

## **UNIT 3A: DOCTRINE** *(All quotations are from the Septuagint except where indicated.)*

### **61: GOD, CREATION AND COVENANT**

#### **A Singular Creator**

“In the beginning God made heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1). So begins the Holy Scripture. The Jews were exceptional amongst all peoples of antiquity in their insistence that God and the natural order were neither to be confused nor fused. The creation owed its being and purpose to God. God Himself was singular and unique. There was only one God; and God was one.

The surrounding cultures had very different ideas in their creation stories. Many supposed a pantheon of deities only some of which had any role in creation. Others commonly believed that the creation was itself part of God, and an emanation of His being. However, the Jews under the divine revelation of their covenant knew that God could not be divided without impugning His sovereignty and power; He could not be confused with creation for then He would be subject to change, violating His self-sufficiency and perfection. Such sovereign sufficiency required the belief that God created the Cosmos out of His own love, freely, so as to nurture something “not-Himself” into a dynamic and evolving relationship of communion with Himself. This applied in the first place to the physical process of creation itself, which was not instantaneous, but rather an unfolding fecundity of God from the Earth itself (Genesis 1:11: “Let the earth bring forth ...”). Although man was a special case in that only he, both male and female of course, was made in the image and likeness of God, there is no reason to suppose that humans in the flesh, animated by the breath of God, were exempt from these natural processes of life development, so the supposed conflict between faith in a Creator and evolutionary processes is both unnecessary and harmful to the pursuit of truth. The freely willed love-based understanding of divine creation also applied to the dynamic and growing covenant relationship God established and

sustained with His own people, called out by God from humankind after the tragedy of the Fall for the special purpose of restoring all humanity through the coming Messiah.

Undergirding all these beliefs was the direct, personal and existential knowledge of the Creator, above whom and apart from whom there could be no other god. This transcendent Being was above infinity itself for He could never be quantified even in these terms. Creation on the other hand, being his handiwork was both finite and entirely good, destined to fulfil its purpose in acquiring its own relative perfection by communing with its Maker. As Father John Anthony McGuckin has insisted: “For Orthodoxy the world itself is a holy and blessed thing. . . . The world [is not] a mere thing, devoid of ‘spiritual value’ in and of itself. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as St Basil and St Gregory of Nazianzus understood and communicated well, “the world is “a sacramentally charged mystery of [the] presence [of God].”<sup>2</sup> All forms of life are drawn into that Presence.

### **Being from Non-Being**

The Jews did not know God because they philosophised about Him, but rather because they had entered into a relationship with the One who had made a friend with Abraham and the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. His ways had been made known in salvation and judgement; and this required from them faithfulness and love, repentance and hope. Later, however, particularly after the emergence of wisdom as a genre in the Scriptures and especially in the post-Exilic environment of Hellenism, the people of God began to reflect more thoroughly on the presuppositions and implications of their faith. There is a marked progression and refinement in understanding for example between Genesis 1:2, which only considers creation from

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<sup>1</sup> Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> McGuckin, p. 207.

the starting point of pre-formed matter and 2 Maccabees 7:28 which follows the received faith to its logical conclusion, namely that the Cosmos was made out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) or rather, more properly, out of that which had no being. We shall now consider some of the further implications of this particular doctrine from a contemporary perspective. Additional reflections will be given on this doctrine in the second lecture of this unit.

The implications of the *ex nihilo* doctrine are both radical and consistent when contrasted with the divinisation of the natural and the naturalisation of the divine characteristic of pagan and polytheist faiths. For example, the world does not exist eternally but, as St Augustine emphasised, both space and time were created with matter and energy, making the terms “before creation” and “after creation” meaningless terms from within creation itself. Interestingly, this has been corroborated by contemporary science.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, science today, working on the assumption that God (if He exists) has no interaction with the created order, assumes that creation made itself, there being no external agency to its existence. Atheism, therefore, in its desire for an eternal cosmos stands in flat contradiction to the Big Bang singularity. This discomfited the late Fred Hoyle (the author of the steady-state theory) who, as an atheist, had an almost visceral disgust for the notion of a beginning; and even today there are some scientists who seek to modify this ‘nihilo’ singularity which stands as an immovable barrier to the notion which claims that no-being could of its own (presumably) ‘non-self’ have created itself. Of course, strictly speaking, both St. Augustine and Stephen Hawking agree that there was no beginning in time, but rather, time itself had a beginning. This awareness that time itself had a beginning is where all our notions of reality bereft of God breakdown.

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<sup>3</sup> For a balanced discussion of how the Orthodox doctrine of creation is now supported by contemporary science, see the entry, “Creation,” in F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (Eds.), *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 429. [This is a reasonably priced 1,786 page paperback edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed.].

