.

The Spirit of the Antichrist – Syncretism

Many Traditional Orthodox thinkers describe ecumenism as the heresy of heresies. Their understanding of this heresy compels them to reason that the Orthodox Church will become whole and fully grace filled if all the Orthodox churches withdraw from the ecumenical

movement, and cease all dialogue with the heterodox. Clearly, ecumenism is a heresy, and has been exposed as such in many theological works that have analyzed it; however this author sees ecumenism as a symptom of a disease rather than the disease itself. For example, if one has the bubonic plague, treating the buboes that result from it does not result in a cure. The underlying disease must be treated first. After treatment, the sores will heal in a natural manner, of their own accord. The disease that sprouts forth the spiritual buboes of ecumenism is syncretism. If the Orthodox Church approached dialogue with the heterodox *outside* the framework of the ecumenical movement, and took great care to set dialogue guidelines where all parties agree that dogmatic syncretism is *precluded*, spiritual wheat may be harvested. However this is not likely to occur because such discussion would *require* the heterodox to become orthodox. In order to fully explain why this is true, we must understand what syncretism is, where it came from, and why its renunciation requires the heterodox to become orthodox.

What is Syncretism?

The answer to this question reveals a philosophical method that is diametrically opposed to the dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church. Many Orthodox readers of religious literature are not aware of the syncretistic method of philosophical thought. However, in order to understand how such a system of thought can corrupt Orthodox dogma, the Orthodox Christian must understand clearly what it is. The following are dictionary definitions of Syncretism:

American Heritage Dictionary definition: "Syncretism: Reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion, especially *when success is partial* or the result is heterogeneous"...*"the attempt to reconcile disparate, even opposing, beliefs and to meld practices of various schools of thought. It is especially associated with the attempt to merge and analogize several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, and thus assert an underlying unity."*

Oxford Theological Dictionary definition: "Syncretism is the process by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion, resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. It is the union of two or more opposite beliefs.... so that the synthesized form is a new thing.

Syncretism seeks common ground between differing systems of religious thought, with the aim of co-mingling these systems into a heterogeneous whole, and the creation of a new religion. Syncretism has its roots in the dark past of human civilization, and the formation of ancient religions. The development of religious *practice* in the early Church resulted in the incorporation of *cultural traditions* that had pagan roots. Many writers *misrepresent* this as evidence that Christianity is a religion that evolved from the syncretistic melding of disparate pagan religions. They confuse *practice* and *belief*. Syncretism has somewhat to do with the evolution of religious practice, but has much more to do with the evolution of religious belief. Orthodox Christian dogmas have remained *unmodified* from the time of the apostles; this is because they *cannot* be modified to be compromised with those dogmas that differ from them. The act of modification makes them heterodox dogmas. The methods of syncretistic philosophy are based on the evolution of dogma; by its very nature syncretism requires dogma to change. Orthodoxy and Syncretism are diametrically opposed.

From examination of modern religious life we observe syncretism at its zenith. How can this be, one may ask? Is it not true that from the mouth of almost every believing individual one meets today, the statement is heard: "we all worship the same God". The subconscious

understanding underlying such a statement is that the dogma upon which one's belief is based is not important, because no matter what the religious system of thought, we all, in the end, worship the same God. All that really matters is what we agree upon. Let us ignore what we disagree upon as irrelevant.

Those who admire the beguiling ways of syncretism constantly seek to identify common truths which unite religions. They assume that once these truths are identified and agreed upon unification of disparate religions can be realized. It is this *method of thought* that underlies the sub-consciousness of Freemasonry, Ecumenism, and will be shown to be the foundation, wittingly or unwittingly only God knows, upon which the leading hierarchs of "World Orthodoxy" institute their compromising dialogue with the Heterodox.

There are occasions in modern Orthodox Church history, where the Orthodox hierarch does not make any attempt to hide his adoration for syncretism. It is common knowledge that Patriarch Athenagoras (Patriarch from 1948-1972) was a 33rd degree freemason, and is revered in the secular world for revoking the anathemas against the Roman Church *without the Roman Church having to change one iota of its heretical dogma*. One could list many more, such as Meletius IV Metaxakis (1921 – 1923), but that is not really necessary for "by their fruits ye shall know them". They are easily recognized by their actions and statements.

Any Orthodox hierarch, who seeks to modify or ignore the Orthodox Church's dogma, ecclesiology, and universally accepted teachings, in order to bring about sacramental unification of heterodox and orthodox churches, is creating a new religion, a religion that is certainly not Orthodox. This new religion is one that is *not* built upon the foundation of Christ's divinity with the brick and mortar of divine revelation. It is a religion that is built with the hay and stubble of syncretism on the shifting sands of secular political expediency.

Essential Freemasonry

In today's secular society, freemasonry is considered old fashioned, quaint, or even mildly amusing among those who are educated and actively involved in defining public policy, even so, its influence on the development of religious attitudes in secular society cannot be ignored. A brief description of what freemasonry "is" helps clarify this important fact.

Freemasonry is composed of a plethora of brotherhoods and sisterhoods. While they are not governed by a singular administrative body, they share a common belief system. In this belief system, freemasonry is *not* purely philanthropic, it is a religion. This religion recognizes the existence of truth in all religions, but that the fullness of truth can only be attained by employing the *syncretistic philosophical method* described previously. This method acknowledges the presence of the Great Architect (God) in all religious beliefs. It also acknowledges the existence of super-essential truths common to all religions. The freemason believes that disagreements between religious beliefs indicate that the topic of disagreement is a product of human inspiration, and does not come from the mind of the Great Architect.

Freemasonry teaches that these super-essential truths, which lay at the foundation of all religions, are mystical in nature, and cannot be fully expressed with words. They are only revealed to those who free themselves from the shackles of dogmatic constructs, and open their minds to receive them. Fraternity, brotherhood and philanthropic activities are considered to be of paramount importance in the acquisition of this mystical knowledge, and form an integral part of Masonic life. The initiation processes prescribed in the first 32 steps of freemasonry, while

replete with mysterious allegory and pagan ritual, much of it referring to the ancient religions of the Roman Pantheon, were composed to reinforce these fundamental principals.

Despite the claims of those who are Freemasons, these super-essential truths can be defined. Looking above the ritual and symbolism of Freemasonry and condensing the core mysteries, especially those expressed in the higher steps and writings of prominent Freemasons (such as Benjamin Franklin), the following Masonic supposed fundamental truths can be derived:

1. All mankind worships the same Great Architect (God), each in his/her own way. From this:
 - a. All peoples should tolerate each other's religious beliefs, recognizing that each religion contains deep truths.
 - b. All differences between religions should be resolved by tolerant discussion, and the *evolution of doctrine*.
 - c. All differences that separate one religion from another and cannot be resolved by the *evolution of doctrine* are of human construct and must be discarded. Masonic rituals are replete with allegorical imagery that portrays the Christian Religion as rife with such doctrines, which they represent as barriers to the acquisition of true knowledge.
 - d. This evolutionary process should be pursued until such time as all mankind worships the Great Architect in singleness of mind. This is the ultimate goal of Freemasonry.
2. The Great Architect can only *be known* by practicing philanthropy. From this:
 - a. Freemasons should live together in peace and harmony with all mankind and work toward their-own and each-others prosperity.
 - b. Freemasons should provide material assistance to all who are in need, without giving preference based on religious belief.
 - c. Those who are wealthy should make their wealth available to those who are poor, so that all mankind may live without need, or want, and may thus concern themselves with the lofty pursuit of knowledge of the Great Architect (i.e. Freemasonry).
3. All people are equal in the eyes of the Great Architect, irrespective of their religion, rank in society, or wealth.

Thus, it is not by chance that secular society, with its emphasis on philanthropy, brotherhood, tolerance, equality, and diversity, appears to advocate beliefs similar to those advocated by freemasons. As stated previously, the freethinking movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was largely composed of individuals who were active freemasons, and the democratic political institutions they developed were created to enable the propagation of Masonic ideology in society. The modern secular humanist is the penultimate syncretist, not quite a pure freemason. They agree with, and advocate the social and philanthropic aspects of freemasonry, but see no need to acknowledge the existence of a "Great Architect".

The Early Origins of Modern Syncretism and the Early Church

To understand the origins of modern Syncretism, one need only look at the state of mankind at the time Christ appeared on earth. To understand how the Church reacted to Syncretism one need only look at the struggles the early Church endured while confessing its faith in Christ.

At the time the Logos became incarnate a plethora of religious beliefs existed. The Roman senate, aware of the need to cultivate a cultural-political consensus among the multitude of peoples that were under its governance created the Pantheon "A temple to all gods", in which a

visitor to Rome could find his particular religious belief represented as an equal among the many beliefs represented there.

To maintain order in the Roman Empire, and to cultivate a sense of unity among the many cultures that came under the rule of Rome, the practice of offering an oblation to the “many gods of the Pantheon” was adopted by the ruling class. Thus, the institution of the Pantheon served two distinct purposes, a political purpose and a religious purpose.

The syncretistic philosophical underpinnings of the Pantheon are obvious. That is, the incorporation of the worship of many different religions into a common form, without regard for belief. One cannot help but notice the similarities between a contemporary ecumenical prayer service and the service of oblation offered in the Pantheon. Like the Pantheon oblation, the ecumenical prayer service has both a political and a religious purpose. The political purpose is often implied and never openly stated, that is; to engender peaceful relations between nations. The obvious religious purpose is the unification of a plurality of disparate religions. The only difference between the Pantheon oblation and the ecumenical prayer service is the physical absence of idols, and the invocation of a single deity as opposed to a multitude of deities.

Early Christian Hierarchs, such as the Holy Apostles, most notably the Apostle Paul, and early Christian Fathers such as St. Ignatius the God-bearer, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, and St. Cyprian of Carthage, delivered stern warnings to their flocks to abstain from such oblations because they were offensive to God, and deprived the soul of salvation. When word of this attitude of the early Christian Church became known to the Roman ruling class they became concerned that such an attitude was harmful to the unity of the Roman Empire. They then issued their infamous decrees banning the Christian religion as anti-social, elitist, and adversarial to the common good of the empire. The early Christian church then endured the cruelest scourging, and legions of souls were martyred for their refusal to offer oblations to the false gods of the Roman Pantheon.

There are many reasons early Christians refused to offer oblation to the gods of the Pantheon. The main reason was to confess that Christ had manifested true religion, and that this newly revealed religion was to deliver mankind from the bondage of pagan religion. The Lord Himself instructed His disciples saying:

Luke 12:8-9; ... Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

St. Paul understood the Lords will that the Church make a pure confession of faith, and he exhorted the early Church:

1 Corinthians 10:22; But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

Through the pen of St Paul, the Logos instructs us that we *cannot* “drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils” He did not say we *should not*, or that “*it is better that we did not*” rather we *cannot* do such a thing. How could those who confess the divinity of Christ and preached this new religion give credibility to the religions of those who were “in the darkness of ignorance and sin” by offering oblations with them?

Again, one cannot help but observe that those same Orthodox who harbor an admiration for ecumenism and the syncretism it embodies ignore St Paul’s admonition and eagerly rush to

embrace intercommunion with the heterodox, *without any agreement on opposing doctrinal positions*. This is despite St. Paul's clear admonition to keep the church separate from those who are outside it; both those who practiced pagan religion:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

And those who refused to hearken unto the divinely revealed teachings of the church:

Matthew 18:16-17; But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Such Orthodox Hierarchs have no interest in drawing the heterodox away from their heretical confession of faith, toward a true and God-pleasing Orthodox confession of faith. Is this coincidence or is there an underlying reason for this? The answer to this question is obvious; *they do not see a need for a pure doctrinal confession*. The underlying motivation for this attitude is the perception that the *act* of intercommunion accomplishes what reams of dialogue cannot, that is; the creation of a new religion. They want to meld together disparate doctrinal positions without agreement *through the mutual incorporation of a religious observance*. Their theology is *purely syncretistic*, and certainly not Orthodox.

How did St. Cyprian of Carthage encourage his flock to react to the syncretism of the Pantheon? Comprehending the import of St. Paul's epistles concerning the offering of oblations to idols, he exhorts his flock to endure martyrdom and thus inherit the kingdom of heaven, rather than submit to the demands of the Roman senate, and inherit eternal damnation:

St Cyprian of Carthage: Treatise III. On the Lapsed. Does not the sacred Scripture, which ever arms our faith and strengthens with a voice from heaven the servants of God, say, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve?" Does it not again show the anger of the divine indignation, and warn of the fear of punishment beforehand, when it says, "They worshipped them whom their fingers have made; and the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself, and I will forgive them not?" And again, God speaks, and says, "He that sacrifices unto any gods, save unto the Lord only, shall be destroyed." In the Gospel also subsequently, the Lord, who instructs by His words and fulfils by His deeds, teaching what should be done, and doing whatever He had taught, did He not before admonish us of whatever is now done and shall be done? Did He not before ordain both for those who deny Him eternal punishments, and for those that confess Him saving rewards?

As stated above, the reason the early Church Fathers, such as St. Cyprian of Carthage, forbid making oblations to the false Gods of the Pantheon is that they *knew* such acts were offensive to God, and deprived those who participated in such oblations the Gifts He had bestowed upon

them. Why is this? Because such participation misled the fallen souls of those who participated in the worship of the Pantheon to believe that Christianity was merely one of many equal ways to worship God, or to be more exact the gods. Isn't the result of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement producing the exact tares that the early fathers shed their blood to prevent from being sown?

The early Church Fathers understood that the mere physical act of oblation in and of itself is easily forgiven, however to deny the Logos before others was equivalent to denying the *reason* the Logos took flesh and was far more serious. The reason the Logos took flesh was to deliver mankind from slavery to false religion, and to provide the sacramental means through which fallen human nature could be deified. This sacramental means, the holy mysteries, *can only be partaken by those who are in the Church*; therefore the *mission* of the Church as prescribed by Christ was *to draw souls into its fold* so that they may become sons and daughters of God by adoption through partaking of the mysteries. Each time a Christian offered oblation to the idols he gave impetus to those who observed him to say to themselves; "The God of the Christians is one of many, there is no need for me to join the Church, my religion is just as good". However what do we observe when the martyrs boldly confessed Christ and refused to offer oblations to the idols? We observe legions converting to Christ as they witnessed the martyrs' miraculous confessions.

Does not the same result ensue when an Orthodox Church either participates, or refuses to participate, in the ecumenical movement? Aren't the heterodox emboldened to remain unchanged when they see the Orthodox turning their back on doctrinal differences? When the Roman Church sees the Ecumenical Patriarch rescinding the anathemas against them, and acknowledging the validity of their sacraments, doesn't it cleave harder to its heretical teachings concerning the infallibility of the Papacy, the immaculate conception of the Theotokos, the existence of purgatory, and the trinity dividing heresy of the Filioque,? Would not the exact opposite occur if the Orthodox Church *in its entirety* withdrew from participation in the ecumenical movement? The abandonment of dogmatic truth is the hateful fruit of syncretism, and the compromises it entails.

It is clear that the early Church stood boldly against those who forcibly enforced religious syncretism even to the shedding of blood. She understood that the worship of God *requires* a pure confession of faith. Syncretism, which seeks a union of religious thought based on a marmalade of compromises, is the way of the Pantheon, the way of the persecutors of Christianity, the way of the ecumenist, and it is the way of the enemy Orthodox Christians struggle against, it is the way of the antichrist.

A More Complete Explanation of Why Syncretism is Wrong

In the previous discussion, we came to understand that the early Church abstained from offering oblations to idols because it was antithetical to her mission. She understood that it was offensive to God, and deprived the soul of salvation. The apostolic fathers *knew* that syncretism was wrong, but the *reason* it is wrong became clearer as the mind of the Church developed its understanding of Christ, His incarnation, and the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul. The reason syncretism is wrong is that it constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God, and as such deprives the soul of the mystical activity of God's grace.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – An Orthodox Understanding

Introduction

From the earliest times in the Christian Church, a struggle has taken place between falsehood and truth, between those who wish to introduce innovations into the Church, and those who faithfully preserve what has been handed down to them. St Ignatius the God-bearer, who was the young child that the Lord seated upon His lap when admonishing the disciples to allow children to come unto Him, describes these struggles in the early church:

St Ignatius the God-bearer, Epistle to the Ephesians Chapter VI: “For there are some vain talkers and deceivers, not Christians, but Christ-betrayers, bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and “corrupting the word” of the Gospel; while they intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, as if they mingled aconite with sweet wine, so that he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draught, may incautiously meet with his death. One of the ancients gives us this advice, “Let no man be called good who mixes good with evil.” For they speak of Christ, not that they may preach Christ, but that they may reject Christ; and they speak of the law, not that they may establish the law, but that they may proclaim things contrary to it. For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the law from Christ. They also calumniate His being born of the Virgin; they are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power.”

