

7: Ancestral Sin and Salvation

Introduction: Seeking Communion with God in a Relationship of Love

God has given each of us free will, just as He gave Adam and Eve free will. Why? As Metropolitan Kallistos reminds us in *The Orthodox Way*: “As a Trinity of love [Father, Son and Holy Spirit], God desired to share his life with created persons made in his image, who would be capable of responding to him freely and willingly in a relationship of love. *Where there is no freedom, there can be no love.*”¹ The choice that confronted Adam and Eve still confronts each of us every day of our lives—whether to turn to God or to self, as we decide how to live our lives.

In a very important sense, human sin, past or present, is one of the possible consequences of the free will that God has given to each of us. Rather than focus negatively on past or present sins, let us first pause and be grateful for this immense gift of free will that God has given to each human being:

. . . God took a risk: for with this gift of freedom there was given also the possibility of sin. But he who takes no risks does not love. Without freedom there would be no sin. But without freedom man would not be in God’s image; without freedom man would not be capable of entering into communion with God in a relationship of love.²

The central goal of this lecture is to understand this relationship between free will and sin—for Adam and Eve, and for us—in order that we and our families can now enter into “a relationship of love” with God and with others. The challenge that confronts us has been well phrased by Archimandrite Vasileios, Abbot of Iveron Monastery, Mount Athos: “God is love and He is absolute freedom; in freedom He loves and in love He offers freedom.”³

Seeking to Refocus the Vision and Reclaim the Vocabulary in the Context of Sin

In seeking to communicate the depth of Orthodox spirituality, Archdeacon John Chryssavgis has stressed the importance of “reclaiming the vocabulary” and “refocusing the vision” in order to move beyond “fitting the vastness of the world and of God into small boxes of our own

¹ [then] Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Revised Edition (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 58 [Emphasis in original].

² Ware, 59.

³ Archimandrite Vasileios, *The Saint: Archetype of Orthodoxy* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Alexander Press, 1997), 8-9.

devising.”⁴ The opening paragraphs of this lecture have attempted to refocus the vision on free will and communion with God, rather than on the burden of sin and the difficulties of reaching God. In a similar vein, Sister Nonna Harrison has acknowledged that the “harmony, which existed in the original human state in paradise, has become disrupted in human-kind’s fallen condition.”⁵ Yet Sister Nonna offers a balanced Orthodox vision of the challenge that now confronts us:

It is the whole person, body and soul, who either turns toward God, turns away from him in sin, or turns back toward him in repentance. The centre of the human being, body and soul, in which all the mature person’s faculties and drives become concentrated, is called ‘the heart.’ When the heart and all the human faculties are again directed towards God, their original harmony is restored.⁶

This holistic Orthodox perspective indicates firmly that despite the fall of Adam and Eve into sin each of us today retain the choice of turning toward God, away from Him in sin, or back toward him in repentance.

As Christos Yannaras has suggested, “The fall [of Adam and Eve] arises out of man’s free decision to reject personal communion with God and restrict himself to the autonomy and self-sufficiency of his own nature.”⁷ That same possibility of restricting ourselves to “the autonomy and self-sufficiency” of our own natures is still with us; and it is that “free decision” that at times leads us “to reject personal communion with God.” Theological time travel is an existential reality in that we continue to make decisions in the Garden of Eden every day of our lives.

To refocus fully away from sin and disobedience to God, it is essential to reclaim our theological vocabulary, especially in the context of being guided by “the saints of the Church, who teach us the process of learning and relearning what it is consciously to know and to reflect God’s love in the world.”⁸ This reclaiming of theological vocabulary is especially necessary in the context of sin because of the contemporary lack of awareness of the vision of the early Church Fathers, as well as the present excessive emphasis in the West upon the views of St. Augustine on both sin and sexuality. For example, Orthodoxy does not accept that “fallen human nature lost its freedom,” nor that we have inherited some form of “generic guilt;” rather, Orthodoxy “prefers

⁴ Archdeacon John Chryssavgis, *Light through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2004), 24-25.

⁵ Sister Nonna Verna Harrison, “The human person as image and likeness of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 84.

⁶ Harrison, 84.

⁷ Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 29-31. Cited by Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians* (Menlo Park, CA: Monastery Books, 1990), 725.