The great 19th Century theologian, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, put it this way:- "All creatures are balanced upon the creative Word of God, as if upon a bridge of diamond; above them is the abyss of divine infinitude, below them, that of their own nothingness." In a sense then, hidden in the centre of this beautiful "bridge of diamond" is God's love for the universe, for humanity and for life itself. Metropolitan Kallistos has emphasised that "God created the universe *by an act of his free will*. Nothing compelled Him to create; he chose to do so."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the profound insight follows:

If nothing compelled God to create, why then did he choose to do so? In so far as such a question admits of an answer, our reply must be: God's motive in creation is love. Rather than say that he created the universe out of nothing, we should say that he created it out of his own self, which is love. . . . Creation is an act not so much of His free will as of his *free love*. To love means to share, as the doctrine of the Trinity has so clearly shown us: . . . [God] is a communion of persons who share in love with one another. . . . God's love is, in the literal sense of the word 'ecstatic'—a love that causes God to go out from Himself and to create things other than himself. . . .<sup>5</sup>

It is appropriate, indeed essential, to consider precisely how God is both Creator and Trinity.

### **God both Creator and Trinity**

As already stated, it is the transcendent majesty and glory of God, His singular unexcelled and excellent being that concerns all truly monotheistic faiths. All else flows from this. Any conceptualisation, image or formulation concerning God in his essence or being is idolatrous and to be rejected. There can be absolutely no

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop [now Metropolitan] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Rev. Ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), p. 44 [italics in original text].

<sup>5</sup> Ware, p. 44 [italics in original text].

ontological overlap between God the Creator and Uncreated One and creation itself. However, to say that God is utterly distinct from creation at the level of His essence is to contribute nothing to an understanding of *how* He can be known by humankind through His covenanted grace, His theophanies and supremely by His Incarnation in the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Presupposed throughout the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church is the truth that God manifests Himself in creation without being absorbed or fused into it, which would be pantheism. The Orthodox teaching that incorporates the reality of the Divine Presence is called *panentheism* and this received its classic formulation in the distinction made between the essence and energies of God in the works of St Gregory Palamas. The energies of God are sometimes referred to as His immanence in creation.

When the Jews reflected upon this immanence in the context of their own covenant experience, their sacred writings made a distinction between the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Later, the Wisdom of God was added. The Word of God could be described as His powerful creative and prophetic utterance. Noteworthy in this regard is this verse from the prophecy of Isaiah 55:11: “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” If the Word of God is that in God which brings something to fruition in a declaratory manner, the Spirit of God is that in God which imparts His life to that which His Word has brought into being. The Wisdom of God is that which may be known from both His Word and His Spirit; it is in effect a term of revelation and dependent upon both His Word and His Spirit for its operation.

When the Word became flesh in the Incarnation of Christ and later when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church at Pentecost, the Apostles learned through their own personal experience that this Word and the Spirit have their own distinct hypostatic identities. As Father John has pointed out:

The attributes of the deity . . . are by no means ‘proper [only] to’ the Lord’s humanity (for otherwise it would have been a sham human life, a mere masquerade as man) but are nevertheless ‘shared’ to a certain extent with the Lord’s body. This ‘sharing’ was called the ‘hypostatic union’ in the ancient church, and was meant to convey the manner in which, while retaining their own proper characteristics intact, the divine and human natures of the same Lord were indissolubly bonded in a vital communion by the self-same Person who lived through and in both natures: eternally in the divine nature, and after the Incarnation within history also through the glorified human nature.<sup>6</sup>

Briefly and profoundly, “the deification of humanity [has been] effected by the Incarnation of God in human history.”<sup>7</sup>

That which had been intimated in the Old Covenant was fully revealed in the New Covenant, and Church Tradition was later to make sense of this in monotheistic terms by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. St Irenaeus referred to the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father (*Against the Heresies*, 5.6), but it was not until the Cappadocian Fathers clarified the terminology in the 4th century that the Church’s experience of the Trinity was thoroughly articulated. The only change that the doctrine of the Trinity made to traditional monotheism concerned the hypostatic distinction of both the Word and the Spirit both between themselves and with the Father. However, this distinction was not applied to the essence or being of God which remained as it always had been a simple, undifferentiated, identical consubstantiality. In this Orthodox sense the hypostases always remained co-equal and undivided. (The doctrine of the holy Trinity will be explored in a later lecture. The purpose of presenting this summary is to understand better the doctrine of creation itself which will now be considered).

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<sup>6</sup> McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> McGuckin, “Hypostatic Union” in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 175.