Unless the reader of the above passage was told that it was written almost 2,000 years ago, they could not be faulted for thinking that it was written recently by a confessing Orthodox Hierarchy and directed at the surfeit of babbling opinions one hears at an ecumenical conference. Indeed, an “enlightened” modern ecumenical theologian finds the very notion of “faithfully preserving that which has been handed down” foolish. The modern ecumenical theologian is interested in identifying the *optimal solution* to a dogmatic dispute. The optimal solution is of course that which pragmatically benefits the majority of those who participate, and which advances the well-being and happiness of the individual. The issue of traditional expression of dogmatic truth is of little relevance. They, like those described by St Ignatius, feel no pangs of conscience as they tear asunder the holy fabric of tradition for the sake of “original” innovation in theological thought. To understand the Church’s attitude towards the proper development of theology, we can read the homily of St Vincent of Lerins on this topic. It can also be read as if it was written yesterday, and not lose any significance.

The Development of Doctrine - Saint Vincent of Lerins (+445 A.D.) Is there to be no development of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly, there is to be development, and on the largest scale.

Who can be so grudging to men, so full of hate for God, as to try to prevent it? But it must truly be development of the Faith, not alteration of the Faith.

Development means that each thing expands to be itself, while alteration means that a thing is changed from one thing into another.

The understanding, knowledge, and wisdom of one and all, of individuals as well as of the whole Church, ought then to make great and vigorous progress with the passing of the ages and the centuries, but only along its own line of development, that is, with the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import.

The religion of souls should follow the law of development of bodies. Though bodies develop and unfold their component parts with the passing of the years, they always remain what they were. There is a great difference between the flower of childhood and the maturity of age, but those who become old are the very same people who were once young. Though the condition and appearance of one and the same individual may change, it is one and the same nature, one and the same person.

The tiny members of un-weaned children and the grown members of young men are still the same members. Men have the same number of limbs as children. Whatever develops at a later age was already present in seminal form; there is nothing new in old age that was not already latent in childhood.

There is no doubt, then, that the legitimate and correct rule of development, the established and wonderful order of growth, is this: - in older people the fullness of years always brings to completion those members and forms that the wisdom of the Creator fashioned beforehand in their earlier years.

If, however, the human form were to turn into some shape that did not belong to its own nature, or even if something were added to the sum of its members or subtracted from it, the whole body would necessarily perish or become grotesque or at least be enfeebled. In the same way, the doctrine of the Christian religion should properly follow these laws of development, that is, by becoming firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time, more exalted as it advances in age.

In ancient times our ancestors sowed the good seed in the harvest field of the Church. It would be very wrong and unfitting if we, their descendants, were to reap, not the genuine wheat of truth but the intrusive growth of error.

On the contrary, what is right and fitting is this: there should be no inconsistency between the first and last, but we should reap true doctrine from the growth of true teaching, so that when, in the course of time, those first sowings yield an increase it may flourish and be tended in our day also.

St Vincent of Lerins notes in his description of the proceedings of the third Ecumenical Council the care with which the Fathers of the Church avoided innovations in Doctrine which were identified as opposing the universally accepted interpretation of those which had preceded them. What is most interesting about this reference is that it *clearly* identifies the common attitude of the pre-schism Western Church and the Eastern Church to church doctrine.

The Council of Ephesus.

THESE then are the men whose writings, whether as judges or as witnesses, were recited in the Council: St. Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a most excellent Doctor

and most blessed martyr, Saint Athanasius, bishop of the same city, a most faithful Teacher, and most eminent Confessor, Saint Theophilus, also bishop of the same city, a man illustrious for his faith, his life, his knowledge, whose successor, the revered Cyril, now adorns the Alexandrian Church. And lest perchance the doctrine ratified by the Council should be thought peculiar to one city and province, there were added also those lights of Cappadocia, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop and Confessor, St. Basil of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, bishop and Confessor, and the other St. Gregory, St. Gregory of Nyssa, for his faith, his conversation, his integrity, and his wisdom, most worthy to be the brother of Basil. And lest Greece or the East should seem to stand alone, to prove that the Western and Latin world also have always held the same belief, there were read in the Council certain Epistles of St. Felix, martyr, and St. Julius, both bishops of Rome. And from the South the most blessed Cyprian, bishop of Carthage and martyr, and from the North St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan.

These all then, to the sacred number of the Decalogue, were produced at Ephesus as doctors, councilors, witnesses, judges. And that blessed council holding their doctrine, following their counsel, believing their witness, submitting to their judgment without haste, without foregone conclusion, without partiality, gave their determination concerning the Rules of Faith...

We expressed our admiration of the humility and sanctity of that Council, such that, though the number of priests was so great, almost the more part of them Metropolitans, so erudite, so learned, that almost all were capable of taking part in doctrinal discussions, whom the very circumstance of their being assembled for the purpose, might seem to embolden to make some determination on their own authority, yet they innovated nothing, presumed nothing, arrogated to themselves absolutely nothing, but used all possible care to hand down nothing to posterity but what they had themselves received from their Fathers. And not only did they dispose satisfactorily of the matter presently in hand, but they also set an example to those who should come after them, how they also should adhere to the determinations of sacred antiquity, and condemn the devices of profane novelty.

Thus proper doctrinal development in the Church is a process that augments but does not contradict all that has preceded it. Impartial analysis of doctrinal development in the Church using the tools of Linguistics and logic clearly demonstrate that *all* doctrinal disputes in the Church took place because individuals attempted to *modify* doctrine in such a way that the new doctrine *opposed or altered* the Orthodox Church's universally accepted understanding of doctrine that preceded it. The foundation of all doctrinal development in the Church is the belief that Christ is the *Living Son of God*, who took flesh from the *Virgin Mary*, and in whom *the fullness of the Godhead dwelt*. That He is both *perfect man and perfect God*, with *two united but un-commingled natures, and wills*. Each of the Christological disputes of the first eight centuries took place as the mind of the Church reacted to those doctrinal teachings that *did not build upon doctrine which had preceded them, but attempted to modify the Church's understanding of them*. This is the essence of Orthodoxy, any doctrinal development that contradicts what has always been accepted by the Church through the decrees of the Seven great Church Councils, those teachings of the Holy Fathers that agree with and build upon the findings of the councils and the

spiritual experience of the great ascetics, is to be anathematized, placed outside the Church. It is called heresy.

The right and proper development of theological thought in the Church by its great minds has been accomplished through the harmonious union of the contemplative ascetic life and the methods of philosophy. These great minds were instructed in, and proficient at, all the classical sciences, while at the same time exhibiting profound proficiency in the contemplative life. The contemplative life leads to a clear *revelation* of truth, while the methods of reason and philosophy provide the tools for a clear *expression* of that truth.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Oration XXI on Athanasius the Great-2), Whoever has been permitted to escape by reason and contemplation from matter and this fleshly cloud or veil (whichever it should be called) and to hold communion with God, and be associated, as far as man's nature can attain, with the purest Light, blessed is he, both from his ascent from hence, and for his deification there, which is conferred by true philosophy, and by rising superior to the dualism of matter, through the unity which is perceived in the Trinity.

The Orthodox Church has never thwarted the right and proper development of theological thought, or for that matter the development of scientific thought. She has always shown a great interest in scientific discovery, and seen the majesty of the Divinity manifest in the wondrous constructions of creation. There were no protests in the Eastern Churches when Copernicus and Galileo put forth their suppositions on the movements of the Planets. Rather, those Church leaders in the East who were instructed in such things saw the veil covering the majesty of God's creation being slowly withdrawn, and revealing its glory to the mind on Man.

The larger question that arises is "*why even bother to preserve Orthodox doctrinal purity? Is heresy that grievous? What is the point? is it really necessary?*" Of course, the answer for an Orthodox Christian is intuitively obvious, that is: It is imperative. If one does not preserve Orthodox Doctrine, but attempts to modify it, one ceases to be Orthodox, one becomes Heterodox, that is; "outside the Orthodox Church". An impartial observer of those Orthodox who undertake dialogue with the Heterodox cannot help but notice that the Orthodox participant has not grasped the reality that the Heterodox do not attach any great importance to Doctrinal purity. They are more interested in finding "common ground" and see great benefit in discarding that which cannot be agreed upon. That is, they are interested in making the Orthodox Heterodox, and have no interest in becoming Orthodox. They are syncretists.

The reason the Orthodox Church preserves doctrinal purity is answered simply: The bride of Christ does not, and cannot, offend its bridegroom Christ. Spiritual experience has taught the Church, through the ascetic endeavors of its great contemplative teachers, that offending the bridegroom expels the Holy Spirit from them. Once an individual professes a faith that they *know contains teachings that contradict what the Church has accepted as true*, the vivifying action of grace ceases to act within them. This is spiritual law, and will be shown to be true in following discussions. It is interesting to note that in the lives of the saints, all manner of sin has been forgiven except the sin of un-repented heresy. Hagiography teaches us that the grace of God acts quietly in the soul of any sinner who repents *and confesses a right and God-pleasing Orthodox faith*. The quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit leads the fallen soul along the path to salvation, and for some, that is for those whose faith is not sullied by spiritual pride and vainglory, even unto the contemplation of the Divinity.

The Heterodox reader of such statements is easily offended by them. They respond with statements such as: “Are you telling me that all that I do is in vain? All my prayers, all my charity, all the love I feel for my fellow man, all the good works I do to help those in need, all my missionary endeavors, all the sweat I pour forth for Christ, are for naught, that I am wasting my time doing these things, that the grace of God of which you Orthodox speak so often, does not enter my heart and guide me on the path to salvation, merely because I do not profess the same creed that you do?” Or others may say “So I am bound for Hades because my bishops have changed one word in the creed we use?” yet others ask “Are you telling me that an individual who was raised in a non-Christian country, and who had never been given the opportunity to even hear of Christ, yet led a blameless life, one that was richly adorned with love for his/her neighbor, a life of the utmost moral purity, will be delegated to the deepest regions of Hades, because his/her parents copulated in a specific region of the world, and at a specific time, that precluded him/her from having any knowledge of Christ?”

The answer to such questions have perplexed and evaded those Orthodox who participate in the ecumenical movement for many years. Indeed, one could say that the perplexing thoughts induced by such questions have created the environment of syncretistic compromise that pervades the ecumenical movement today. The answers to these questions posed by the Heterodox, in and of themselves explain why the Orthodox are so meticulous in their preservation of doctrinal purity. To answer these questions, and to *clearly identify* why syncretism is so heinous, one must understand what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is. One must also humbly approach and beseech Christ to reveal the glory, majesty and profound spiritual truths He manifest in His love for mankind when He took flesh, endured all that we endure in our human nature, even unto death on the Cross, and descended into Hades to preach there, freeing *all* those from *every age* who were bound by the tyranny of death, and harbored the desire to please God and be united with Him in their life.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

There are three sections from the Gospels that address the notion of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In the first reading from St. Mathew we observe Christ performing miracles on the Sabbath, and then being blasphemously accused by the Pharisees of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub. In the second reading from St. Luke the same event is recalled. In the third reading from St. John we read of Christ performing miracles, and then being accused of blasphemy because He confessed himself to be the Son of God. These three passages cannot be separated when one reads them, for the knowledge gleaned from a study of one is made whole by the knowledge gleaned from study of the others. These passages provide a full understanding of both what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is, and the dire consequences that result from such blasphemy.

These passages begin with Christ clearly confessing to the Jews who came unto Him, His divinity and son-ship with the father. They then describe the reaction of the Jews to this confession, and the blasphemy that ensued as a result of the Jews rejection of Christ as the Son of God:

Mathew 12: 1-6; At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw [it], they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye

not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is [one] greater than the temple.

St. John Chrysostom tells us: "... but why could He have led them away from it [the law], who foreknew all, unless it had been His will that the Sabbath should be broken? It was His will indeed, but not simply so; wherefore He never breaks it without a cause, but giving reasonable excuses: that He might at once bring the law to an end, and not startle them". The Lord was demonstrating to both His disciples, and to the Jews who observed Him, that He was the giver of the Law, the Lord of the Sabbath:

Matthew 12:8; For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.

Having *clearly stated* to the Jews that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, Christ then revealed His Divinity in veiled terms that the Pharisees well understood. For both the Pharisees and the Sadducees acknowledged the presence of God in the temple. They also acknowledged that the temple was sanctified by this presence. By declaring Himself to be greater than the temple, Christ had made Himself greater than that which they understood to be sanctified by the presence of God. Christ was by this declaration claiming that He Himself was God, the sanctifier. The Jews, who heard and understood this, provoked the Lord to tell them more, hoping to catch Him blaspheming the Law. We read further in the Gospel according to John, the conversation that transpired as the Lord spoke unto those who came unto Him as he taught in the Temple hoping to catch Him in His words:

John 10: 14-21; I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh 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 commandment have I received of my Father. There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

The Lord spoke with such authority that He left no doubt in the minds of those who heard Him. He was confessing plainly that He was the Son of God, sent into the world to gather the lost sheep of His Father's flock, a flock that was composed not only of Jews, but also of a multitude of Gentiles who would follow Him. And further, that He was, of His own free will, to lay down His life for this flock.

As those of the Jews who were present listened they became agitated, perceiving that he spoke of the Jews and Gentiles as equal members of the Father's flock. They recalled His parable of the Prodigal Son, and understood from that parable Christ symbolically referring to the races of the Gentiles as the Prodigal returning to their Father and being accepted with great ceremony;

Luke 15:22; But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

While referring to the Jewish people as the bitter elder son:

Luke 15:29-30; And he [the elder son] answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:.

The very thought of social communion with the Gentiles was offensive to the Jew. This led some to declare that this man, who claimed to be Christ the Son of God, was mad and possessed by a devil. Others however were amazed by the miracles they had observed and could not agree with the Pharisees, for the Lord had indeed worked wondrous miracles in and around the temple. The healing of the man with the withered hand:

Mathew 12: 9-13 He went into their synagogue: And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

The expulsion of the devil from the blind and dumb man, granting him sight and the ability to speak:

Mathew 12: 22-23; Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

Seeing these miracles, the likes of which had never been seen before, the Jews gathered around Christ and asked Him:

John 10: 22-25; Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not.

The Lord openly confessed His divinity to the Jews. He does not use speech spiced with the political doublespeak that is so commonly heard today. He told them plainly that He is the Christ, the Messiah, but they chose not to believe Him. They could not be reconciled with the notion that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God Who appeared unto Moses in the wilderness, the God who created the Heavens and the Earth, could be standing before them as a mortal, composed of flesh and bones. Christ then attempts to reason with them, asking them to make a righteous judgment, one that acknowledges the miracles He had performed were manifestations of His divinity, tokens of His election, and His son-ship with the Father:

John 10: 25-30; The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me ... I and my Father are one.

The Jews who heard Him make such an open confession of His divinity became exceedingly wroth:

John 10: 31-32; Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

But the response of the Jews to Christ's good works was to ignore them, to let Him know that it was not His good works that so offended them, it was His claim to be one in essence with the Father; "I and my Father are one":

John 10: 32-33; The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

The Jews, hearing Christ's confession of His Divinity became enraged, unable to bear such a notion, they wished to stone Him. The spiritual eyes of their soul were blinded by preconceptions of what the Creator of Heaven and Earth should be like, they saw before them a simple mortal. They reasoned that He was blaspheming God by making such claims. Among the Jews who had gathered around Christ were the Pharisees, they also beheld the glory of Christ's Divinity manifest through the miraculous events that had taken place in and around the Temple grounds. Having gathered around Him they asked Christ to clarify for them His bold statements concerning His Son-ship with the Father, Jesus answers them:

John 10: 33-38; Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

Seeing that Jesus was a mortal man making Himself to be God, the Pharisees concluded that He must be a blasphemer. The Pharisees then reasoned that, since Christ was blaspheming God, the miracles He performed *could not be from God*:

Mathew 12: 24; But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

Christ in His love for mankind perceived in His spirit that the Pharisees had accused Him of working miracles, not by the power of the Holy Spirit, but by the power of His Father's antithesis. Christ did not rail against the Pharisees for entertaining such heinous notions, but rather sought to bring them to an understanding of the grievousness of such an assertion. He reasons with them, attempting to draw them to recognize His divinity:

Mathew 12: 25-28; And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Having reasoned with the Pharisees, who still refused to recognize that the miracles he had performed were a clear manifestation of His Son-ship with the Father, accomplished through the wondrous activity of the Holy Spirit, He states explicitly the consequences of their disbelief:

Mathew 12: 31; Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men.