⁸ Chryssavgis, *Light through Darkness*, 25.

to describe the problem as ‘ancestral sin’ (*to proporatikon hamartema*) to distance itself clearly from . . . Augustinianism.”⁹

The Immaturity of Adam and of Us

What actually happened in the Garden of Eden? What were the consequences of those events? These are highly speculative questions; and in seeking to understand Paradise and the heavenly life, it is appropriate to be cautious when reflecting on “what no eye has seen, no ear heard, no mind conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9; paraphrasing Isaiah 64:4).¹⁰ Yet while St. Paul urged caution, he also insisted that it was possible to “speak wisdom among those who are mature,” to explain “God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory” (1 Corinthians 2.6-7). In seeking to understand what happened in the Garden of Eden, the immaturity of Adam and Eve, as well as our own immaturity, are both significant.

St. Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 200), writing in *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, set out from Tradition what constituted “the wider sentiment of the Greek Fathers,” that “humanity contained within itself, even after the Fall from grace (as recounted in the story of Adam and Eve), the innate gift of the Image of the Divine which was the particular charism that marked out the . . . human being (as distinct from angels or all other material entities).”¹¹ In this perspective, Adam was quite simply “a child, whose understanding was not yet complete, needing still to develop before he came to fulfilment.”¹² Furthermore, precisely because Adam was a child in his understanding of the meaning of life, he was open to the temptation that the Devil set before Eve, and that she brought to him. As St Irenaeus commented: “Man was a child, not yet having his discretion perfected, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver [i.e. the Devil].”¹³

In addition to pointing out the immaturity of Adam, the Church Fathers also cautioned about the immaturity that resulted in humanity itself because of the Fall. St. Athanasius viewed sin as a cloud which had been drawn over the capacity of the human being to see God; however,

⁹ Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 262, note 22, with reference to 189. For a full exposition of this perspective, see Father John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr, 2002), trans. George S. Gabriel. Cf. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Revised Edition (London: Penguin, 1993), 222f.

¹⁰ See Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), entries on Heaven/Paradise and Fall, 158-159, 138-141.

¹¹ Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 189.

¹² St. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12. Quoted and translated by McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 262, note 22. For the full text of *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, see the website of Christian Ethereal Classics Library at: www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.pdf . Cf. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 223.

¹³ St. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12.

because “the soul is made after the image and likeness of God,” it remained true even after the Fall that “the soul beholds as in a mirror the Image of the Father, even the Word, and by His means reaches the idea of the Father, Whose Image the Saviour is.”¹⁴

Father John McGuckin describes Athanasius’s vision of “a shining mirror of the divinity that is within,” originally formulated in the context of a tarnished fourth-century Alexandrian silver mirror. Yet the metaphor remains relevant to each of us today:

The person who wishes to see God need only turn the spiritual gaze interiorly, and there in the clarity of the God-seeking mind and soul will the image of God be radiant, and instructive. . . .The loss of the mirror [of divinity after the Fall] . . . was not a wholesale collapse of the human ability to see God. The mirror is useless because it was no longer functioning, not because it was taken away. St. Athanasius and many of the other Greek Fathers in their ascetical doctrine call for a ‘cleaning of the surface’ so that it can function once again as a bright and reflective surface.¹⁵

The writing and preaching and pastoral activity of Saints Irenaeus and Athanasius and countless other Church fathers testify to the reality that: “... Orthodoxy insists on the perennial freshness and beauty of the human being, even in the fallen condition, not for the sake of human pride or self-confidence but in order to ensure that the essential truth of the human person is never forgotten.”¹⁶

The previous E-Quip lecture sought to define that “essential truth of the human person” in less elegant language than Father McGuckin, but his formulation is worthy of reflection—that “the essential truth of the human person” is its “luminous *energia* as a song of God’s mercy and philanthropy and, because of that, a mysterious entity ... innately beautiful, glorious, and alluring.”¹⁷ In this context, *energeia* refers to the Patristic emphasis upon “the very nature of human beings as itself an energy that had been sent out by God for the purpose of lifting the very nature of mankind into a transcendence of itself in communion with the deity.”¹⁸ Such an affirmation of humanity and its God-given destiny is not an abstruse mystical vision, but a practical possibility, once the meaning of Genesis 1:26 is fully understood.

¹⁴ St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*. [*Against the Gentiles/Nations/Heathen*], 34. Philip Schaff (ed.) At: www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.pdf, 34. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 4*, 152.

¹⁵ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 189.