When God created the heavens and the earth, it was, therefore, the Trinity that did so. If Genesis 1 and John 1 are held together in their Johannine exegetical cross-reference, we discover that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-equally, and as one, active in creation. In Genesis 1:1-2 the Spirit hovers over the waters of chaos bringing forth life where there is no life, and the Word of God commands light and all that there is into being. St John follows the same theme, but now the Logos (Word) and Pneuma (Spirit) have a theandric aspect; that is, they explicitly connect God to humankind in the Word made flesh and Spirit, being the light of life of humans. This had always been latent in the Genesis doctrine of the creation of humankind as being made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27); however, with the Incarnation and Pentecost this becomes realised respectively in the Person of Christ and the life of the Church.

One further refinement was emphasised by the Fathers in respect of the image of God in humankind. Since only Christ Himself was and is the true icon (Image) of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), humans, strictly speaking, are made *according* to this Image. In other words, the realisation of the image of God in us is only in Christ (Colossians 3:10); and it is something into which we are called to grow throughout our lives, as set out in Ephesians 4:15-16a: “speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” St John Chrysostom has offered an important exegesis of this Biblical passage:

Communication [by the Spirit] is not to all members equally but according to the capacity of each member to receive. [The Spirit] gives more to that member [or person] able to receive and less to that member able to receive only so much. So it is with Christ. The Spirit is like a root. The souls of persons depend upon

Christ as members [of His Body]. Each member depends on His providential distribution of gifts. The supply of spiritual gifts occurs according to a due proportion, as each member effects the increase of the Body [of Christ].<sup>8</sup>

In the light of this unequal ability of persons to receive providential gifts and the unequal distribution that necessarily follows, it is essential that all members of the Body of Christ understand that for “each part [of the Body of Christ to be] working properly,” everyone should not expect to receive the same gifts, but only those gifts that are appropriate for their personalities, prayers and abilities in the light of the tasks they are asked to complete in the Body of Christ.

Finally, the theandric dignity of humanity made in the image and likeness of God arises also from our place within the order of creation of which, of course, we are part. The divine vocation of all humans, as emphasised in Genesis is to tend creation (Genesis 2:15)—to be in effect its priests, to offer back to God that which has been given to us enhanced in some way. This vocation was compromised in the Fall but given back to humankind in and by the redemption of Christ who took all things to Himself, including our human nature, to restore and renew them actively in God. Thus creation is continuing to happen in the present moment, as Metropolitan Kallistos has explained:

In saying that God is Creator of the world, we do not mean merely that he set things in motion by an initial act ‘at the beginning,’ after which they go on functioning by themselves. God is not just a cosmic clockmaker, who winds up the machinery and then leaves it to keep ticking on its own. On the contrary, creation is *continual*. If we are to be accurate when speaking of creation, we should use not the past tense but the continuous present. We should say, not ‘God made the world, and me in it,’ but God is making the world, and me in it,

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<sup>8</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians II.4:15-16*, quoted by Mark J. Edwards (Ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 168.

here and now, at this moment and always.’ Creation is not an event in the past, but a relationship in the present.<sup>9</sup>

The perfection of humanity, therefore, is inextricably linked to the perfecting of creation, because the latter is only made possible by the former, and the former is strengthened by the latter. Insofar as humanity is to perfect itself even as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48) then this can only be achieved by humans glorifying God in worship and service and fulfilling their divine vocations in the cosmos in a continuing relationship both with the cosmos and with the Trinity.

### **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**

Since humans have been created “a little lower than the angels” (Psalm 8:5), there is both a spiritual and physical aspect to the human being. The spiritual aspect has many different components, as does the physical. The soul is distinct from the body and of a different essence, yet the human person, fully alive, is a psychosomatic unity. Both will be saved and not the soul only. Although the Fall has broken the bond between body and soul on death, this bond will be restored at the general resurrection.

The soul is the higher commanding principle of our identity. It may be saved even if the body is lost and vice versa (Matthew 16:26). In a person being saved the body becomes a partner of the soul, whereas in a person perishing the body, through carnality, wars against the spirit. St Paul often talks in these terms of the flesh warring against the spirit, but he is by no means deprecating the body as such, but rather he exposes, often through his own experience, those internal conflicts in the heart which implicate the will, the passions and the inward disturbance of sin (Romans 7).