We then observe Christ telling the Pharisees that He was not offended by their dislike of Him as a man; that He understood they may speak against Him out of ignorance of His divinity:

Mathew 12: 32; And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him:

But to be sure they understood that those who refuse to recognize the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit *as a manifestation of His Divinity and Son-ship with the Father*; and consequently deny this wondrous activity as divine are committing a sin that is not forgivable, Christ continues:

Mathew 12: 32; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Christ is telling the Pharisees that they may mock his humanity; The way He conducts Himself in public “associating with harlots and publicans”, the way He eats “with unwashed hands”, the way He speaks “in the Aramaic tongue”, for Christ knew that their hatred for him as a man would extend even to his murder on the cross. Even so, such mockery and hatred was easily forgiven. They may even speak against His claim of Son-ship with the Father out of ignorance, and repent and be forgiven; as St. Cyril of Alexandria explains in his commentary on this passage from the evangelist Luke, who also records this event:

Luke 12:8-10; Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.

St. Cyril of Alexandria’s concise commentary of this passage:

(St. Cyril of Alexandria; Commentary of the Gospel of St. Luke Ch. 12 8-10);” And that blasphemy is a most wicked crime for men to commit, He has further taught us by saying, that *whosoever shall speak a word against the son of man it shall be forgiven him; but unto him who blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven.* And in what way is this too to be understood? Now if the Savior means this, that if any scornful word be used by any one of us towards some mere man, he will obtain forgiveness if he repent, the matter is free from all difficulty. For as God is by nature good, He will free from blame all those who repent. But if the declaration has reference to Christ Himself, the Savior of all, how can he be innocent or secure from condemnation, who has spoken against Him? What we then say is this; that whenever any one, who has not yet learnt the meaning of this mystery, nor understood that being by nature God, He humbled Himself to our estate, and became man, speaks anything against Him, blasphemous to a certain extent, but yet not so wicked as to pass forgiveness, such things God will pardon in those who have sinned from ignorance. And to explain my meaning by an example Christ somewhere said; *I am the living bread which came down from heaven and giveth life to the world.* Because, therefore some did not know His glory, but thought that He was mere man, they said: *is not this the carpenter’s son, whose father and mother we know? How doth He now say that I came down from heaven?* And again, He was once standing teaching in a

Synagogue, and was wondered at by them all. But some, it tells us, said: *How knoweth that man learning, having never been taught?* For of course they knew not that in Him *are all the treasures of wisdom, and the hidden things of knowledge*. Such things might well be forgiven as being spoken inconsiderately from ignorance.

But to those who have blasphemed the Godhead itself, condemnation is inevitable, and the punishment eternal both in this world and in that which is to come,

For by the Spirit He means not only the Holy Spirit, but also the *whole nature of the Godhead*, as understood to consist in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, And the Savior Himself also somewhere said, *God is a spirit*, Blasphemy therefore against the Spirit is against the whole supreme substance; for as I said, the nature of the Deity, as offered to our understanding in the holy and adorable Trinity, is one.

Note: St. Cyril's declaration "*But to those who have blasphemed the Godhead itself, condemnation is inevitable, and the punishment eternal both in this world and in that which is to come*" was aimed directly at the Nestorians, who *refused to repent* of their blasphemous teachings. St. Cyril is expressing here the attitude the Orthodox Church *has always by necessity adopted with respect to those who teach heresy and refuse to repent*. Syncretism *requires* the commingling of opposing dogmatic expressions; those who advocate such dogmatic compromise fall under this same condemnation. Why is it that a child can comprehend this, but learned Orthodox Hierarchs cannot? The answer to this question has been given previously; it is because those Hierarchs are syncretists, they do not regard dogmatic purity as important, they have a more secular view of the church. They see the church as a "brotherhood" of individuals who believe in God (The great Architect, in the Masonic sense), and they consider dogmatic differences as obtrusive obstacles to union, better to be ignored than to be argued over.

The guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church has taught us therefore, that those souls who deny the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of the Godhead and remain unrepentant commit a sin that cannot be forgiven, neither in this life, nor in the life to come. It is the *only* sin that cannot be forgiven. St John Chrysostom explains that this was especially true for the Pharisees because the Jewish synagogue was intimately familiar with the activity of the Holy Spirit in the prophets of the Old Testament, and in the wondrous miracles that occurred while the Jews wandered in the wilderness. They should have therefore recognized the Father in the miracles of the Son.

From the above discussion it is clear that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit *is a direct result* of refusing to accept Christ's divinity, of refusing to accept that the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit bears witness to His divinity. Consequently, *the logical and blasphemous, conclusion* of such a denial is that the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit poured forth by Christ were not from God. In the Church the same result ensues when one refuses to accept the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the Church, leading her to a correct and God-pleasing confession of Christ's divinity. Further, the adoption of any teaching that weakens, or even worse, opposes the Church's teachings of Christ's divinity is equivalent to committing the same sin the Pharisees committed. How is this? One may ask. The bold individual who alters

these doctrines does so because they believe that “These doctrines are not the result of the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit, they are doctrines that come from the mind of man”. They believe this despite the revelation of the Logos through St. John the Theologian, that the Holy Spirit itself has led the Church, to a proper confession of Christ’s Divinity:

John 14:26; But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 15:26; But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 14:17; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

1 John 2:20-22; But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

1 John 2:27; But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The doctrinal development of this confession has taken place in a wondrous manner, as described by St. Vincent, while the Church struggled with the Christological heresies throughout the first eight centuries of her existence. Knowing that this sin, the sin of un-repentant heresy, is by Christ’s own words, the only sin that cannot be forgiven, the Holy Orthodox Church boldly defends its confession of Christ’s Divinity, a confession that is pure and spotless, without blemish, a confession that manifests a full and complete recognition of the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. She is careful to maintain doctrinal purity, so that she not be found guilty of blaspheming the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and commit this unforgivable sin, and thereby loose the vivifying action of the grace of the Holy Spirit in her mysteries. As St. Ambrose of Milan notes:

(St Ambrose of Milan, Three Books on the Holy Spirit, Book III-Ch IV-24) The Lord then replies to the blasphemy of the Pharisees, and refuses to them the grace of His power, which consists in the remission of sins, because they asserted that His heavenly power rested on the help of the devil. And He affirms that they act with satanic spirit who divide the Church of God, so that He includes the heretics and schismatics of all times, to whom He denies forgiveness, for every other sin is concerned with single persons, this is a sin against all. For they alone wish to destroy the grace of Christ who rend asunder the members of the Church for which the Lord Jesus suffered, and the Holy Spirit was given us.

Syncretism however, by its commingling of various heretical dogmas, completely denies the authority of the Holy Spirit in the universally accepted doctrines of the Church. It embodies within its own philosophical method all that is blasphemous against the Holy Spirit.

Be not deceived, the *grace* of the Holy Spirit of God cannot dwell where there is untruth, or heresy, as the Logos revealed to St John the Theologian:

Revelation 21:27; And there shall in no wise enter into it [the church] any thing [doctrine] that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie [heresy]: but they [those doctrines] which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Orthodox exegesis from the above passage reveals two great truths. Firstly, those souls that find their way into the Kingdom of God will be pure and without blemish, washed clean by the Body and Blood of Christ. This cleansing is a free gift given by God to those who seek the Lord in truth, and finding that truth revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, partake of His pure mysteries with a clear conscience, and a right confession of faith in His Son's Divinity. In this way all Orthodox Christians are martyrs for their faith. Each and every Orthodox Christian who approaches the Holy Chalice is called to make the same confession of faith in Christ's Divinity as that which was made by the Holy Martyrs: "I believe and I confess, O Lord, that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first." ... and the rest of the prayer recited by the Priest before communing.

The second great truth is that God does not permit heresy a place in the Kingdom of God. Only those doctrines that are pure and true can be contemplated in that blessed place. The Kingdom of God is both Heaven, the place where the righteous dwell in the life to come, and within us, in this vale of tears:

Luke 17:20-21; The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

If heresy has no place in the kingdom of God, how can the soul of one who does not confess the divinity of Christ in truth, that is, in such a way that the confession is admixed with the tares of heresy, be a temple of the living God, a dwelling place of the kingdom of God within?

(*St. Jerome; Dialogue against the Luciferians, 9*): For the Holy Spirit must have a clean abode: nor will He become a dweller in that temple which has not for its chief priest the true faith.

Indeed, the admonition, that "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" tells us that this is not possible. Such a statement appears stern, and uncompromising, but upon closer inspection it is seen to be filled with love. It is not because heresies are simply untrue, and therefore offensive to God that they are expelled from the kingdom of God, as if the Godhead was somehow capricious and expressing a personal preference. No, let such foolish thoughts be banished from our minds, it is because the truth of the Godhead is incompatible with untruth. God is truth and light, and cannot dwell where there is untruth and darkness. The very nature of untruth precludes its compatibility with the truth. Just as darkness at once disappears when a light is turned on, truth expels untruth. If one cleaves to untruth, that individual is expelled from that place where truth abides, and the kingdom of God cannot exist within that soul. The Lord warns us to avoid heresy because, in His love for mankind, He does not wish that *any* soul be excluded from the kingdom of God, both within himself in this life, and inherited in the life to come.

1 Timothy 2:3-4; For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Let us therefore heed the warning Christ has given us; “but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” For indeed, as the Holy Apostle John the Theologian inspired by the Holy Spirit reveals to us, the sin of denying the divinity of the Son, has the consequence of expelling the founder and nourisher of the kingdom of God; the Holy Spirit, from within us.

1 John 2:23-27; Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also ... If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

In truth the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, (*1 John 5:7*; For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one), and to have not the Father is the same as to have not the most Holy Spirit.

From the above apologetic discussion it is clear that the salvific action of the Holy Spirit cannot be active in the soul of one who adheres to heresy and who knowingly compromises himself in matters of the faith. This does not foolishly admit that the Holy Spirit cannot act through the conscience of those who have fallen from the truth, and lead them to the knowledge of the truth, or that the Holy Spirit does not provide what is essential for life; these characteristics of the Holy Spirit are attributes of God’s active mercy in creation. The above apology is stating that there is a unique activity of the Holy Spirit that is manifest in the soul of a right believing Orthodox Christian that is not manifest in the soul of the heretic. This activity creates and nourishes the kingdom of God within them, deifying their fallen nature and making them divine. It is described in the prayers before communion as “deifying the spirit and wondrously nourishing the mind”.

So that we not ignore those who are less inclined to give heed to reason and dogmatic apologetics, and are more inclined to things pragmatic, we shall consider things more practical in nature.

The Grace of God and the Mystical Activity of the Holy Spirit

In response to those (Balaam et al.) who misrepresented the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul of man, St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, expounded the Orthodox Church’s teaching on this phenomenon in his treatises concerning the energies of God. The doctrines contained in these treatises provide an understanding of what the grace of God is and how it acts in the soul of an Orthodox Christian.

St. Gregory had experienced union with God in his own personal spiritual life, he had attained to the lofty contemplation of God, and vision of the divine light. Thus the knowledge he gained from this union with God was one that is firmly based in the Orthodox dogmatic tradition. As stated previously, “The contemplative life leads to a clear *revelation* of truth, while the methods of reason and philosophy provide the tools for a clear *expression* of that truth”. In his teachings he tells us that the prophets of the Old Testament era, and the apostles and great contemplative teachers of the New Testament era all possess knowledge that is superior to that obtained through the use of reason and logic, using purely philosophical methods. This is because they communed with the Godhead in their contemplations, passing onto us the knowledge they had gleaned, to the best of their ability, and in *complete obedience to their conscience*. This knowledge is therefore divine, as the Holy Apostle confesses:

Romans 9:1; I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit

Christ Himself promised the Apostles that the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the truths of His divinity:

John 15:26; But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

St. Gregory explains further that the divine light which mysteriously appears to the mind of those who reach such lofty contemplative heights is not the essence of the divinity, but rather a manifestation of its energies. It is however the divinity itself, uncreated, eternal, without beginning or end:

“This Light is not symbolic nor created, but the shining of the hypostatic light; it is the divinity itself. The light on Mt. Tabor is not a third hidden nature in Christ, but the divinity itself.” (On the Uncreated Light of Tabor, St Gregory Palamas)

This mysterious activity of the grace of God, the Holy Spirit, manifests itself to the soul through God’s energies, and is especially recognized in the vision of the divine uncreated light. St. Gregory then explains that the writings of those Fathers who refer to the manifestations of divine grace are referring to one and the same mystical activity of the Holy Spirit. He continues by explaining to us that the union of God and man which was one of un-commingled essences in Christ is one of energies in us. Thus the contemplation of God teaches one by introspection, the nature of the divinity of Christ. This method of acquiring divine knowledge represents the fullness of the realization of Christ’s promises, made to His disciples at the last supper. The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, inspired by this mysterious action of God’s grace, put into writing the truths that were revealed to them by this mysterious activity.

In order that the thoughts of an individual not be mistaken for those that proceed from God, the Church instituted the holy Ecumenical Councils, which sought *consensus of revelation* from its participants, and issued proclamations of those consensuses. This is “the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the Church, leading her to a correct and God-pleasing confession of Christ’s divinity” that was spoken of earlier.

There are many reasons we have not seen the Church conduct an ecumenical council for so many centuries. Some say that there have been no great heresies to contend with, however this is untrue. The innovations introduced into the Western Church, such as the Filioque, purgatory, indulgences, the Immaculate Conception, Papal infallibility, and others, constitute grave Christological heresies. A better understanding of the reason we have not seen an ecumenical council convene is that Church hierarchs, in their humility, recognized they had not attained such lofty contemplative heights. This recognition of inadequacy and the spirit of humility that accompany it are being replaced today by a more secular and “enlightened” spirit, one that sees no need for contemplative proficiency when undertaking development of doctrine in the Church. This boldness leads Orthodox Church leaders to make grievous errors in judgment, adopting syncretistic arguments which lead to innovations that are hateful to the Godhead, innovations that deprive their flocks of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

As was shown in earlier discussions, we know *from spiritual law* that denying the divinity of Christ, or harboring any heresy, expels the salvific mystical activity of the Holy Spirit from the soul. We also observed St. Gregory eloquently explaining to us, that those who have prepared

themselves to be united with God recognize the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit as the grace of God manifested in His energies, especially in the vision of the uncreated light, and know *from experience* that heresy expels this grace from the soul.

(Letter of support for St Gregory Palamas by the Fathers of the Holy Mountain recited at the synod held in Constantinople in 1341) "These things we have been taught by the Scriptures, these things we have received from our fathers, these things we have come to know from our own small experience."

This is the grace of God of which those who do not confess Christ's divinity in a God-pleasing manner, and embrace heresy, have no part.

Is there Grace Outside the Orthodox Church?

There are those who agree that the doctrines of the Orthodox Church are divinely inspired, the result of the mystical activity of divine grace, but their adoration of syncretism leads them to confess that the grace of God has always existed outside the Church, in the sacraments and spiritual practices of the Heterodox, and even non-Christian religions. Previous discussions have shown from scripture that the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in the soul of one who confesses heresy. St. Gregory Palamas has shown us that the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit is recognized by its manifestations as the Grace of God (His energies) deifying individuals who are faithful sons and daughters of the Orthodox Church. However there exists an even more compelling argument indicating why the grace of God has never existed outside the Orthodox Church, an argument that is so simple a child has no problem comprehending it, yet those advanced in years and learning have trouble accepting.

The Logos assumed flesh becoming incarnate and uniting the divine and human natures within himself for two significantly important reasons; to restore fallen human nature, and to establish the Church and its sacramental life.