¹⁶ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 191.

¹⁷ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 191.

¹⁸ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 188, further developed by notes 15 and 16, 261.

When God created man, his first words were: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. . . .” St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-682), a remarkable Greek theologian and ascetic writer, viewed the *image* of God as “given to man from the beginning,” but the *likeness* to God had “to be acquired through a spiritual process.”¹⁹ That insight has been framed more precisely by Father McGuckin with the idea that the *image* of God within each human person is innate, while the *likeness* to God is determined by the correspondence between the life that is lived and “the call to sanctity” that each individual receives to live “one’s life in the Holy Spirit according to grace.”²⁰

Furthermore, the intensity of “the call to sanctity” that each individual receives is not predetermined. On the contrary,

Almost all of the ascetical Fathers argue that the gift of God’s grace is given in the measure, appropriate [to] the degree of seriousness with which the believer responds to the initial grace, and with which he or she continues on the Christian path of responsiveness. God calls his people to himself, but expects them to respond, and does not generally force the presence on the unwilling (except in cases of extraordinary mercy and conversion).²¹

Clearly, the Fall did not remove the possibility of each human being receiving grace; and it is worth pondering on the existential reality lived out on a day-by-day basis that grace is given to the extent that each of us is capable of receiving and acting upon that grace.

Our need for grace (and the amount of grace we receive) is a consequence of our own immaturity, as well as the extent to which we seek to face that immaturity with honesty, prayer and psychological resilience. The legacy of the Fall is not an Augustinian guilt trip about our failings, but rather a need to understand the relationship between prayer and energy (both human and divine), between grace and psychological resilience.

What Actually Happened in the Garden of Eden?

¹⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: ST. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985), 61.

²⁰ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 263, note 26 from 189.

²¹ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 263, note 27 from 189.

Applying the newly reclaimed vocabulary and refocused vision of sin and grace now regained from the Church Fathers, consider once again those perplexing questions: What actually happened in the Garden of Eden? What were the consequences of those events? St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) offers a calm summary of the consequences of the Fall: “In the present life, we are as if in a sort of school . . . with a view to our becoming fit for the reception of the blessings of the world to come.”²² St. Maximus the Confessor further develops this educational motif by suggesting that:

Many of the things that befall us, befall us for our training, either to do away with past sins or to correct present neglect or to check future sinful deeds. He then, who reckons that temptation has come upon him for one of those reasons, is not vexed at its attack, especially as he is conscious of his sin.²³

It is often true, as Archimandrite Vasileios has emphasised that, “because God loves us, He allows us to undergo many trials in our lives.”²⁴ This perspective is often balanced with “our own natural process of maturing.”²⁵

Furthermore, the consciousness of sin does not minimize its importance, but is an essential step toward healing its effects and uprooting it from human life, as set out by St. John Cassian (c.360-after 430):

The rational part of your mind and soul is corrupt. . . . It must be healed by the judgment of a right discretion and the virtue of humility. . . . If you are established . . . in the humility of true discretion and learn with sorrow of heart how hard and difficult a thing it is for each of us to save his soul . . . you are actually still in need of the help of a teacher.²⁶

Such an educational perspective on the consequences of the Fall is sensible but does not face the more difficult question of what actually happened in the Garden of Eden. It should also be noted that St. John Cassian’s emphasis upon still being “in need of the help of a teacher” may be quite

²² St. John Chrysostom, *Homily X on Romans V*. Cited by Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, 170.

²³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life*, 22. Cited by Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, 749.

²⁴ Archimandrite Vasileios, *The Saint: Archetype of Orthodoxy*, 43.

²⁵ Matthew Linn, Shelia Fabricant, Dennis Linn, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 14.

²⁶ St. John Cassian, *Conference of Abbot Abraham*, Chap. XVI. . Cited by Johanna Manley (ed.), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, 751.

unhelpful in encouraging each person to take responsibility for their own lives, although spiritual direction can often be of significant value.

In Greek, the Garden of Eden refers to *paradeisos* (Paradise). Therefore, we may rightly understand the Garden and indeed Heaven as a real place in space-time but removed from the fallen domain of this world. In this dimension, our first parents communed harmoniously with the world, each other and God. The Fathers, (especially Sts. Theophilus of Antioch, Ephraim the Syrian, Hilary of Poitiers and Maximus the Confessor), insist that our first parents were created neither mortal nor immortal. Until the point of his disobedience Adam was sinless but not perfect and able to sin through the exercise of his will. He was not immortal but rather capable of achieving immortality through obedience. In the west, the highly influential St. Augustine characterised the Fall as a loss of original perfection rather than a hiatus in human development.