If the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit, that is the grace of God, has always existed outside the Church, and has manifested itself in the lives of the great moral teachers of ancient religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and later, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and others, why then was it necessary for Christ to assume flesh and suffer his ignoble death on the Cross? God could simply send his Holy Spirit to inspire the teachers of these religions, leading them over time to a common consensus, and the establishment of true religion. As explained previously, such an understanding of the evolution of religion exists today among freemasons and new-age philosophers of syncretism. No, such foolish thoughts proceed from a reprobate mind.

Christ assumed flesh in order that the Divine and Human natures could be united, but not commingled. This unification of the two natures in Christ's body empowered the heavenly to be united with the earthly here in this vale of tears. That is, it made possible the indwelling, without commingling, of the Grace of God in the Holy Mystery of communion. If the Logos of the Holy Trinity had not taken flesh and endured death on the Cross, uniting the divine nature with human nature, the Eucharistic bread and wine could not be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. It truth, the indwelling of the Grace of God in all the sacraments of the Orthodox Church would not have been possible. Further, the non-commingled infusion of the grace of God with fallen human nature, the union of God and man, the deification of fallen human nature, as witnessed by St. Gregory Palamas and all the great contemplative Fathers of the Church, would not have been possible. In other words, the Grace of God would not have been made accessible to *the nature* of fallen mankind.

The Orthodox Church bows down in deep gratitude, shedding copious tears, and rejoicing with a joy unutterable, singing and chanting unto to its Lord, God, and Savior, in recognition of the great self-emptying He endured, in order that it be possible for mankind to partake of His divine grace, and become sons of God. Selah.

If we accept, as those adorers of syncretism would have us believe, that the Grace of God has always existed in the sacraments and spiritual practices of those outside the Orthodox Church, then we are stating that the Logos *did not need to assume flesh*, or at the least that the assumption of flesh was only a *formality* that did not result in any significant *change in the spirituality of fallen man*. That is, the grace of God was accessible to all, even had the Logos not assumed flesh. Even the most casual observer can see that such a belief is *blasphemous with respect to the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit*, and is in direct opposition to everything the Orthodox Church of Christ has taught from its humble inception.

Thus, the simple argument stated above shows clearly that those who believe that the grace of God has always existed outside the Church are denying the *reason* for the incarnation of the Logos. If such a belief does not qualify as hateful to the Holy Spirit, and a heresy, what then does?

Yet others may question: “the Holy Prophets of God from the Old Testament prophesied by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this then shows clearly that the grace of God was manifest to mankind before Christ’s incarnation. How then can you explain this?” The answer to this question has been given above, but in order that those who in good conscience cannot glean it from the preceding discussion, we shall clarify it with certainty, for such a question indicates a gross misunderstanding of the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul. In the Old Testament, the energies of God were made manifest to the Prophets, enabling them to see with their mind the future as if it were the present. A clear example of God’s energies were manifest when the holy prophet Moses’ face shone with the uncreated light as he spoke to the Jewish people in the desert wilderness. St. Gregory Palamas makes this point with great clarity in his writings. However the *union of their fallen human nature with God was not possible*. That is, the prophets could not become sons of God by adoption; they awaited the incarnation of the Logos for their adoption by grace to be fulfilled.

Hebrews 11:39-40; And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Further the Lord manifest himself to the Holy Prophets for a very specific reason. That is, so there should be *no doubt* His Son, when He assumed flesh, would be recognized as the Messiah by the Holy Apostles. And further, that the Apostles would begin the work of establishing His holy Church without hesitation, thereby providing the sacramental means for dispensing God’s grace to all who would accept Him, both, Jew and Gentile, here in this vale of tears.

The question then arises; “very well then; let us assume that the grace of God was made capable of infusing itself, without being co-mingled, with fallen human nature as a result of the incarnation of the Logos. Why then is it not possible for this grace to manifest itself to those outside the Orthodox Church, *after* Christ’s incarnation and death on the Cross?” Oh the subtlety and craftiness of the fallen powers, their machinations know no end. As stated in previous discussions, *spiritual law* dictates that those who wish to be united with the Father must accept the Son, that is, confess the divinity of the Son in a God-pleasing Orthodox manner, without the admixture of heresy. To deny this requirement is to deny the applicability of spiritual law in the

life of modern man. It is like a man who tires of pulling a cart and thinks to himself; “the physical laws of friction and gravity cause me great toil and misery, I shall simply ignore them and they will go away!” Does the simple act of ignoring them cause them to go away? Of course it doesn’t, the cart remains a source of toil and misery in his life. Spiritual law proceeds from the nature of the divinity, it is immutable and unchanging.

One may continue by asking; “very well then, what of those who confess the divinity of Christ, but cannot accept a specific teaching of the Orthodox Church, for example the Roman Church which teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son? Or the Monophysites who believe that Christ’s human nature was wholly consumed by the divine nature. Surely they are not deprived of God’s grace for such small dogmatic misunderstandings.” Many Fathers have confessed, and the acts of the seven great Church Councils have declared, from the most ancient of times, that those who alter the doctrines of the Church place themselves outside the Church, they become Heterodox, and deprive themselves of God’s grace. I do not wish to belabor the reader by repeating that which is already well known, and which has been discussed earlier. However, there exists another way to look at this question, one that is based on a combination of dogmatic and moral theology, one that provides insight into the current state of the Church of God.

Indeed, the spiritual attitude that permeates this question belies a deep sympathy for the Heterodox, this sympathetic attitude wholly permeates those Orthodox who answer such a question with; “Of course they are not deprived of God’s grace”. Is such a sympathetic attitude wrong? Are such Orthodox Christians offending God by thinking this way? One who thinks this way is really stating that the Heterodox Christian is a living participant of the Church, that their sacraments are valid, that is; grace filled, that the differences in doctrine that separate the Heterodox Churches from the Orthodox Church are not impediments to the activity of grace in their mysteries.

It is intuitively obvious that those Orthodox who answer in such a way are exhibiting a hidden devotion to syncretism. That is, if Orthodox dogma forms an impediment to the union of two systems of religious thought, that dogma should be overlooked for the sake of love and brotherly communion. Is not this attitude exactly the attitude of the freethinking mason, and the syncretistic philosopher?

There exist among those who are Orthodox Hierarchs today, individuals who understand full well the Orthodox Church’s teaching with respect to heresy, and the exclusion of the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit among those who are Heterodox. However, these Hierarchs refuse to accept it, they reason that the Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Gregory the Dialogist, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory the Great, St. Mark of Ephesus, and all the Fathers who composed the decrees of the Holy Seven Councils, were “unenlightened”, and overly consumed with dogmatic precision to the exclusion of *love* for their brothers and sisters in Christ. They reason that the love *they* feel for the Heterodox is from God, it is divine, and prevents them from excluding the Heterodox from the Orthodox Church, this love supersedes dogmatic truth. Is it really the love of God?

Divine love, the true love of God, is seated at the pinnacle of the temple of Christian virtues. It is experienced by few, and practiced by the very elect, like St Gregory Palamas, who attain to union with God in this life, and are granted to experience it as a free gift of God. For such blessed individuals the love of God flows through them, like waves of an all consuming spiritual fire, enveloping their whole being. They are granted this gift, because they have acquired the

blessed spirit of God-pleasing humility, and gained the experience in spiritual life to not think highly of themselves, as a result of the gifts God grants them. Most Orthodox Christians who are honest with themselves will confess that they do not have such love;

A clear demonstration of this spiritual reality is given by St. Simeon the New Theologian:

(St. Simeon the New Theologian "On Faith") "Are there not Christians everywhere? But if you find it expedient, investigate and examine carefully whether they fulfill Christ's commandments; and indeed among myriad's you will with difficulty find one, who is Christian in both word and deed. Did not our Lord Jesus Christ say; 'He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do (*John 14. 12*)' But which one of us will dare to say: 'I do the works of Christ and truly believe in Christ'?"

If one can barely be found who truly performs the works of Christ, how then can we presume to have acquired the gift of God's Love? A gift which is the reward granted unto those who reach perfection in performing his works. Only a fool is willing to point out to others that they possess this gift when they do not possess it. Such foolishness, like that of the Pharisee in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, is the result of spiritual pride. As St. Cyril of Alexandria points out:

(St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke) Many at once are the faults of the Pharisee. For first of all he is boastful, and without sense; for he praises himself, although the sacred Scripture cries aloud: 'Let a neighbor praise thee, and not thy own mouth; a stranger and not thy own lips – (*Prov. 27:2*)'

The love for others that we feel in our daily lives is not the divine love that the Holy Fathers experienced. The love we experience, while not perfect, is instrumental in inspiring us to fulfill the commandments of Christ given to us in the gospels, but should not be placed above the lofty and wholly spiritually consuming divine love the Fathers of the church *experienced* as they laid down the dogmatic foundations of the Church. For indeed, such Fathers understood from their own personal spiritual experience and communion with God that He is love. But this same intimate communion, which allowed them to fully participate in His love, also made clear unto them expressions of faith.

As expressed by St. Gregory Palamas, the grace of God, divine love, forbids those who are consumed by it, to ignore the urgings of their conscience, they profess what has been revealed to them in complete obedience. Thus, through the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit, divine love guides the Saints throughout all ages towards that God-pleasing expression of faith that is the essence of Orthodoxy. Such are the urgings of the Spirit of love, which is also called the Spirit of truth. This Spirit would never allow those who participate in its beauty to teach what is untrue:

1 John 2:5; But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

John 14:21; He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 16:13; Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

1 Peter 1:8; (Christ) Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see [him] not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

True Christian love, divine love, is a manifestation of the Spirit of truth. They are both energies of God. He who bears the Spirit of God's love, is also the bearer of His truth, and as such, cannot harbor within himself sympathy for any teaching that betrays his faith, nor can he overlook dogmatic differences, and ignore the conscience of the Orthodox Church, for the sake of a "Pantheon" unity. This is spiritual law. How then can those hierarchs that put aside the divinely revealed truths that separate the Orthodox from the Heterodox, for the sake of a "feeling", not be placing themselves outside the True Orthodox Church by such actions? For in truth such actions blaspheme the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the Church.

It is this mystical activity of the Holy Spirit, the deifying grace of God, the indwelling of Christ in its mysteries, the well-spring of eternal life, the source of all goodness, and the abundance of divine love, that the True Orthodox Church guards and protects here in this vale of tears. For she knows from experience, and confesses boldly, that this mystical activity does not exist where there is Heterodoxy, where there is "any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie", where there is only darkness and deceit. *There is no grace outside the Orthodox Church.*

How Should the Orthodox Church Conduct itself with the Heterodox?

Recall that, in his epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul exhorts the Church:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

We should take note that St. Paul makes the bold assertion; "saith the Lord Almighty". He leaves no room for misinterpretation, what preceded that statement was given to him by direct revelation from God through contemplation and the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit in his soul. In other passages he declares what proceeds directly from God through revelation; (1 Corinthians 7:10) "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband", and what is his humble opinion; (1 Corinthians 7:25) "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful". We should therefore heed what the Holy Apostle advises us in this passage, as if it were spoken by Christ Himself.

There exist two interpretations of the above passage given by the Fathers of the Orthodox Church. The first interpretation, most eloquently expressed by St John Chrysostom in his commentary on this passage, addresses the moral aspect of this passage as it relates to our personal spiritual life. That is, we should consider sin and the passions to be the "unbelievers", the "unrighteousness", the "darkness", and the "infidels" from which the Holy Apostle warns us to abstain. We should not allow our body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, to become a

sanctuary of idols, that is, a home for a soul filled with passionate impulses and sin. We are instructed that purifying our mind, soul and body through prayer, fasting, deeds of mercy, love for our neighbor, and by avoiding occasions of sin (“touch not the unclean thing”), leads us to separation from that which is “unclean” and prepares us to be received by the Father, to become sons and daughters of the Father by adoption. St. John’s commentary is a beautiful summary of the Orthodox Christian ascetic spiritual life.

Such an interpretation of this passage is most edifying for the Orthodox Christian who seeks guidance in their personal spiritual life. However, with respect to the life of the Church, a second interpretation is provided by the Fathers of the Church. These Fathers include St Gregory the Theologian, St Basil the Great, St Leo the Great, St Ambrose of Milan, and a host of Church Canons from the seven great councils. In this interpretation the Fathers observe the Lord, through the pen of St. Paul, providing guidance to the Church with respect to the conduct she must exhibit in her relations with *all* those who are outside the Church, not just the reprobate pagan religions that existed during the time of St. Paul’s missionary activities.

In these passages the Fathers of the Church, individually, and collectively, agree that the Orthodox Church must isolate itself from intercommunion with those who teach heresy, that is heterodox doctrines, because such intercommunion offends the Holy Spirit. For those who have read what precedes this discussion this is intuitively obvious, but in order that those who are reluctant to accept what has been written for fear that it does not have historical precedence in the Orthodox Church we offer the following references from the most ancient times in the Church. The Fathers who are quoted in the following speak in such a way that their speech appears lacking in love, and at times coarse. However, if they are read with the understanding that these Hierarchs *knew* that heresy deprives the rational flock of the grace of God; they are then observed to be written with the deepest love and concern for the spiritual wellbeing of their flocks.

(The Epistle of St. Ignatius the Godbearer to the Smyrnæans: Ch IV “Beware of Heretics”) I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that ye also hold the same opinions as I do. But I guard you beforehand from those beasts in the shape of men, whom you must not only not receive, but, if it be possible, not even meet with; only you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance, which, however, will be very difficult. Yet Jesus Christ, who is our true life, has the power of effecting this.

(St Irenæus: Introductory Note to Irenæus Against Heresies: Chapter XVI.—“Absurd interpretations of the Marcosians”.) But as many as separate from the Church, and give heed to such old wives’ fables as these, are truly self-condemned; and these men Paul commands us, “after a first and second admonition, to avoid.” And John, the disciple of the Lord, has intensified their condemnation, when he desires us not even to address to them the salutation of “good-speed;” for, says he, “He that bids them be of good-speed is a partaker with their evil deeds;” and that with reason, “for there is no good-speed to the ungodly,” saith the Lord.

(St Irenæus: Against Heresies Book V: Chapter XX.—Those pastors are to be heard to whom the apostles committed the Churches, possessing one and the same doctrine of salvation; the heretics, on the other hand, are to be avoided. We must think soberly with regard to the mysteries of the faith.) 1. Now all these [heretics]

are of much later date than the bishops to whom the apostles committed the Churches; which fact I have in the third book taken all pains to demonstrate. It follows, then, as a matter of course that these heretics aforementioned, since they are blind to the truth, and deviate from the [right] way, will walk in various roads; and therefore the footsteps of their doctrine are scattered here and there without agreement or connection. But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments, *and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution*, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. And undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world. For to her is entrusted the light of God; and therefore the “wisdom” of God, by means of which she saves all men, “is declared in [its] going forth; it uttereth [its voice] faithfully in the streets, is preached on the tops of the walls, and speaks continually in the gates of the city.” For the Church preaches the truth everywhere, and she is the seven-branched candlestick which bears the light of Christ.

2. Those, therefore, who desert the preaching of the Church, call in question the knowledge of the holy presbyters, not taking into consideration of how much greater consequence is a religious man, even in a private station, than a blasphemous and impudent sophist. Now, such are all the heretics, ... *proceeding on their way variously, inharmoniously, and foolishly*,... as blind men are led by the blind, they shall deservedly fall into the ditch of ignorance lying in their path, ever seeking and never finding out the truth. *It behooves us, therefore, to avoid their doctrines, and to take careful heed lest we suffer any injury from them; but to flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures.* For the Church has been planted as a garden (*paradisus*) in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, “Thou mayest freely eat from every tree of the garden,” that is, Eat ye from every Scripture of the Lord; but ye shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord. For these men ... *set their own impious minds above the God who made them.* They therefore form opinions on what is beyond the limits of the understanding. For this cause also the apostle says, “*Be not wise beyond what it is fitting to be wise, but be wise prudently,*” that we be not cast forth by eating of the “knowledge” of these men from the paradise of life.

(*St. John Chrysostom; Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians Homily II. Philippians i. 8–1*) This I say not for my own sake, says he, but for yours, for there is danger lest any one be spoiled by the love of the heretics; for all this he hints at, and see how he brings it in. Not for my own sake, says he, do I say this, but that ye may be sincere, that is, that ye receive no spurious doctrine under the pretence of love. ... that ye may then be found pure, having caused no one to stumble.

(Correspondence between St John Chrysostom and Innocent, Bishop of Rome: “Innocent, bishop, to presbyters and deacons, and to all the clergy and people of the church of Constantinople, the brethren beloved who are subject to the bishop John, greeting”) And if others [teachings] are brought forward by certain men, which are at variance with the canons framed at Nicæa, and are proved to have been composed by heretics, let them be rejected by the Orthodox Catholic bishops. For the inventions of heretics ought not to be appended to the Orthodox Catholic canons; for by their adverse and unlawful decrees they are always intending to weaken the design of the canons of Nicæa.

(St John Chrysostom; Commentary of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans: 1: 17) Let heretics hearken to the voice of the Spirit, for such is the nature of their reasonings. They are like some labyrinth or puzzles which have no end to them anywhere, and do not let the reason stand upon the rock, and have their very origin in vanity. For being ashamed to allow of faith, and to seem ignorant of heavenly things, they involve themselves in the dust-cloud of countless reasonings.

(St John Chrysostom: “Commentary of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galations Ch:1:7) ... “And would pervert the Gospel of Christ.” They had, in fact, only introduced one or two commandments, circumcision and the observance of days, but he says that the Gospel was subverted, in order to show that a slight adulteration vitiates the whole. ... Where then are those who charge us with being contentious in separating from heretics, and say that there is no real difference between us except what arises from our ambition? Let them hear Paul’s assertion, that those who had but slightly innovated, subverted the Gospel.

(St. Athanasius the Great; Against the Arians, Discourse II: Chapter XVII.—Introduction to Proverbs viii. 22 continued.) For the Arians do not baptize into Father and Son, but into Creator and creature, and into Maker and work. And as a creature is other than the Son, so the Baptism, which is supposed to be given by them, is other than the truth, though they pretend to name the Name of the Father and the Son, because of the words of Scripture, For not he who simply says, ‘O Lord,’ gives Baptism; but he who with the Name has also the right faith. On this account therefore our Saviour also did not simply command to baptize, but first says, ‘Teach;’ then thus: ‘Baptize into the Name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost;’ that the right faith might follow upon learning, and together with faith might come the consecration of Baptism.

(Life of St. Anthony the Great Ch. 68) And he (St. Anthony) was altogether wonderful in faith and religious, for he never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning; nor had he friendly dealings with the Manichæans or any other heretics; or, if he had, only as far as advising them that they should change to piety. For he thought, and asserted, that intercourse with such as these was harmful and destructive to the soul. In the same manner also he loathed the heresy of the Arians, and exhorted all neither to approach them nor to hold their erroneous belief. And once when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned

their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.

(St. Athanasius the Great; History of the Arians: 60. Martyrdom of Eutychius.) ‘We are beaten for the sake of the Truth, but we will not hold communion with the heretics: beat us now as thou wilt; God will judge thee for this.’

(St. Athanasius the Great; History of the Arians: 80. Duty of separating from heretics.) ... that we all obey the precept which it has given us both in regard to other heresies, and especially respecting this. That precept is as follows; ‘Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of them, and be ye separate, that bear the vessels of the Lord.’ This may suffice to instruct us all, so that if any one has been deceived by them, he may go out from them, as out of Sodom, and not return again unto them, lest he suffer the fate of Lot’s wife; and if any one has continued from the beginning pure from this impious heresy, he may glory in Christ and say, ‘We have not stretched out our hands to a strange god.

(St. Athanasius the Great; Festal Letters, Letter III 5.)... as Paul saith, ‘Not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth;’ reverently trusting that we are reconciled through Christ, and not departing from faith in Him, nor do we defile ourselves together with heretics, and strangers to the truth, whose conversation and whose will degrade them. But rejoicing in afflictions, we break through the furnace of iron and darkness, and pass, unharmed, over that terrible Red Sea. Thus also, when we look upon the confusion of heretics, we shall, with Moses, sing that great song of praise, and say, ‘We will sing unto the Lord, for He is to be gloriously praised.’

(St. Athanasius the Great; Festal Letters, Letter VII 4.) Thus it is that all those who are aliens from the Orthodox Church, heretics, and schismatics, since they are excluded from glorifying (God) with the saints, cannot properly even continue to be observers of the feast [Pascha]. But the righteous man, although he appears dying to the world, uses boldness of speech, saying, ‘I shall not die, but live, and narrate all Thy marvelous deeds.’

(St. Gregory of Nyssa, Book II, 1. on the Incarnation) In the Faith then which was delivered by God to the Apostles we admit neither subtraction, nor alteration, nor addition, knowing assuredly that he who presumes to pervert the Divine utterance by dishonest quibbling, the same “is of his father the devil,” who leaves the words of truth and “speaks of his own,” becoming the father of a lie. For whatsoever is said otherwise than in exact accord with the truth is assuredly false and not true.

(St. Jerome; Dialogue against the Luciferians, 9.) If a bishop lays his hands on men he lays them on those who have been baptized in the right faith, and who have believed that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are three persons, but one essence. But an Arian has no faith but this (close your ears, my hearers, that you may not be defiled by words so grossly impious), that the Father alone is very God, and that Jesus Christ our Savior is a creature, and the Holy Ghost the Servant of both. How can he then receive the Holy Ghost from the Church, who has not yet obtained remission of sins? For the Holy Ghost must have a clean abode: nor

will He become a dweller in that temple which has not for its chief priest the true faith.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures; Lecture I- 7.) We may not receive Baptism twice or thrice; else it might be said, Though I have failed once, I shall set it right a second time: whereas if thou fail once, the thing cannot be set right; for there is *one Lord, and one faith, and one baptism*: for only the heretics are re-baptized, because the former was no baptism.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures; Lecture I-20.) Hate all heretics, ... But hate [the heretic] because of his impious doctrines, hate thou the worker of wickedness, the receptacle of all filth, who gathereth up the mire of every heresy. ... Heed not their fair speech, nor their supposed humility: for they are serpents, *a generation of vipers*. Judas too *said Hail! Master*, even while he was betraying Him. Heed not their kisses, and beware of their venom.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures; Lecture XV-9.) And formerly the heretics were manifest; but now the Church is filled with heretics in disguise. For men have fallen away from the truth, and *have itching ears*. Is it a plausible discourse? all listen to it gladly. Is it a word of correction? all turn away from it. Most have departed from right words, and rather choose the evil, than desire the good. This therefore is *the falling away*, and the enemy is soon to be looked for: and meanwhile he has in part begun to send forth his own forerunners, that he may then come prepared upon the prey. Look therefore to thyself, O man, and make safe thy soul. The Church now charges thee before the Living God; she declares to thee the things concerning Antichrist before they arrive.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures; Lecture XV-33.) But thou, O hearer, worship only Him as thy King, and flee all heretical error.

(St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures; Lecture XVIII-26.) And if ever thou art sojourning in cities, inquire not simply where the Lord's House is (for the other sects of the profane also attempt to call their own dens houses of the Lord), nor merely where the Church is, but where is the True Orthodox Catholic Church.

(St. Basil the Great; Letter CLXXXVIII-To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons). So it seemed good to the ancient authorities to reject the baptism of heretics altogether, but to admit that of schismatics, on the ground that they still belonged to the Church.

(St. Basil the Great; Letter CCLXII -To the Monk Urbicius.) I therefore urge that these errors receive ecclesiastical correction, and that you abstain from communion with the heretics.

(St. Hillary of Poitiers; On the Councils of the Eastern fathers-30). "Having therefore held this faith from the beginning, and being resolved to hold it to the end in the sight of God and Christ, we say anathema to every heretical and perverted sect, and if any man teaches contrary to the wholesome and right faith of the Scriptures, saying that there is or was time, or space, or age before the Son was begotten, let him be anathema.

(*St. Hillary of Poitiers; On the Councils of the Eastern fathers—40*) “But those who say that the Son is sprung from things non-existent, or from another substance and not from God, and that there was a time or age when He was not, the holy Orthodox Catholic Church regards as aliens.”

(*St. Ambrose of Milan; Three books on the Holy Spirit, Book II- Ch.XV:134,135*) Such men, who sow disputes—that is to say, heretics—the Apostle bids us leave alone. Of them he says in yet another place, that “certain shall depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits, and the doctrines of devils.” John, likewise, saith that heretics are Antichrists, plainly marking out the Arians. For this [Arian] heresy began to be after all other heresies, and hath gathered the poisons of all. As it is written of the Antichrist, that “he opened his mouth to blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name, and to make war with His saints,” so do they also dishonour the Son of God...

(*St. Theodore the Studite, Letter to Abbot Theophilus, PG 99, 1049*) With a great voice, Saint John Chrysostom declared that not only heretics, but also they who hold communion with them are enemies of God.

(*St. Theodore the Studite, To the Patriarch of Jerusalem, PG 99, 1164.*) Concerning the faith, the heretics were totally shipwrecked; and as for the others, even if their reason did not founder, nonetheless, because of their communion with heresy, they too were destroyed.

(*St. Paphnutius; Letter to Timothy the Reader, PG, 78, 252C.*) Just as the fishermen hide the hook with bait and covertly hook the fish, similarly, the crafty allies of the heresies cover their evil teachings and corrupt understanding with pietism and hook the more simple, bringing them to spiritual death.

Applicable Church Canons:

(*Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council*) Canon X: If any one shall pray, even in a private house, with an excommunicated person, let him also be excommunicated.

(*Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council*) Canon XI: If any clergyman shall join in prayer with a deposed clergyman, as if he were a clergyman, let him also be deposed.

(*Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council*) Canon XLV: Let a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, who has only prayed with heretics, be excommunicated: but if he has permitted them to perform any clerical office, let him be deposed.

(*Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council*) Canon XLVI: We ordain that a bishop, or presbyter, who has admitted the baptism or sacrifice of heretics, be deposed. For what concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath a believer with an infidel?

(*Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council*) Canon LXIV: If any clergyman or layman shall enter into a synagogue of Jews or heretics to pray, let the former be deposed and let the latter be excommunicated.

(Apostolic Canons, c.c. 100 – 300 AD, ratified at the 1st Ecumenical Council)
Canon LXXI: If any Christian brings oil into a temple of the heathen or into a synagogue of the Jews at their feast, or lights lamps, let him be excommunicated.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon VI: IT is not permitted to heretics to enter the house of God while they continue in heresy.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon VII: PERSONS converted from heresies, that is, of the Novatians, Photinians, and Quartodecimans, whether they were catechumens or communicants among them, shall not be received until they shall have anathematized every heresy, and particularly that in which they were held; and afterwards those who among them were called communicants, having thoroughly learned the symbols of the faith, and having been anointed with the holy chrism, shall so communicate in the holy Mysteries.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon VIII: PERSONS converted from the heresy of those who are called Phrygians, even should they be among those reputed by them as clergymen, and even should they be called the very chiefest, are with all care to be both instructed and baptized by the bishops and presbyters of the Church.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon IX: THE members of the Church are not allowed to meet in the cemeteries, nor attend the so-called martyries of any of the heretics, for prayer or service; but such as so do, if they be communicants, shall be excommunicated for a time; but if they repent and confess that they have sinned they shall be received.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon X: THE members of the Church shall not indiscriminately marry their children to heretics.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon XXXI: IT is not lawful to make marriages with all [sorts of] heretics, nor to give our sons and daughters to them; but rather to take of them, if they promise to become Christians.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon XXXII: IT is unlawful to receive the blessings of heretics, for they are rather curses, than blessings.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon XXXIII: NO one shall join in prayers with heretics or schismatics.

(Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council) Canon XXXIV: NO Christian shall forsake the martyrs of Christ, and turn to false martyrs, that is, to those of the heretics, or those who formerly were heretics; for they are aliens from God. Let those, therefore, who go after them, be anathema.

(*Council of Laodicea in Phrygia c.c. 343 AD, ratified at the 2nd Ecumenical council*) Canon XXXVII: IT is not lawful to receive portions sent from the feasts of Jews or heretics, nor to feast together with them.

(*Council of Trullo, c.c. 692 AD*) Canon LXXII: AN orthodox man is not permitted to marry an heretical woman, nor an orthodox woman to be joined to an heretical man. But if anything of this kind appear to have been done by any [we require them] to consider the marriage null, and that the marriage be dissolved. For it is not fitting to mingle together what should not be mingled, nor is it right that the sheep be joined with the wolf, nor the lot of sinners with the portion of Christ.

Finally, a few words from St. Basil the Great, concerning the state of the Churches during his episcopacy, words which are equally applicable today:

(*St. Basil the Great; Letter CLXIV-To Ascholius.*) And what is our condition? Love is grown cold; the teaching of the Fathers is being laid waste; everywhere is shipwreck of the Faith; the mouths of the Faithful are silent; the people, driven from the houses of prayer, lift up their hands in the open air to their Lord which is in heaven. Our afflictions are heavy, martyrdom is nowhere to be seen, because those who evilly entreat us are called by the same name as ourselves. Wherefore pray to the Lord yourself, and join all Christ's noble athletes with you in prayer for the Churches, to the end that, if any further time remains for this world, and all things are not being driven to destruction, God may be reconciled to his own Churches and restore them to their ancient peace.

(*Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church - Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976, p. 16.*) Since the Church is catholic in all her parts, each one of her members not only the clergy but also each layman, is called to confess and to defend the truth of tradition, opposing even the bishops should they fall into heresy.

(*Saint Theodore the Studite PG 99*) "One who is well-pleasing to God is to be preferred over myriads who are invested with presumption. ... It is your prerogative to prefer the drowned multitude to Noah who was saved; but as for me, allow me to run to the Ark along with the few.

Orthodox Christian Syncretism – the Secular Orthodox Christian

"Syncretism is deeply embedded in the mind of World Orthodoxy" For those who have not read the previous discussions, such a statement is sure to raise eyebrows. However, there is much truth in the statement. The influence of secular thought and freethinking syncretism is largely to blame for all the spiritual conflicts that are observed in the Orthodox Church today. Conflicts that concern the Calendar question, ecumenism, renovationism, the "Living Church" etc. These conflicts exist in the Orthodox Church because the leaders of the Church, and their followers, have been swayed by syncretistic philosophy; the faithful recognize this and oppose them. The following observations show that the spirit of syncretism that characterizes freemasonry, and the ecumenical movement, is the same spirit of syncretism that characterizes the Orthodox Christian syncretist. If one finds themselves agreeing with what The Orthodox Christian syncretist

believes, they can be sure that their faith has been compromised by notions that are in essence alien to Orthodoxy, and offensive to the most Holy Spirit.

1. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that the Grace of God exists and is active in the souls of all righteous people, be they Orthodox, Heterodox, or for that matter even non-Christian. If they are righteous they are vessels of God's Grace. What one believes is not important, what is important is one's character. A good example of this, are those Orthodox who believe that Mother Theresa of Calcutta was a vessel of God's Grace, despite her blatantly obvious syncretistic beliefs. Indeed the Orthodox Christian syncretist may be completely at ease with her teachings, she spoke as one who had acquired knowledge of the "super-essential" truths that are taught in Freemasonry. Following are some of her teachings, taken from recorded discussions:

"It is humiliating to ask people to change their religion as it is something that cannot be bought and sold. At the most what one can change is the hearts of the people for the better."

"We never try to convert those who receive [aid from Missionaries of Charity] to Christianity but in our work we bear witness to the love of God's presence, and if Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, or agnostics become for this, better men -- simply better -- we will be satisfied. It matters to the individual what church he belongs to. If that individual thinks and believes that their way is the only way to God for her or him, then this is the way God comes into their life. If he does not know any other way, and if he has no doubt, so that he does not need to search, then this is his way to salvation."

"Of course, I convert. I convert you to be a better Hindu or a better Muslim or a better Protestant. Once you've found God, it's up to you to decide how to worship him."

"I love all religions, but I am in love with my own."

In an interview with a nun who worked with Mother Teresa about dying Hindus the following response was heard (reported in *Christian News*): "These people are waiting to die. What are you telling them to prepare them for death and eternity? She replied candidly, 'We tell them to pray to their Bhagwan, to their gods'."

As explained in the preceding discussions, the Grace of God cannot dwell in the soul of one who teaches heresy, how then could God's grace dwell in the soul of individuals who do not see any need to confess Christ's Divinity in a God-pleasing manner, in order to worship God and receive His Grace? It is not a co-incidence that Mother Teresa is revered by the secular world.