We learn from St. Irenaeus and the Greek Fathers of the Church that Adam was like a child, fully capable of growing up in obedience to his Heavenly Father and achieving immortality. We know that he ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in disobedience to God's Word and suffered death as a result. This is not analogous to the myth of Greek paganism in which Prometheus stole fire from the gods and paid the price for his audacity. The fruit itself was not placed in Eden surrounded by a permanent exclusion zone, leaving humanity in state of perpetual infantile innocence. God's intention was that Adam should grow to discern between good and evil through obedience and divinisation, thereby acquiring the requisite spiritual maturity and wisdom. Like a child, he had to be taught. However, like many children and adults, he would not be taught. He wanted to be autonomous—to be God-like without God—and he thereby brought death down upon his own head through his own choice.

Is Death a Divine Punishment?

St. Irenaeus and the Fathers generally do not see death as a divine punishment for the disobedience of our first parents; and this view has been set out in considerable detail by Father John Romanides.²⁷ This distortion arose later in the west under the influence of St. Augustine. The Fathers rather interpreted the consequences of the Fall as something we brought on ourselves when we distanced ourselves from God. God still walks in the Garden. It is we who hide and shamefully cover our nakedness. Likewise, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise and the angel standing guard with the flaming sword is not an act of divine retribution but a compassionate and merciful provision lest we eat of the second tree, the Tree of Life, and

²⁷ See Father John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*. trans. George S. Gabriel. (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr, 2002).

die eternally. The fruit of this tree, if we had eaten it, would have condemned us forever.

Listen to St. John Chrysostom:

Partaking of the tree, the man and woman became liable to death and subject to the future needs of the body. Adam was no longer permitted to remain in the Garden, and was bidden to leave, a move by which God showed His love for him ... he had become mortal, and lest he presume to eat further from the tree which promised an endless life of continuous sinning, he was expelled from the Garden as a mark of divine solicitude, not of necessity.²⁸

This interpretation is remarkably different from many contemporary Western views, for the Orthodox perspective here is that Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden as mortal beings, not to punish them, but to protect them from “an endless life of continuous sinning”. We now live outside Eden but with the Incarnation of Christ and his resurrection we can move beyond death and sin into eternal life. In short we can re-enter Paradise. As St. Paul taught in the light of the resurrection: “O death where is thy sting ...?” The sting of death is sin. Nevertheless, there is “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

We shall now examine how this comes to pass, both then and now for each one of us.

The sin of Adam and Eve was one of disobedience born out of a demonically induced pride. We know from St. Paul that the wages of such sin are death (Romans 6:23); and St. Paul’s connection between sin and death greatly influenced early Patristic thought on the Fall and its consequences.²⁹ Now, there is a dual aspect to death. It is not only sets a limit on sinning on an individual basis, but also, and for the human race generally, it stirs a consciousness of what has been lost in Eden. The denial of this awareness of alienation from God in an unrepentant soul generates either an ungodly fear of death or a stoical resignation to its inevitability. Both these responses corrupt the human spirit and become the genesis of new evils.

It should be remembered that all of us do share in Adam’s newly corrupted nature. In the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria (d.444):

Adam had heard: ‘Earth thou art and to the earth shalt thou return,’ and from being incorruptible he became corruptible and was made subject to the bonds of death. But since he produced children after falling into this state, we his descendants are

²⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Genesis XVIII*, 3PG 53 151.

²⁹ McGuckin, *Patristic Theology*, 139.

corruptible coming from a corruptible source. Thus it is that we are heirs of Adam's curse.³⁰

Furthermore, it is true that the consequence of the Fall in the form of the corruption of this human nature did entail "an inclination or tendency toward sin."³¹ Nevertheless, in the midst of this human inclination toward sin Orthodox teaching has held firmly to the view of St. Cyril:

What has Adam's guilt to do with us? Why are we held responsible for his sin when we were not even born when he committed it. Did not God say: 'The parents will not die for the children, nor the children for the parents, but the soul which has sinned, it shall die (Deuteronomy 24:16)?³²

It is clear then that there is a huge difference between this belief—that we share in Adam's curse *through* the corruption of death—and the view common in the West since Augustine that we are punished *by* death for an original sin in Eden.