St John Chrysostom refers to this folly in his commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians:

(*Homily XLVII. Acts XXI. 39, 40*): Many of the heretics have thus prevailed, and while their doctrines are corrupt, yet the greater part of men out of reverence for their (virtuous) life did not go on to examine their doctrine: and many even condemning them on account of their doctrine, reverence them on account of their life: not rightly indeed, but still so it is, that they do thus feel towards them.

(St. John Chrysostom; Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians Homily II. Philippians i. 8–1) This I say not for my own sake, says he, but for yours, for there is danger lest any one be spoiled by the love of the heretics; for all this he hints at, and see how he brings it in. Not for my own sake, says he, do I say this, but that ye may be sincere, that is, that ye receive no spurious doctrine under the pretence of love. ... that ye may then be found pure, having caused no one to stumble.

2. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that the Grace of God exists in all religions, only it exists in its fullness in the Orthodox Church. They confuse the mystical activity of the Holy Spirit through divine grace with manifestations of God's mercy and love. The Orthodox Church recognizes that God's mercy is made manifest to all mankind

Matthew 5:45 ... for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

This mercy of God manifests itself in many ways;

- a. In the stability of the natural order of creation.
- b. In the answering of prayers and supplications.
- c. In the guidance of souls to a correct confession of faith which is accomplished through the activity of the conscience. For all mankind is created in God's image and those who incline their hearts to righteousness are instinctively guided by their thoughts to seek their Creator. They, like Homing Pidgeons, instinctively navigate their way back to their fathers abode. *(Proverbs 8:17) I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*
- d. Openly miraculous manifestations of His Divinity, such as those miraculous events that are recorded in the Gospels, and in the lives of the saints, and the most notable manifestation in the modern era, the appearance of the Holy Light at the Paschal service in Jerusalem. For this light is made manifest for all to see, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, even Atheist. This great manifestation is sent every year unto all mankind as a witness to the truth of Orthodoxy, and as a token of God's love and concern for His fallen creation, yet mankind ignores it.
- e. In the giving and maintenance of life in creation *(Tone 5: Matins Odes of Accent) To the Holy Spirit belongeth the lordship of life, for from Him every living being hath its breath, as also from the Father together with the Son.*

However, as explained in previous discussions, the mystical deifying activity of the Holy Spirit, the grace of the Godhead that is imparted unto every Orthodox Christian at Baptism, and manifests itself in the sacramental life of the Orthodox Church, is not imparted to the Heterodox or the Non-Christian, neither through their sacraments, nor through their religious practices, because they do not confess a right faith in God, this is spiritual law.

3. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that all peoples worship the same God. They surmise that the lack of knowledge concerning differences between various religions, and for that matter, even the lack of interest in learning about those differences does not hinder the activity of Grace within such peoples. If one believes in the Supreme Being and leads a righteous life, God's grace is imparted to them, despite personal beliefs that disagree with those of the Orthodox Church. A good example of this aspect of Orthodox Christian syncretism is demonstrated every time an Orthodox priest communes a freemason, or any

individual that he knows harbors heretical beliefs. Sadly, the Priest who commits this is not being compassionate, or forgiving, but is offending the Holy Spirit.

4. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that a bishop can teach heresy, but because his flock does not have the capacity to comprehend the heresy, and are only interested in living a church oriented life, the Grace of God is imparted unto them in the mysteries, despite the heretical teachings of their bishop.

This belief is in direct opposition to the Orthodox understanding of the Church, the decrees of the Holy councils, and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. The canons that clearly define the boundaries of the Church were established by the Holy Spirit to preserve the Church from heresy precisely because heresy deprives the innocent flock of the mysterious activity God's grace in the mysteries, as described previously. If one believes that a bishop can teach heresy, but the Grace of God is imparted unto those who are ignorant, then they are unwittingly denying the very reason for the Church's existence.

Many Fathers refer to the bishop as the eye of the body of the Church, placed in such a lofty position in the stead of Christ, to watch over and guard the flock that Christ has entrusted to him. If the bishop teaches heresy, filling his being with the darkness and deceit of falsehood, how then can he be a divine and God-pleasing dispenser of God's grace? Christ Himself instructs us that the darkness that results is absolute, there is no "partial grace":

Matthew 6:22-23; The light of the body [the Church] is the eye [the bishop]: if therefore thine eye be single [oneness of mind with Orthodox doctrine], thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil [professing teachings that oppose Orthodox doctrine], thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

5. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that all religions harbor truth, and that the mysteries and spiritual practices of any religion may be blessed with God's grace, merely for the sake of the true truth they do believe, no matter how trivial. One may suggest that they know of no Orthodox bishop who believes this, but it can quickly be proven that this belief is all-pervasive: Did not Patriarch Athanagorus lift the Anathema's against Rome because he saw the differences in teaching (i.e. definitions of truth) as insignificant. The entire Greek New-Calendar Church, and the majority of the Synods of World Orthodoxy, agree with Patriarch Athanagorus, and accept the mysteries of the Roman and Anglican Churches as valid, despite the fact that they harbor teachings that have been identified as heretical. This belief has been expressed in the Thyateria Confession of Archbishop Athanagorus of Thyateria (England), and more recently in the Balamand agreement which was signed and ratified by the Following Orthodox participants:

Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (by proxy)

Patriarchate of Russia (by proxy)

Patriarchate of Alexandria (by proxy)

Patriarchate of Antioch (by proxy)

Patriarchate of Romania (by proxy)

Church of Poland (by proxy)

Church of Cyprus (by proxy)

Church of Albania (by proxy)

Church of Finland (by proxy)

6. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that the mystery of salvation exists in an existential plane, where members of heterodox and even non-Christian faiths are mystically united with Christ's Holy Church, even though they do not know it. They cannot accept the notion of the soul's condemnation, (except for Traditional Orthodox Christians, whom they see as the only ones worthy of the fires of Hell) they are essentially Originists, with a religious humanist world view.

The Church does offer the possibility of salvation to those who, for no fault of their own, find themselves outside the Orthodox Church, and deprived of the possibility of knowing Christ here in this vale of tears, merely because they were raised in a cultural situation that prevented such knowledge being imparted unto them. The Holy Orthodox Church speaks of this during every Paschal Cycle. That is, the descent of the Lord into Hades and His preaching there, delivering from bondage to the enemy those whom he has chosen in his own mysterious manner, uniting them to His Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Such was the case with the multitude of innocents who were slaughtered by Herod. They knew not baptism, nor the Lord, however after the Lord arose from the dead they were accepted by him and received crowns in paradise, as do all the righteous from "the ages". This is a great mystery, and one which Lovers of truth delight in each year, while celebrating the festival of festivals, and feast of feasts, openly beholding the mysterious light of Christ's resurrection descending into Hades and bringing good tidings to those dwelling in the gloomy darkness of ignorance. The same applies for those innocent Orthodox Christians who were deprived of grace in the mysteries, because their bishop was a heretic, but they were unlearned and ignorant of such things, yet loved righteousness and truth in their lives.

7. The Orthodox Christian syncretist does not believe that truth is black and white, for him everything is gray. A good example of this is the explanation of the 1983 Anathema against Ecumenism by Archpriest Alexander Lebedev. The conscience of the Church, acting through the ROCOR bishops at the Sobor in 1983 passed judgment on the heresies of ecumenism, the branch theory, and the belief that the mysteries of the heterodox are grace filled and salvific.

Those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ's Church is divided into so-called "branches" which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all "branches" or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and Eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore, to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians, Anathema!

This anathema exposes any of those who bareheaded and in their Cathedra, teach the teachings described in that anathema as offending the Holy Spirit. Some try to explain away the anathema as only applying to ROCOR clergy, such as Archpriest Alexander Lebedev's confusing explanation. Such explanations are themselves based in syncretistic thinking. This is simply demonstrated: The ban is against the teachings of ecumenism, which are banned only because they are lies, and consequently opposed to truth. Since God is the spirit of truth, they are opposed to God. It is irrelevant where they are taught (i.e. the jurisdiction) the lie is ecumenism itself, and those who teach it knowing this, are consequently under the ban.

Ecumenism remains banned no matter where it raises its ugly head. Those who would have you believe that it is only banned in the ROCOR Synod, are stating that what is a lie in the ROCOR Synod, is somehow not a lie in another jurisdiction. That what is forbidden as ungodly in the ROCOR Synod is somehow acceptable and God-worthy in another jurisdiction. This is Syncretism in all its glory.

8. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes dearly that love and compassion supersede truth. They speak of such things, without understanding the simple truth that the Spirit of Truth *is* God, and without it, there can be no true love and compassion. Truth - or more perfectly a true faith, comes first, then ascetic struggle, combined with true repentance, and if God wills, love, or more perfectly - the spirit of truth, comes and makes its abode in our souls. Without truth there can be no love, only a poor substitute, one that is purely emotional and common to all mankind and all systems of religious and secular thought. Such human love does not save ones soul from the darkness of ignorance. The Fathers have warned us through their ascetic writings to beware of such emotions, as they can easily seduce the soul away from pleasing God, and lead it towards pleasing man.
9. The Orthodox Christian syncretist believes that the aforementioned canons setting boundaries with respect to our relations with the heterodox are no longer applicable. However they forcefully and emphatically enforce those canons that apply to relations between Orthodox believers (i.e. those with respect to autocephaly, and other jurisdictional questions). This attitude offers a most enlightening perspective on what it is that is truly important to such Hierarchs. They want to preserve power and influence, not the truth.
10. The Orthodox Christian syncretist abhors the proselyte, especially one who converts because he/she recognizes Orthodoxy as true religion. Their syncretistic ecclesiology recognizes the *religion* of the heterodox as God-pleasing, and for this reason they do not see a need for one to convert from heterodoxy to orthodoxy. The proselyte on the other hand, has trodden the blessed path spoken of by St Athanasius the Great:

(St. Athanasius the Great; Against the Arians, Discourse II: Chapter XVII.— Introduction to Proverbs viii. 22 continued.) On this account therefore our Saviour also did not simply command to baptize, but first says, ‘Teach;’ then thus: ‘Baptize into the Name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost;’ that the right faith might follow upon learning, and together with faith might come the consecration of Baptism.

The Proselyte converts to Orthodoxy after being taught and having understood well, that Orthodoxy is true religion enriched with the fullness of God’s grace, and that heterodoxy is false religion, empty and void of grace. Such individuals are thorns in the side of the orthodox syncretist, and are therefore despised by them as overzealous, unlearned, and spiritually inexperienced acolytes, when often the opposite is true. The Lord takes special care of the Proselyte, freeing him/her from the fettering chains of their former religious misunderstandings, granting them spiritual insight, setting them aright and revealing unto them what pleases Him. The Lord takes special care to preserve and nurture them.

(Psalm 145:8): The Lord looseth the fettered; the Lord maketh wise the blind; the Lord setteth aright the fallen; the Lord loveth the righteous; the Lord preserveth the proselytes.

However, the Proselyte who converts because of cultural circumstance, such as marriage, and has no interest in the faith, but some interest in the culture is welcomed with open arms. The orthodox syncretist does not have to worry about such an individual probing and asking revealing questions about the anti-orthodox activities of the orthodox ecumenist.

May the grace of God preserve us from the beguiling and spiritually destructive ways of the Orthodox syncretist.

The Fate of the Heterodox

There are many heterodox Christians who truly believe in the divinity of Christ, and dedicate their lives to serving the Lord by fulfilling the commandments prescribed in the Gospels. These individuals cannot accept the notion that they are deprived of God's grace, merely because they are not Orthodox Christians. They tell of the wondrous and miraculous signs that accompany their missionary activities, and the multitudes of Christians they present to the Lord. Based on the previous discussions, what is to become of such individuals?

Spiritual reasoning teaches us that no-one, orthodox or heterodox, may declare the spiritual fate of any individual who has lived their life here in this vale of tears. Only Christ may know the fate of each individual, which fate will be revealed at the general resurrection. There is no question however, that the heterodox Christian does not participate in the grace-filled life of the Church here in this world, how then can such individuals inherit the Kingdom of God?

The answer to this question can be gleaned from a careful study of the scriptures and the writings of the Fathers, however a more accessible method of instruction is found in the liturgical service books of the Orthodox Church, specifically the Resurrectional Oktoechos, and the Lenten Triodion/Pentecostarion.

Man is created in God's image, and the soul of an Orthodox Christian that is rightly ordered, is granted to understand the will of God, as the spirit of God allows it. Such faithful servants of Christ become true dispensers of justice, comprehending "with a right spirit" the will of the Godhead. Thus, the orthodox Christian ascetic is a truly righteous examiner and judge of spiritual matters. Fallen man, created in God's image is still driven by his nature to recognize what is right and true, and attempts to dispense justice based on this recognition; however he, like the secular humanist, falls short of what constitutes divine justice. This is because he places his trust in pure reason, and not on divine reason.

The fathers who composed the beautiful services found in the Liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church stand among the great contemplatives of the Orthodox Church, and as such are "true dispensers of justice comprehending with a right spirit the will of the Godhead". They dedicated their lives to the acquisition of that true knowledge which comes from union with God. They composed these services, as a means of conveying this knowledge to the generations who followed them.

We therefore understand and confess that the Fathers who composed these divine services having acquired the Godly spirit of discernment, put forth in melody and spiritual Odes the knowledge of that true and divine justice that comes from God, and not the carnal and legalistic justice that is so often found in the writings of those who pervert the true knowledge of God. The usage of these services in the Orthodox Church for centuries gives them credence and authority, they are a wellspring of knowledge for those thirsting for answers to questions concerning the fate of all mankind. This knowledge teaches us that God, who loves His creation and desires that

[Ἦ ἸΟΨΕΔΩΣ ΒΟ ἸΔΩ, ΒΉΥΗΝΥΑ ΟὔΖΗΗΚΗ ΒΕΒΟΔΗΛΩ ἘΐΗ, ΗΕΤΛΉΝΙΕ ΔΑΡΔΑ
ЧЕЛОВѢЧЕСКОМḶ ΡΟΔḶ:]

(*Tone 2: Vespers: 3rd Resurrection Aposticha*): ... and as all-powerful thou didst descend into Hades, snatching from the hand of the mighty one the souls of those who awaited therein thy coming granting them to dwell in Paradise instead of Hades...

[ΒΟ ἸΔΩ ΖΕ ΙΗΖΨΕΔΩΣ ἸΑΚΩ ΙΗΛΕΝΩ, ΤΑΜΩ ΤΒΟΕΓḶ ΠΗΨΕΨΤΕΨΑ ὠΖΗΔΑΪΟΥΨΙΑ,
ΗΕΧΗΤΗΒΩΣ ἸΑΚΩ ὞ ΞΒΉΡΑ ΚΡΉΠΚΑΓΩ, ΡΑἷ ΒΜΉΨΤΩ ἸΔΑ ΖΗΤΗ ΔΑΡΟΒΑΛΩ ἘΐΗ.]

The Lord delivered from the hand of the tyrant, those who awaited His coming, granting them life in the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than death in Hades. Who are those who awaited His coming? The Orthodox Church understands these souls to be the righteous from every age.

(*Tone 1: Vespers: Resurrection Aposticha*): ... when Hades met thee he was vexed, while the souls of the righteous receiving thee below rejoiced ...

[ἘΓḶΖΕ ἸΔΩ ἘΡΉΤΩ ΔΟΛΉ, ὠΓΟΡΗΪΑ, ἢ ΠΡΑΒΕΔΗΥΧΩ ΔΨΥΨ ΠΡΪΕΜΨΑ
ΒΟΖΡΑΔΟΒΑΨΑΑ:]

(*Tone 7: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 6*): The souls of the righteous, who were held in bondage and forsaken in Hades, remembered Thee and prayed for salvation from Thee, which Thou didst grant unto them through Thy Cross, O Christ, when in Thy compassion Thou didst descend into the nether regions of the earth.

[ΒΟΠΟΜΗΝΑΧḶ ΤΑ ΖΑΚΛΟΥΨΗΝΥΑ ΒΟ ἸΔΉ ΔΨΥΨ, ἢ ὠΨΤΑΒΕΛΨΥΨΑΑ ΠΡΉΝΥΧΩ, ἢ ὞
ΤΕΒḶ ΕΨΪΕΨΑ ΜΟΛΑΧḶΑ: ἘΖΕ ΚΡΉΤΟΜΩ ΧΡΉΤḶ, ΠΟΔΑΜΩ ἘΐΗ ΠΡΕΝΠḶΔΗΗΜΩ, ΠΗΨΕΔΩ
ἸΑΚΩ ΕΛΓΟΔΨΡΟΒΕΝΩ.]

Who are the righteous? No other answer can be given other than that they are those who acknowledge that Christ is God. From the previous discussions, it should be of no surprise that the divine services tell us that the souls of the righteous recognize and confess that Christ is the son of the Living God, in whom the fullness of the divinity dwelt.

(*Tone 3: Vespers: 3rd Resurrection Aposticha*):... and arising on the third day from the dead Thou hast raised with Thyself those who acknowledged Thee as God.

[Ἦ ΤΡΗΔΗΒΕΝΩ ἢΖ ΜΕΡΨΒΥΧΩ ΒΟΚΡΕΪΩ, ΞΖ ΟΒΟḶ ΒΟΚΡΕΪΩ ἘΐΗ, ἢΖΕ ΤΑ ΕΓΑ
ΠΟΖΝΑΒΨΗΧΩ:]

(*Tone 8: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 6*):... and when He had visited those in Hades, Christ arose, saving, as one all-powerful, those who sing the praises of His Resurrection.

[Ἦ ΒΟ ἸΔΕΚΑΑ ΨΕΔΩ, ΒΟΚΡḶ ΧΡΉΤḶ, ἢ ΕΨḶ ἸΑΚΩ ΙΗΛΕΝΩ ΠΟΪΨΥΑ ἘΓḶ ΒΟΚΡḶ.]

The righteous man cannot tolerate what is untrue: (*Proverbs 13:5; A righteous man hateth lying:*) but finds truth to be well pleasing and a source of Joy, (*Job 22:19; The righteous see it [the truth], and are glad:*) The souls of the righteous are drawn to the recognition of Christ as the son of the Living God, for the very reason that they are drawn to, and love the truth. The righteous man, having sought truth throughout his life, recognizes in Christ that spirit of God which he yearned for in his life.

While it was the righteous who awaited the coming of Christ, His preaching of the good tidings of his victory over death, and His resurrection is rendered equally unto all who were chained therein.

(*Tone 3: Vespers: 3rd Resurrection Stichera by Anatolius*): Descending down unto those in Hades, Christ proclaimed the good tidings, exclaiming, ‘Be of good cheer; for now I have conquered! I am the Resurrection; I shall raise you up’.

[СЪЦЫМЪ ВО ѿДѢ СОШЕДЪ ХРІТОСЪ БЛАГОВѢСТІ: ДЕРЗАЙТЕ, ГЛАГОЛА, НЫНѢ ПОВѢДИХЪ, ѿЗЪ СЪМЪ БОИКРІИЕ, ѿЗЪ БЫ ВОЗВЕДЪ.]

(*Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 9*): ... for He hath raised with him the dead from every age, and to all doth He grant life and Resurrection.

[ѿКЪ НЪЖЕ ѿ ВѢКА МЕРТВЫЯ БОИКРІИ, НЪ ВРЕМЪ ПОДАЕТЪ ЖИВОТЪ НЪ БОИКРІИЕ.]

What if we should inquire concerning the things of which Christ preached to those in Hades when He descended therein? Do the services tell us something of these things? The services tell us that Christ revealed the hidden secrets of His divinity unto them, proclaiming unto them the mystery of their deliverance from death, enlightening them with the hypostatic light of His divinity:

(*Lenton Triodion, Matins of Holy Saturday: Canon-Ode-3*): ... Thou hast revealed Thy hidden secrets unto those in Hades O Lord ...

[НЫНѢ ЖЕ СОКРОВЕНИЛА ТВОѦ БГОМЪЖИУ ѿСНИЛА СЪН, НЪ СЪЦЫМЪ ВО ѿДѢ ВЪКО]

(*Lenton Triodion, Matins of Holy Saturday: Canon-Ode-6*): ... To those from every age who slept in the tombs Thou hast proclaimed true deliverance O Savior, being the firstborn of the dead.

[НЪ ПРОПОВѢДАЛЪ СЪН ѿ ВѢКА ТАМЪ СПАЦЫМЪ, НЪБАВЛЕНІЕ НЕЛОЖНОЕ БЫВЪ СЪСЕ, МЕРТВЫМЪ ПЕРВЕНЕЦЪ.]

(*Tone 1: Matins: 7th Stichera at Lauds*): ... for Thou, the Sun of righteousness, hast enlightened those who slept in darkness, leading them to the never-setting radiance...

[НЪ БО ВО ТЪМѢ СПАЦЫА, СЪНЦЕ ПРОСВЕТИ ПРАВДЫ, КЪ НЕВЕЧЕРНЕМЪ НАСТАВЛАА СЪАНИЮ:]

And upon hearing the preaching of Christ while chained in the bowels of Hades, what do the righteous do? The souls of the righteous, freed from the shackles that had held them, joyfully arise, and hasten to the Hypostatic light of Christ, praising and glorifying Him unto the ages.

(*Paschal Canon: Ode 5*): Those who were held fast by Hades' bonds, seeing Thy measureless compassion, hastened to the light, O Christ, with joyful steps, praising the eternal Passover.

[ΠΕΖΜΕΡΗΘΕ ΤΒΟΕ ΕΛΓΟΔΥΤΡΟΒΙΕ* ΛΔΟΒΥΜΗ ΟΥΖΑΜΗ ΕΟΔΕΡΖΗΜΙΗ ΖΡΑΨΕ,* ΚΖ ΕΒΕΤΥΔ ΗΔΑΧΔ, ΧΡΤΕ,* ΒΕΕΕΛΥΜΗ ΗΟΓΑΜΗ,* ΠΑΕΧΔ ΧΒΑΛΑΨΕ ΕΒΕΥΗΔΥ.]

(*Tone 2: Liturgy: 5th Verse of the Beatitudes*): ... Those who slept in darkness, O Christ, seeing Thee the Light in the lowest depths of Hades, did arise.

[ΗΓΕ ΒΟ ΤΥΜΤΕ ΕΠΑΨΙΗ ΤΑ ΕΒΕΤΥΖ ΒΗΔΕΒΨΕ, ΒΖ ΠΡΕΠΟΔΗΕΨΗΧΖ ΛΔΟΒΥΧΖ ΧΡΤΕ ΒΟΙΚΡΕΟΨΑ.]

(*Tone 8: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 7*): Upon Thy divine descent the regions beneath the earth were filled with light, and the darkness which previously pursued those therein, was driven out. Therefore the prisoners from every age arose, crying aloud, 'Blessed art Thou O God of our Fathers!'

[ΗΓΕΕΤΒΕΝΗΜΥΖ ΤΒΟΗΜΥΖ ΕΨΕΕΤΒΕΜΥΖ ΕΒΕΤΑ ΗΕΠΟΛΗΗΛΖ ΕΙΗ ΠΡΕΠΩΔΗΑΑ, Η ΤΥΜΑ ΠΡΟΓΗΑΝΑ ΒΥΙΤΥ ΠΡΕΖΔΕ ΓΟΗΑΨΑΑ. ΨΗΕΔΔΖΕ ΒΟΙΚΡΕΟΨΑ ΗΓΕ Ψ ΕΒΕΚΑ ΙΖΗΗΥΖ, ΖΟΒΔΥΕ: ΕΛΓΟΕΛΟΒΕΗΖ ΕΓΖ ΟΤΕΨΖ ΝΑΨΗΧΖ.]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 9*): Our froward death hath been slain with [Thy] resurrection from the dead, for when Thou didst appear to those in Hades O Christ, Thou didst grant unto them life, wherefore as the life, resurrection, and hypostatic light, we magnify Thee in hymns.

[ΟΥΜΕΡΤΕΗΕΑ ΜΕΡΖΚΑΑ ΝΑΨΑ ΕΜΕΡΤΥ, ΗΖ ΜΕΡΤΒΥΧΖ ΒΟΙΚΡΗΗΕΜΥΖ: ΤΥ ΒΟ ΙΒΕΗΕΑ ΕΨΥΜΥΖ ΒΟ ΛΔΕ ΧΡΤΕ, ΖΗΒΟΤΥ ΔΑΡΟΒΑΛΖ ΕΙΗ. ΤΥΕΜΖΕ ΤΑ ΙΑΚΩ ΖΗΖΗΥ Η ΒΟΙΚΡΗΙΕ Η ΕΒΕΤΥΖ ΥΠΟΕΤΑΕΗΥΗ ΠΟΥΨΕ ΒΕΛΗΥΑΕΜΥΖ.]

But what of the souls of those who reject Christ? Who do not acknowledge Him as God? The Divine services celebrating the resurrection of Christ do not dwell on such themes. But the fate of those who reject Christ is clearly described in the Holy Scriptures, and the exegetical writings of the Holy fathers. Those who do not acknowledge Christ as the son of the living God are not granted to dwell in the kingdom of God, they “*shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”. However, the divine services tell us that they participate in Christ's resurrection, and that they have been taught by Christ in Hades the truth of His son-ship and oneness with the Father. How can anyone who has witnessed the hypostatic light of Christ's resurrection, even after death, reject Christ, and not accept him as the son of God? Indeed, can these two seemingly mutually exclusive beliefs be true? The answer to this question also answers all questions concerning the fate of the heterodox.

The Fate of the Righteous

It is self-evident that Christ's descent into Hades and His preaching there was for the purpose of gathering to Himself all those righteous who sought Him in their lives, and awaited His coming, even those who did not know His name here in this vale of tears. St. Peter was brought

to the recognition of a similar truth when the Holy Spirit instructed him to go to the house of Cornelius the Centurion, a gentile and a pagan, to preach Christ to him and his family, because Cornelius was a “*A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always*”. Upon recognizing this, Peter exclaimed: (*Acts 10:35*): “*But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*”. After preaching to Cornelius the gospel of Christ, Cornelius recognized in this preaching that which he had been searching for in his life. St. Peter then observed the Holy Spirit descending on Cornelius, just as it did upon the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, even before Cornelius and his family had been baptized. This led St. Peter to exclaim: (*Acts 10:47-48*): “*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.*”

The Orthodox Church, rightly dissecting the word of truth, teaches in its canons and the acts of the councils accepted by the Church, that those who are to be numbered among her members must be baptized in the flesh. The mystery of baptism opens the spiritual gates that allow the fallen nature of the baptized individual to be united with the divine nature, and prepares the soul to accept the grace of God through partaking of the body and blood of Christ. Without baptism all the mysteries of the Church are ineffectual. How then could Cornelius have been “baptized with the Spirit” before being baptized with water in the flesh? This question is easily answered when one recalls that the Holy Prophets of God experienced God’s energies, while awaiting their adoption by grace. Cornelius had likewise experienced the power of God’s energies, but his human nature had not yet been empowered to be united with the divine nature. For this reason the Holy Spirit inspired St. Peter to have Cornelius and his family baptized, even though the Holy Spirit had descended upon them.

The question then arises “How then, can those who have not been baptized in the flesh here in this vale of tears be united with the Church after Christ’s preaching in Hades and His resurrection?” Hagiography is replete with examples of individuals who have confessed Christ and received crowns of martyrdom even though they have not been baptized with water. This baptism is called the baptism of blood. The Holy Innocents who were slain by Herod received crowns in heaven even though they had not known Christ here in this vale of tears. The righteous forefathers, and all the righteous, whose lives have been described for us in the writings of the old-testament also received crowns in heaven, even though they had not known baptism here in this vale of tears, but awaited the coming of the messiah. Foremost amongst these is Melchizadech, who was not a Jew, but served the true God, and was righteous above all the Jews at that time, including Abraham. Thus it is self-evident that the souls of the righteous who were not able to be baptized in this life are received by Christ into the church after death. This mystery of salvation is “wrought in the midst of the earth”, as described in the Royal Hours of Pascha:

(Lenten Triodion, Royal Hours: Troparion 6th Hour); O Christ God, Thou hast wrought salvation in the midst of the earth ...

[Ο ΠΙΣΤΗΙΕ ΣΩΤΗΡΑΜΑΣ ΕΝΗ ΠΟΡΕΥΕΤΕ ΖΕΜΛΗ ΧΡΗΤΕ ΕΒΉΕ]

This great and mysterious act of salvation is accomplished by the power of the grace of God, and is made possible only because the word of God assumed flesh, suffered His ignoble death, and descended into Hades drawing those who had walked in the shadow of death back to His hypostatic light, as described earlier.

(Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 7): Thou hast called me back to the light as once I walked in the shadow of death when Thou didst strike the shadowy darkness of Hades with the splendor of Thy Divinity...

[Χοδαίσα μὰ βυ σῆνι σμέρτηβῆ πρηζβάλλζ ζῖν κζ σβῆτδ, τέμνοζράλινῆ ἄδζ, βλιετᾶνῆεμζ ὠβλόζζζ βῆεετβλ,]

It is this salvation that the righteous prophets and all the forefathers and foremothers awaited in that gloomy darkness. It is this salvation that is granted unto all the righteous who lived their lives awaiting the coming of the Messiah, and who recognize in the glorious hypostatic light of His divinity, Christ, the son of God. It is this salvation that empowered the Holy Prophets to receive the fulfillment of their expectation, and become sons of God by adoption.

Hebrews 11:39-40; And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Thus, the Holy Orthodox Church instructs us through her sacred liturgical texts, that *all* the righteous are granted salvation. She does make any judgments concerning the *individual*, heterodox or orthodox, this is left to Christ, she only makes it clear for us, here in this vale of tears that the souls of all the righteous will be united to the Holy Church, Christ's body, through baptism in the flesh, or through "salvation in the midst of the earth" and dwell eternally in the blessed uncreated light of the Godhead.

The Fate of the Unrighteous

The fallen soul, repulsed by the hypostatic light of Christ here in this vale of tears, will also be repulsed by that light after death. The hypostatic light of Christ tortures such souls, searing their minds with the knowledge, and their souls with the divine fire of the Love of God, a love that they rejected, even hated, here in this life.

The aim of the orthodox spiritual life, the ascetic life that all orthodox Christians are called to live, is to acquire the grace of God, and from this grow in the love of God, to become accustomed to things that are Godly. To acquire this grace the soul must not only develop a love for God, and a longing for the knowledge of what is true and God pleasing, but must also harbor a longing to follow the commandments given to us by Christ during His earthly life.

The acquisition of such a longing requires the soul to continually incline its desire towards pleasing God, in an almost athletic sense. This is the purpose of the ascetic life. It matters not whether one is a layman, clergyman, or monastic, the goal is the same, to develop a constant longing for what is good and God-pleasing. The desire for what is good and God-pleasing nurtures the love of God within our souls, and attracts the grace of God, which gives life to our spiritual endeavors and makes them God-pleasing. However such a constant longing does much more than attract the grace of God into our souls, it prepares the soul to embrace Christ and dwell eternally in His hypostatic light after its resurrection. Those who disdain and ridicule the ascetic life do so out of ignorance of its importance in the training, conditioning, and salvation of the soul.

The unrighteous man hates all that is spiritual, he disdains the ascetic life, he ridicules the religious man, and he harbors a love for all things temporal. In every action in his life he turns his face from Christ, finding prayer tedious and unprofitable. Such a man may be the Patriarch of

a local Church, or he may be a simple layman, social stature does not delineate the righteous man from the unrighteous man, the inclination of the desires of the soul delineates the righteous man from the unrighteous man.

Thus the unrighteous man, having spent his life in the pursuit of vanity, the acquisition of wealth, social stature, the praise of man, the gratification of his every whim, cannot develop a love for God and from this a love for his fellow man. The unrighteous man may show, for the entire world to see, his love for mankind, but such a display is only for demonstrative purposes, it is not the result of a desire to please God, it is the result of a desire to please man, and to receive from man praise and adoration. For this reason Christ warns us to show our love in such a way that "*left hand knoweth not what the right hand doeth*", that is in such a way that it is not done for the sake of obtaining praise from men, but praise from God.

(Matthew 6:3-4); But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

The soul of the unrighteous man, harboring no desire to please God, eagerly feeds the passionate impulses of its disordered soul, and over time develops a hatred for all things holy and good. Upon seeing the hypostatic light of Christ in the murky darkness of Hades, such a soul is not only frightened, but spiritually repulsed by such a sight. The hypostatic light of Christ tortures them as described in a recent work of deep theological importance:

(The River of Fire, Dr Alexander Kalomiros); God is Truth and Light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light. In the day of the Great Judgment all men will appear naked before this penetrating light of truth. The "books" will be opened. What are these "books"? They are our hearts. Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God, and what is in these hearts will be revealed. If in those hearts there is love for God, those hearts will rejoice seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, there is hatred for God in those hearts, these men will suffer by receiving on their opened hearts this penetrating light of truth which they detested all their life.