The West came to believe that this original sin was transmitted to subsequent generations through sexual reproduction and that we inherited thereby not only the sin of Adam but the guilt as well. This view is first found in St. Augustine:

... now when this (the Fall) happened, the whole human race was 'in his loins' [i. e. Adam's loins]. Hence in accordance with the mysterious and powerful natural laws of heredity it followed that those who were in his loins and were to come into this world through the concupiscence [lustful desires] of the flesh were condemned with him.³³

Aquinas and later the Reformers, for whom St. Augustine was hugely influential, all felt constrained to repeat in the words of Aquinas: "The commingling of the sexes which, after the sin of our first parent, cannot take place without lust, transmits original sin to the offspring."³⁴

³⁰ St. Cyril of Alexandria, "Doctrinal Questions and Answers," IX, 6 in *Selected Letters*.

³¹ Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition*, Translated and edited by Hieromonk Saraphim Rose and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Third Edition (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2005), 163.

³² Pomazansky, 163n. [This insight taken from the notes to *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* was written by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood].

³³ St. Augustine, *Treatise against Julian the Pelagian*.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Comp. Theol.*, 224

As noted above, this is not Orthodox. We reject St. Augustine's view that fallen man is under the "harsh necessity" of committing sin.³⁵ We alone are responsible for the sins that we commit; and this neither extends to the sins of our forefathers nor even to the primal sin of our first parents, except in so far as this is where the fault entered the human race. Moreover, the Fall is not a taint in our character transmitted by sex, nor is sex itself necessarily tainted by lust. Orthodoxy refers instead to "ancestral sin," by which it means human participation in the disobedience of the first Adam, inherited through death, not sex. It is a curse that the Law exposed in the inability of humans to fulfil the Mosaic Covenant. However, this is a curse which has been redeemed by Christ, Who, being condemned on a tree and cursed by our sins, (Galatians 3:13), confers on us only the blessings of his resurrection. In this we participate in His victory over our sin, evil, suffering and death.

Some western commentators criticise the Orthodox understanding at this point by reminding us that, according to Psalm 50(51):5: "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (NKJV: Masoretic text). As stated, this is capable of being interpreted either in the "Western" manner or in the Orthodox manner. However, the Septuagint (LXX) version of the Psalm translated into English reads: "Behold I was brought forth in iniquities, and in sins [plural] did my mother conceive me."³⁶ This makes it quite clear that sin is endemic to the human condition from birth to death. It says nothing about transmission, let alone transmission by sex. We must assume that the Jewish scholars in Alexandria knew what they were doing when they translated the Hebrew text into Greek. The Orthodox Church certainly accepts their scholarship and, importantly, there is nothing in Judaism then or now that comes anywhere close to the Christian West's understanding of original sin which is rather important if one wants to understand St. Paul's teaching on Adam and Christ the New Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. After all, St. Paul, like our Lord, was a Jew by birth and by training, adept in the Law.

This then is the characteristic understanding of the Fall in the Orthodox Church—sin generated by the corruption of death, itself occasioned by ancestral sin. In the post-Orthodox, post-Christian West, however, many people see death as both the natural created state of man and an acceptable reality. This deformed perception and analysis is also not Orthodox. Death, being the curse of Eden, is an unnatural enemy, neither designed into Creation by God nor desired by Him. Death of course has been endemic in the world from the dawn of life. Perhaps this is

³⁵ St. Augustine, *On the Perfection of Human Righteousness*, 4.9. Cited by McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 262, note 22.

³⁶ Translated by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Bagster & Sons, 1851), 728. A more recent translation is slightly different, but still does not imply transmission of sin from Adam and Eve over the generations: "For, look, I was conceived in lawlessness, and in sin did my mother crave for me. Trans. Albert Pietersma. In *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 572.

why Tradition has insisted on the angelic fall of Satan and his angels before the human Fall. Consequently, outside of Eden, death and corruption has always been present, but within Eden humans had the possibility of immortality and theosis, an option they squandered. In the present circumstances of humanity, death tends to cause people to feel alienation from their brothers, sisters and God. Humans distract themselves with the selfish pursuit of earthly things as if these will put off the evil day. "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," as the saying goes. They pursue selfish goals and become impassioned by egotism and narcissism. This is the real death—the death of the spirit—from which mortality itself has cast a longer and longer shadow over the God-less secularism of Western materialism. This Western misinterpretation of the meaning of death has significant implications for salvation, as considered further in the conclusion of this lecture.

The fallout of the Fall was, therefore, a self-induced hell, not inflicted upon humankind by a malign wrathful deity. Even the murderer Cain was given his mark by God as a protection. God did not cease to love and care for us even in our fallen state. He desired that the self-inflicted curse hanging over humanity should be lifted and that humans should resume their role as God's priests in creation by growing back into spiritual maturity. This of course, He achieved through the New and Final Adam, Christ. Characteristically, the Fathers speak of God saving us by recapitulating or regathering the whole creation in Himself and redeeming it, (Ephesians 1:10). The beginning of this process was in the Incarnation: its climax, the death and resurrection of Christ, its fruition in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, the Body of Christ glorified. As St. Irenaeus proclaimed: "God the Son became Man in order to regather in Himself the ancient creation, so that He might slay sin and destroy the power of death and give life to all men."³⁷

The key to human regeneration lies in the intervention of God in the Incarnation to break the vicious cycle of sin and death so that the gates of Paradise might be opened once more to the whole of Creation. The final victory of this intervention was the resurrection of Christ. By his voluntary submission to death Christ conquered death itself, emerging victorious from Hades with our humanity made perfect in Him. The voluntary obedience of a Virgin-Mother bruised the serpent's head in the Incarnation (Gen 3:15). The voluntary obedience of her Son unto death on a cross granted unto us victory over sin and death, waiting only on our repentance and resolution to serve God and our neighbour in love. In this manner Christ is revealed as the New Adam and the Mother of God as the New Eve. It is Christ our God who in the icon of Pascha storms into hell

³⁷ St Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, III, xix 6 ANF

and liberates the captives from the grip of death and sin. A new way has thereby been opened up for us to regain Paradise; Christ being the first fruits of all those who have fallen asleep.

Ancestral Sin, Death and the Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation

It is important to recognise that this later state of Paradise, often termed “Heaven,” is more fruitful for us than the first. At the point when Adam lost Paradise both he and Eve had not had the opportunity to enter into their full inheritance as children of God. Their disobedience put paid to that. It is different for us. In Christ we now have that opportunity, not only to be saved from death and hell, but also to be glorified by His life in us—the Holy Spirit. By the love poured into our hearts by that same Spirit we are now able to eat both from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. The tree of the cross has not only become our cure; the resurrection has also become our portal into the very life of God himself, our deification. Therefore, we are being offered not just a Paradise regained but a whole Cosmos made new according to God’s plan and purpose.

The interpretation of ancestral sin given in this lecture has placed considerable emphasis upon the immaturity of both Adam and of us, as well as the possibility of overcoming that immaturity by accepting full responsibility (through both prayer and action) for how we live our lives now. This is not in conflict with the awareness of death in the preceding paragraphs nor with Father John Romanides’s even firmer insistence that “the West regards death as a phenomenon from God, and the Greek Fathers and writers of this period generally emphasise that God did not create death.”³⁸ In fact, precisely because we are now aware that death is *not* “a phenomenon from God,” our personal freedom has been greatly increased. In the words of St. John Chrysostom: “He who does not fear death is outside the tyranny of the devil. . . . He fears no one, is in terror of no one, is higher than everyone, and freer than everyone.”³⁹ Nevertheless, as Father Romanides points out: “A characteristic of the Greek Patristic tradition is the continuous battle against the tyranny of death, the devil and sin through the life of unselfish love in Christ. Orthodox monastic life and the entire body of liturgical arts in the Eastern Church’s tradition are imbued with this heroic and fighting spirit.”⁴⁰

The Orthodox insistence upon ancestral sin as the appropriate doctrinal interpretation of the meaning of Adam and Eve’s behaviour in the Garden of Eden, as well as the firm rejection by Orthodoxy of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, have considerable implications for how each

³⁸ Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, 171.

³⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Homily 4, Ch. 6. Cited by, Homily 4, Ch. 6. Cited by Romanides, 174.