So that which will differentiate between one man and another will not be a decision of God, a reward or a punishment from Him, but that which was in each one's heart; what was there during all our life will be revealed in the Day of Judgment. If there is a reward and a punishment in this revelation — and there really is — it does not come from God but from the love or hate which reigns in our heart. Love has bliss in it, hatred has despair, bitterness, grief, affliction, wickedness, agitation, confusion, darkness, and all the other interior conditions which compose hell (I Cor. 4:6).

The Light of Truth, God's Energy, God's grace which will fall on men unhindered by corrupt conditions in the Day of Judgment, will be the same to all men. There will be no distinction whatsoever. All the difference lies in those who receive, not in Him Who gives. The sun shines on healthy and diseased eyes alike, without any distinction. Healthy eyes enjoy light and because of it see clearly the beauty which surrounds them. Diseased eyes feel pain, they hurt, suffer, and want to hide from this same light which brings such great happiness to those who have healthy eyes.

But alas, there is no longer any possibility of escaping God's light. During this life there was. In the New Creation of the Resurrection, God will be everywhere and in everything. His light and love will embrace all. There will be no place hidden from God, as was the case during our corrupt life in the kingdom of the prince of this world. The devil's kingdom will be despoiled by the Common Resurrection and God will take possession again of His creation. Love will enrobe everything with its sacred Fire which will flow like a river from the throne of God and will irrigate paradise. But this same river of Love — for those who have hate in their hearts — will suffocate and burn.

(*Heb. 12:29*) "*For our God is a consuming fire*"; the very fire which purifies gold, also consumes wood. Precious metals shine in it like the sun, rubbish burns with black smoke. All are in the same fire of Love. Some shine and others become black and dark. In the same furnace steel shines like the sun, whereas clay turns dark and is hardened like stone. The difference is in man, not in God.

The difference is conditioned by the free choice of man, which God respects absolutely. God's judgment is the revelation of the reality which is in man.

Such is the fate of the unrighteous.

For those who find the divine services of the Orthodox Church a wellspring of God-pleasing knowledge concerning the descent of Christ into Hades, and the resurrection of mankind from the slumber of death, the following excerpts are given for their nourishment and edification.

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Sedalion: 1st Kathismata*): Thou hast raised with Thee the dead from every age, / as the friend of mankind.

[Ты̀ со̀во̀здвѣ́глъ є̀сѣ̀ ѿ̀ вѣ́ка о́умѣ́ршылъ, ꙗ́кѡ є̀дѣ́нъз ѿ̀вѣ́колю́бецъ.]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Sedalion: 2nd Kathismata*): ... Christ hath despoiled Hades, / as alone almighty and all powerful, / raising up all those in corruption, / dispelling the fear of condemnation / by the power of the Cross.

[ѿ̀дъз плѣ́нѣ̀ хрѣ́тоꙋ, ꙗ́кѡ є̀дѣ́нъз крѣ́покъ ѣ̀ сѣ́ленъ, ѣ̀ ѣ̀стѣ́вшылъ всѣ̀ со̀во̀здвѣ́же, ѡ́сѣ́ждѣ́нѣ̀ стрѣ́хъ разрѣ́шѣ́въ крѣ́тоꙋ.]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Kontakion*): ...and now Eve, freed from her chains, rejoiceth as she cries aloud: It is Thee, O Christ, who grantest the Resurrection to all.

[Ѹ̀ва ны́нѣ̀ ѿ̀ о́ꙋꙋз ѣ̀збѣ́влѣ́ма рѣ́дѣ́тѣ̀а зѡвѣ́щи: ты̀ є̀сѣ̀, ꙗ́же всѣ́мъз подѣ́ хрѣ́тѣ̀ * во̀скрѣ́нѣ̀.]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Ikos*): Let us praise as God all-powerful the One who hath risen on the third day, smashing the gates of Hades and rousing from the grave the age-long dead ...

[Во̀скрѣ́шаго трѣ́днѣ́внѡ во̀спѡ́мъз ꙗ́кѡ є́҃а всѣ́нѣ́нъа, ѣ̀ вратѣ̀ ѿ̀дѡ́ва стѣ́ршаго, ѣ̀ ꙗ́же ѿ̀ вѣ́ка ѣ̀з грѡ́ба во̀здвѣ́гшаго]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 7*): When Thou, the highly exalted one, didst willingly became as one helpless and slain among the dead for our sakes, Thou didst set us all free, and with a lofty arm, raise us up together with Thee,

[Ты́ вѣ́вѣ ѡ́чи безпомощенъ, ѡ́у́збенъ въ мѣ́ртвыхъ во́лею нѣ́къ рѣ́ди превозносимый, всѣ́хъ освободилъ є́си, ѡ́ державною рѣ́кою совокрѣ́силъ є́си]

(*Tone 1: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 9*): Our froward death hath been slain with [thy] resurrection from the dead, for when Thou didst appear to those in Hades O Christ, Thou didst grant unto them life, wherefore as the life, resurrection, and hypostatic light, we magnify Thee in hymns.

[О́умертвенѣ́а мѣ́рткѣ́а нѣ́ша смѣ́рть, ѡ́з мѣ́ртвыхъ вокрѣ́нїемъ: ты́ во ѡ́бнѣ́вѣа сѣ́щымъ во ѡ́дѣ́ хрѣ́стѣ́, жнвѣ́тъ даровалъ є́си. тѣ́мже тѣ́ ѡ́акъ жнзнь ѡ́ вокрѣ́нїе ѡ́ свѣ́тъ ѡ́постѣ́еный пою́ще велича́емъ.]

(*Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Theotokos)-Ode 3*): The One who is beyond all time, as the Creator of time, was fashioned of His own will as a babe from thee, O Virgin.

[И́же вре́мене превѣ́шшїи всѣ́агѡ, ѡ́акъ вре́менемъ тѣ́ворецъ, ѡ́з тѣ́бѣ́ дѣ́о во́лею мѣ́нецъ создѣ́а.]

(*Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Ikos*): O Savior, Thou art the light of those lying in darkness, and the resurrection and life of all mortals. Since Thou hast raised up all mankind with Thyself ...

[Ты́ є́си свѣ́тъ ѡ́мраченнымъ, ты́ є́си вокрѣ́нїе всѣ́хъ, ѡ́ жнвѣ́тъ челоѡ́бѣ́кѡвъ, ѡ́ всѣ́хъ совокрѣ́силъ є́си,]

(*Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 8*):... and arose on the third day, O lover of mankind, redeeming all mortal mankind who sings unto Thee in faith:

[И́ трї́днѣ́внѡ вокрѣ́лъ є́си, ѡ́ ѡ́збѣ́вилъ є́си всѣ́хъ челоѡ́бѣ́кн члѣ́вѣ́колю́бче, вѣ́рою пою́щїа:]

(*Tone 2: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 9*): ... for He hath raised with him the age-long dead, and to all doth He grant life and Resurrection.

[ѡ́акъ ѡ́же ѡ́ вѣ́ка мѣ́ртвїа совокрѣ́нїи, ѡ́ вѣ́емъ подаѣ́тъ жнвѣ́тъ ѡ́ вокрѣ́нїе.]

(*Tone 3: Matins: Resurrection Sedalion: 2nd Kathismata*): Awed by Thine immutable Divinity and by Thy voluntary passion, O Lord, Hades lamented, 'I tremble at thy body's essence, which remains uncorrupted. I behold Thee, the One who is invisible, mystically making war against me; wherefore those whom I hold cry out': 'Glory, O Christ, to thy Resurrection!'

[НЕНЗМѢННАГВ БЖЕРТВѢ, ꙗ БѢЛЫЯ СТРАСТИ ТВОЕѢ ГДН, ОУЖАСѢА АЗЪ, ВЪ СЕБѢ
РЫДАШЕ: ТРЕПЕЩУ ПЛОТИ НЕГЛѢННЫЯ УПОСТАСИ, ВЪИЖАШУ НЕВѢДНАГО, ТЛѢННУ
БОРЮЩА МѢ. ТѢМЖЕ ꙗ ИЖЕ ДЕРЖАШУ, ЗОВЕШЪ: СЛѢВА ХРІТЕ БОСКОУ ТВОЕМОУ.]

(*Tone 3: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 1*):... for death was smitten with fear when our God, having taken living flesh subject to suffering, wrestled with the tyrant and raised all with Himself, wherefore He is glorified.

[ИЖЕ СМЕРТИ ОУБОЛѢА, ГЛѢСА: СТРАСТИЮ БО ПЛОТЬ УДѢШЕВЛЕННЮ ПРИЕМОУ, СЕИ
БЪЗ НАШУ, ꙗ БРАВА СЪ МЪЧИТЕЛЕМОУ, ВЕА БОСКОУ: АЖЪ ПРОСЛАВИА.]

(*Tone 3: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 4*): In a mortal body, O Life, Thou hast partaken of death, for the sake of the wretchedness of Thy needy and the sighing of Thy poor, and having gloriously despoiled the seducing destroyer, Thou hast raised all with Thee, wherefore Thou hast been glorified.

[ТѢЛОМОУ СМЕРТНЫМОУ ЖИВОТЕ, СМЕРТИ ПРИЧАСТИА СЕИ, СТРАСТИ РАДИ НИЦНУХЪ, ꙗ
ВОЗДУХАНИА ОУБОГНУХЪ ТВОИХЪ: ꙗ РАСТАВЪЗ ТЛѢЮЩАГО ПРЕПРОСЛАВЛЕННЕ, ВЪСЪХЪ
БОСКОУ СЕИ, АЖЪ ПРОСЛАВИА.]

(*Tone 4: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 3*): Thou wast revealed, O Lover of mankind, as voluntarily dead in a tomb, reopening the gates of Hades for the souls found therein from the ages [Note: implies every age], ...

[ВІДАЕНЪ БЫА СЕИ ЧЛѢКОЛЮБЧЕ БОЛЕЮ БО ГРОБѢ МЕРТВЪ, ЖИВОТВОРЧЕ, ꙗ ВРАТА
РАЗВЕРГА СЕИ АДАВА, АЖЕ ШЪ ВЪКѢВЪ ДЪШАМОУ.]

(*Tone 4: Matins: Resurrection Canons (to the Cross)-Ode 4*): Thy deified soul, O Savior, captured the treasures of Hades raising together with itself the souls kept therein from every age; while Thy life-giving body flowed forth incorruption unto all.

[ОБОЖЕНА ТВОѢ СПСЕ ДША, АДАВА СОКРОВЕНЦА ПЛѢНѢШИ, АЖЕ ШЪ ВЪКѢ БОСКОУ
ДЪШЫ: ЖИВНОНОЕ ЖЕ ТѢЛО ВЪЕМЪ НЕГЛѢНІЕ ИСТОЧН.]

(*Tone 5: Vespers: 2nd Resurrection Stichera*): He who hath granted Resurrection to the race of mankind, was led as a sheep to the slaughter; the princes of Hades trembled before Him and the gates of lamentations were lifted up; for Christ the King of glory entered, saying to those in bondage: 'Come forth!' and to those in darkness: 'Reveal yourselves!'

[БОСКОУ ДААН РОДЪ ЧЕЛОВѢЧЕСКОМУ, АЖЪ ОБЪА НА ЗАКОЛЕНІЕ ВЕДЕА:
ОУСТРАШИША СЕГВ КНАЗН АДТИН, ꙗ ВЪАШАА ВРАТА ПЛАЧѢВНАА. ВІДЕ БО ЦРЬ
СЛѢВЫ ХРІТОУ, ГЛГОЛА СЪЦЫМОУ БО ОУЗАХЪ, ИЗЫДИТЕ: ꙗ СЪЦЫМОУ БО ТЪМѢ,
ШЪКРЫТИТЕА.]

(*Tone 7: Matins: 1st Lauds Resurrection Stichera by Anatolius*): By Thy mighty power, O Lord, Thou hast destroyed the gates of Hades and abolished the dominion of death; raising with Thyself the dead who slept from eternity in darkness, by Thy divine and glorious Resurrection, as King of the universe and as God All-powerful.

[ВРАТѦ АДОКА СОКРЪШНѦЗ ѸН, ГДН, Н СМЕРТНЮ ДЕРЖАВЪ ОУПРАЗДНѦЗ ѸН КРѢПКЮ СИЛОЮ ТВОЮ, Н СОВОЗДВѦГЛѦЗ ѸН МЪРТВЫА, НЖЕ ѿ ВѢКА ВО ТЪМѢ СПАЩЫА, БЖЕСТВЕННЫМЪ Н СЛАБНЫМЪ ВОСКРЪЩЕНЫМЪ ТВОИМЪ, ІАКЪ ЦРЬ ВЪСЪХЪ Н БГЪ ВВЕИЛЕНЪ.]

(*Tone 8: Matins: Resurrection Canon-Ode 7*): Upon Thy divine descent the regions beneath the earth were filled with light, and the darkness which previously pursued those therein, was driven out. Therefore the prisoners from every age arose, crying aloud, ‘Blessed art Thou O God of our Fathers!’

[БЖЕСТВЕННЫМЪ ТВОИМЪ СОЩЕСТВЕНЫМЪ СВѢТА НПОЛНИЛѦЗ ѸН ПРЕНСПАДАА, Н ТЪМА ПРОГНАА БЫТЬ ПРЖДЕ ГОНАЦАА. ѾНЮДЪЖЕ ВОСКРЪЩА НЖЕ ѿ ВѢКА ѿЗНИЦЫ, ЗОВУЩЕ: БЛГОСЛОВЕНЪ БГЪ ѾТЪЦЪ НАШНХЪ.]

Glory be to Thee Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

Why Should the Orthodox Church Proselytize?

The fallen and reprobate mind may reason, “Why then, is it necessary to proselytize among individuals who live righteous lives in heterodox faiths, if they will be united to the Church in the afterlife anyway?” The answer to this question was given earlier. The reason the heterodox are called to become orthodox is so that the deifying activity of the Holy Spirit may become active in their souls, enlivening their virtuous deeds with God’s grace. If one is to adopt a stagnant modus-operandi of confession, believing that there is no need to bring souls into the Orthodox Church, why then was it necessary for the Holy Apostles to establish the Church in the first place, and preach Christ unto the nations? This question in and of itself shows the folly of such an attitude.

It is clear that those who do not advocate proselytizing among the heterodox do so because they believe that the grace of God is active in the heterodox mysteries. As shown in previous discussions, this is untrue; the heterodox Christian does not participate in the deifying grace filled life of the Orthodox Church. It is the enemy of all that is good and holy, the father of the antichrist who is to come, who instills such foolish thoughts in the minds of Orthodox Hierarchs. For the antichrist knows that he cannot assume his place in global society while there are those who correctly confess the orthodox faith, and bear spiritual fruit in the vineyard of Christ’s church, carrying within themselves the hypostatic light of the Holy Trinity; for this reason the enemies of Christ fear the confessing orthodox hierarch more than anything else in creation.

Those hierarchs who strive to suppress proselytizing among the heterodox, and non-Christian religions, are not friends of Christ, they are allies of the antichrist, for it is God’s good pleasure that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is the goal of those who seek an earthly kingdom of ease and prosperity to suppress the confession of true religion; thus

those who hate the ascetic way of the confessing orthodox Christian, strive to suppress with all the might available to them the monastic way, the ascetic way, the way of those who strive to acquire the holy spirit lawfully.

(2 *Timothy* 2:5); And if a man also strive for masteries, [yet] is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

Wittingly or unwittingly, only God knows, these orthodox hierarchs make themselves one with those enemies of Christ whose only goal is to destroy all manifestations of God's grace in creation. They seek to replace the spirit of God with the spirit of the antichrist. This spirit opposes all that Christ represents. Christ represents struggle against the ways of this world, dispassion - a life free from passionate impulses, a life dedicated to the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of the antichrist is devoted to the acquisition of a life of ease in this world, a life of worldly passionate satisfaction, a life of prosperity, a life separate from the holy spirit of God. May the grace of God preserve us from such prelest, and keep us on the straight and narrow path of a God-pleasing orthodox confession of faith, both in word, and in deed.