⁴⁰ Romanides, 174.

of us should seek to attain salvation. Father Romanides contends that this Western misinterpretation of the meaning of death has led both Roman Catholics and Protestants into a contemporary situation in which:

. . . if death is from God, and if Satan is God's instrument of punishment, why would anyone follow the faith of the Orthodox East and marshal the forces necessary to do battle against the devil who reigns in death? . . . The West ceased to battle against Satan and gave itself over to the propitiation of God through works and actions as if God had need of the services and servile acts of man. Instead of being undertaken by men for the spiritual struggle and battle against Satan, prayers and fasts and good works were done to propitiate God and to acquire merits. After Anselm's theory [that only the Crucifixion propitiated God once and for all] finally came to prevail, it was natural that Protestants would eventually conclude that the sacraments and good works do not propitiate God and that faith alone in the crucified Christ saves.⁴¹

Father John refers here to Anselm who was suspicious of the ransom theory in that the receiver of the ransom price could not be the devil without giving him rights he did not have.⁴² Although the ransom model of atonement, correctly understood, lies entirely within the Tradition of the Church and accords with the Scriptures, Anselm himself preferred an idea which owed more to the feudalism of his day than the Gospel or the Scriptures. He supposed that God had become Man in order to provide a perfect sacrifice to avert His own entirely justified wrath at the sin of humankind. In this he was bound by an exterior principle of divine justice; He could do no other. This supports the idea of divine determinism rather than His sovereign freedom to save. The feudal idea of a Lord requiring satisfaction for the rebellion of his serfs has nothing to do with the gospel of the divine love. Later generations of Protestant Christians were to deform and distort this doctrine further by supposing that God (the Father) had punished His Son rather than humanity collectively. The Orthodox can never accept this account of penal substitutionary atonement as it occludes God's Love by an alleged righteous anger in the heart of God where it has absolutely no place. In many ways this is a reversion to paganism with a wrathful deity wreaking vengeance on humankind. We therefore deny that "the sacrifice of the Son is in any way demanded by the Father."⁴³ Christ freely offers Himself to death and the only motive is love. This necessarily accords in a Triune God with the disposition of all three hypostases who must

⁴¹ Romanides, 174. Cf. Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 213-215.

⁴² See the article in Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ransom_theory_of_atonement

⁴³ Peter Bouteneff, "Christ and Salvation," 98 in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, edited by Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

have the same mind in the matter. Briefly, we create hell; God creates heaven. We always have a choice and it is that choice that opens to door to saving grace!

Essentially, as Metropolitan Kallistos has explained: “The Orthodox picture of fallen humanity is far less sombre than the Augustinian or Calvinist view.”⁴⁴ However, it should also be remembered that St. Augustine himself learned and taught many others that: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts can find no rest, until they rest in you.”⁴⁵

Deification: In this World and the Next

Fr. McGuckin comments that because “atonement theology. . . [has] so dominated post-medieval Western Christian discourse,” there has been little awareness in the West of the Orthodox commitment to “the concept of the ascent of men and women to their divine destiny. . . [as] conveyed by the Orthodox concept of the deification of the human race in Christ.”⁴⁶ This concept has been clearly set forth in the Gospel of St. John 7:38-39 in which Christ spoke “about the [Holy] Spirit which those who believed in me were to receive” with the result that for those who believed, out of their hearts “shall flow rivers of living water.” In our baptisms, we have each received the Holy Spirit; and throughout our lives “this comfort” which the Holy Spirit “pours out and spreads through the whole of [each person’s] being, to all his joints, his inner parts, his heart.”⁴⁷ It is in this context that Archimandrite Vasileios reflects: “You feel that what is happening is that strange event recorded in the Synaxarion for All Saints: ‘The [Holy] Spirit descends and clay ascends.’ The Spirit descends and the clay, the whole human being, ascends.”⁴⁸ We are each whole human beings made of clay, capable of being moulded by the Holy Spirit into God’s purpose for each of our lives. . . . if we choose to participate.

The precise nature of this process of deification involving participation with the descending Holy Spirit and the ascending whole human being is difficult to articulate. Peter Bouteneff, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, New York, and Director of their Master of Theology Program proposes that:

Our vocation is to become by grace everything that Christ is by nature. In other words, our work is to participate in God’s work and in his will, and in his light and his glory, to the point where, while remaining created human persons, we become

⁴⁴ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 224.

⁴⁵ *Confessions*, 1.1. Cited by McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 186.

⁴⁶ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 198.

⁴⁷ Archimandrite Vasileios, *The Saint: Archetype of Orthodoxy*, 19. The phrase “to all his joints, his inner parts, his heart” has been drawn by Archimandrite Vasileios from the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

⁴⁸ Vasileios, 19-20.

also partakers of the characteristics of divinity itself. In that ascent—and through all the ‘crosses’ that entails—we join the One who descended for our sake, who, while remaining uncreated and divine, became also a partaker of the characteristics of humanity.⁴⁹

Thus Dr. Bouteneff suggests rightly that it is Christ Himself who has first descended and ascended to make possible the descent of the Holy Spirit into our lives.

Closely linked to this descent of the Holy Spirit into our lives is the necessity of self-awareness urged by St. Isaac the Syrian (died c.700): “To him who knows himself, knowledge of all things is given. For knowing oneself is the fulfilment of the knowledge of all things.”⁵⁰ In a sense, because Adam and Eve are no longer responsible for our personal sins, we are confronted with the painful insights of St. Isaac the Syrian that: “It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins. . . .Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons. . . .This life has been given to you for repentance, do not waste it in vain pursuits.”⁵¹ The pursuit of deification in this life is not an easy path.

Reflecting on the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor, Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006) has pointed out that deification for each human being is “at one and the same time, an act of divine grace and an act of human free will.”⁵² It is this integration of grace and free will that St. Maximus, Jaroslav Pelikan (a historian and convert to Orthodoxy from the Lutheran Church) and all of us seek both in this life on earth and in the life to come:

‘The future deification of those who have now been made children of God’ [while alive on earth] was the way the spirituality of Maximus described the stages of salvation: having been transformed into ‘children of God’ in this life, believers could anticipate yet a further transformation in the life to come, into a participation in the very nature of God.⁵³

However, if we are to be made “children of God” in this life now, we each need to come to terms with the secularity of life as it is lived around us.

⁴⁹ Bouteneff, 105 in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*.

⁵⁰ Cited by Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 271.

⁵¹ “Orthodox America: Pearls from St. Isaac of Syria” at the website of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad at: www.roca.org/OA/137/137d.htm. For a more comprehensive analysis of the life and teaching of St. Isaac of Syria see Metropolitan Hilarion Alfreyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000).

⁵² Jaroslav Pelikan, “Introduction,” in *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 11. See also

⁵³ Pelikan, 10. See also Bouteneff, 17 and Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996).

A Poetic Epilogue: Facing Contemporary Secularity

When George Herbert (1593-1633) began his poem “Love” with the words: “Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,/Guilty of dust and sin”⁵⁴ he was expressing an attitude of countless others who for many centuries now have felt unworthy to receive blessings from God, because the fear of original sin has undermined their free will and their capacity to be reconciled to God. It may well be that this sense of unworthiness among both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians in the West has become an important element in the decline of Christianity so vividly described in 1851 by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) in *Dover Beach*: “The sea is calm to-night./ The tide is full. . . . The Sea of Faith/ Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore/ Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled./ But now I only hear/ Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,/ Retreating, to the breath/ Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world.” More than seventy-five years later, William Butler Yeats ,(1865-1939), writing in 1929 in *The Nineteenth Century and After* tried to respond to Arnold’s vision of declining faith with a four-line poem: “Though the great song return no more/ There’s keen delight in what we have:/ The rattle of pebbles on the shore/ Under the receding wave.”⁵⁵

This vivid image of Christians having become rattling pebbles “under the receding wave” of faith, is as acutely relevant to Christian life now as during the previous four centuries when Herbert, Arnold and Yeats were trying to come to terms with the meaning of faith in Christ to their own lives and the lives of others. However, while there may well be a certain sense of “keen delight in what we have” among many twenty-first century Orthodox Christians, the abiding Orthodox Tradition with respect to sin and salvation is the hope that all humanity will come to believe in Christ. That goal was set out by St. Macarius the Great (c.300-c.390) as he picked up a theme of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18 by praying that: “The inner being of believers who through perfect faith are born of the Spirit shall reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory.”⁵⁶ It is to the implementation of this prayer that we turn in the next lecture on salvation history that continues to seek a better understanding of the Orthodox approach to salvation.

⁵⁴ George Herbert, “Love,” in Laura Barber, *Penguin’s Poems by Heart* (London: Penguin, 2009), 56.

⁵⁵ *Dover Beach* and the response of Yeats may be found here:- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dover_Beach

⁵⁶ St. Macarius the Great, Homily 5:10.

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