The soul is immortal as it is conferred by the breath of God with the full unalloyed endowment of the image of God. Nonetheless, it is not divine in essence but rather

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<sup>9</sup> Ware, p. 45.

reflects those higher spiritual principles which are the imprints of God in human nature. The teaching of the immortality of the soul pervades the Old Testament from its earliest form which speaks of Hades as the abode of souls (Genesis 37:35) to later traditions prior to the coming of Christ which speak of the immortality of the righteous (Wisdom 3:1; 5:15). The full flowering of this teaching though is in the New Testament, since with the Resurrection of Christ comes the full realisation of the promise. St Paul talks of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens which awaits believers (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Most of the Fathers consider that the immortality of the soul is a gift of divine grace rather than simply a natural aspect of the soul itself (St John of Damascus and St Cyril of Jerusalem). The origin of the soul has not been clearly defined in Tradition which according to revelation remains incomplete. However, the Church has rejected under divine guidance the Origenist teaching of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls as antithetical to the Christian faith which insists on the unique individuality of each human person in which the soul and one particular body are united.

The spirit is the handmaid of the soul, with its hidden dimension which relates to God in the innermost self. When the Holy Spirit is active for good in the heart the spirit brings the compliant body back into active partnership with the soul and in this manner everything is brought back into a unity in God, where before there was only division, confusion and alienation caused by the passions. The practical means of achieving this transformation, this redemption of soul and body, is by faith, good works and those ascetical disciplines which incorporate prayer and the sacramental life of the Church as instruments of divine grace.

The physical aspects of the human person are no less important than the spiritual. These include the body itself but also the mind, which after all depends upon the brain for its operation. When the physical is in harmony with the spiritual and centred in

God all the bodily aspects are in tune with the Holy Spirit. So, physical health, emotional balance, mental equilibrium and general vigour characterise human life as God intended it to be.

In Christian living a proper care for one's body as a temple the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) is Godly and not at all incompatible with an ascetical discipline that keeps the whole person centred on God, for it is the latter that makes the former possible. A dissolute spirit on the other hand is contrary to divinely created human nature and this will inevitably lead to progressive physical deterioration. A contrite heart becomes a fit place for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and imparts to the body a certain radiance which is an anticipation in the flesh of the resurrection. This transfiguration of both body and soul has been manifested in the lives of the saints and constitutes the empirical evidence for the saving work of God in the whole human person.

The image of God in human life is the divine imprint which lies at the very heart of our humanity. There is no general agreement in the Scriptures or the Fathers of the precise constituency of this image. Some suggest rationality, others free will, immortality and sacrificial love. Some fathers suppose inward dispositions and faculties only, others insist that the body no less of the soul and the spirit contribute to the divine image (St Irenaeus of Lyons).<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking, there is a dogmatic and pastoral interest in distinguishing the image of God in human life and its likeness in human sanctification (St. John of Damascus and others). So, the image of God is never effaced through sin, but the likeness unto God may degrade or even be lost. This teaching is in stark contrast to many traditions in heterodox Christian thought (notably Calvinism) which claim depravity, even total corruption, in human nature

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<sup>10</sup> For further consideration of the Orthodox approach to the body, the soul and the human spirit see Ware, pp, 46-51, 60-61; and the entry "Soul" in Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, pp. 316-319.

itself. In Orthodox Christianity, evil is a destructive parasitism or privation of good, not an ontological change at the heart of humanity.

### **The Heavenly Realm - the Angels**

The angels are endemic in both the old and new Testaments.<sup>11</sup> This summary alone will suffice to emphasise this fact: An "angel" or "messenger," is used of God, of men, and of an order of created spiritual beings whose chief attributes are strength and wisdom (2 Samuel 14:20; Psalms 103:20; 104:4). In the Old Testament, the expression "the angel of the Lord" (sometimes "of God") usually implies the presence of Deity in angelic form (Genesis 16:1-13; 21:17-19; Genesis 22:11-16; 31:11-13; Exodus 3:2-4; Judges 2:1; 6:12-16; 13:3-22). The word "angel" is used of men in Luke 7:24, James 2:25 and throughout Revelation (1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) In Revelation 8:3-5, Christ is evidently meant. Sometimes "angel" is used of the spirit of man (Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15). Although angels are spirits (Psalms 104:4; Hebrews 1:14), power is given them to become visible in the semblance of human form (Genesis 19:1 cf. Genesis 19:5; Exodus 3:2; Numbers 22:22-31; Judges 2:1; 6:11,22; 13:3,6; 1 Chronicles 21:16,20; Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:26; John 20:12; Acts 7:30; 12:7,8). The word is always used in the masculine gender, though sex, in the human sense, is never ascribed to angels (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25). They are exceedingly numerous (Matthew 26:53; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11; Psalms 68:17). The power is inconceivable (2 Kings 19:35). Their place is about the throne of God (Revelation 5:11; 7:11). Their relation to the believer is that of "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation;" and this ministry has reference largely to the physical safety and well-being of believers, (1 Kings 19:5; Psalms 34:7; 91:11; Daniel 6:22; Matthew 2:13, 19; 4:11; Luke 22:43; Acts 5:19; Acts 12:7-10). From Hebrews 1:14; Matthew 18:10; Psalms 91:11 this care for the heirs of salvation begins in infancy and continues through life. These Guardian angels appointed to each person observe us all (1

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<sup>11</sup> Biblical references in this section are to the Masoretic text.

Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; Ecclesiastes 5:6); a fact which should influence conduct. They receive departing saints (Luke 16:22). Man is made "a little lower than the angels," and in the Incarnation Christ took "for a little time" this lower place (Psalms 8:4,5; Hebrews 2:6,9) that He might lift the believer into His own sphere above angels (Hebrews 2:9,10). The angels are to accompany Christ in His second advent (Matthew 25:31). To them will be committed the preparation of the judgment of the nations (Matthew 13:30, 39, 41, 42). The Kingdom is not to be subject to angels, but to Christ and those for whom He was made a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:5). The Archangel St. Michael is mentioned as having a particular relation to Israel and to the Resurrection (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1, 2; Jude 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The only other angel whose name is revealed (in the Masoretic text but not the LXX) is Gabriel, who was employed in the most distinguished services (Daniel 8:16; 9:21 cf. Luke 1:19, 26).

The angels populate the invisible creation as opposed to the visible and this is referred to of course in the creed of Nicaea. The invisible heaven was created before the visible world as the abode of the angels according to Saints Ambrose, Gregory the Theologian, John of Damascus, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Anastasius of Sinai. Angels are active spirits having intelligence, will and knowledge who serve God to fulfil His will and glorify Him. They are fleshless but strictly speaking not immaterial (St John of Damascus). The Damascene also teaches that the angels assume forms appropriate to those who behold them. Being without bodies their movement is less restricted, but nonetheless they are not omnipresent as befits only God. Their immortality is of the same measure and order as that of men, that is, a gift of grace. In intelligence and power, they surpass all humans, yet they do not have the dignity of man as being made in the image and likeness of God. Moreover, as with mortal man they do not know the depths that are in God nor can they know the future. Their

knowledge of redemption is also limited (1 Peter 1:12), they do not know all human thoughts and cannot perform miracles except by the will of God (Psalm 71:19).

The multiplicity of angels exists in ranks of degree and function. Holy Tradition has expounded further on these matters and particularly in the work, *The Heavenly Hierarchy* which bears the name of St Dionysios the Areopagite. In this work there are nine choirs or ranks of angels—three hierarchies of three ranks each. These ranks are based on the Scriptural record (see Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16). The Cherubim are to be found in Genesis 3, Psalm 79 and 98 and Ezekiel 1, 10. These are the other references: the seraphim (Isaiah 6), powers (Ephesians 1, Romans 8), thrones, principalities, dominions and authorities (Colossians 1, Ephesians 1, 3), archangels (1 Thessalonians 4, Jude 9) and angels (1 Peter 3, Romans 8). In the first hierarchy are those closest to God, the thrones cherubim and seraphim. The second hierarchy comprises the authorities, dominions and powers. The third hierarchy which is closest to humans consists of angels, archangels and principalities. These hierarchies are referred to also by *The Apostolic Constitutions*, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Gregory the Theologian, St John Chrysostom, St Gregory the Great and St John of Damascus. Finally, five of the seven archangels are given names and functions in the Scriptures as follows: Michael (who is like God?); Gabriel (man of God); Rafael (help of God: LXX); Uriel (fire of God: LXX) and Salathiel (prayer to God: LXX). Tradition also ascribes names to the other two: Jegudiel (praise of God) and Barachiel (blessing of God).

In the midst of the multiplicity and complexity of angels, it is important to remember that their impact upon our lives is direct and significant. Father John Anthony McGuckin has written of how angels “express their root of existence out of the energy of prayer” and how “Evagrius the Theologian said that the feeling of inner warmth

during prayer was . . . a sign of the presence of an angel taking note of our prayer and joining in with us.”<sup>12</sup> It follows then that:

Given that the angels are eschatological spirits of praise, we find naturally that when the same vocation to be transfigured in praise is, even approximately, approached in the life of the Church on earth, the faithful sense the presence of angels very closely. It is a form of spiritual exultation which is profoundly deep, and sober, and peaceful. It can be sensed at moments of great grace in the divine liturgy, at which they also serve . . . and on other occasions when the grace of God has been perfectly fulfilled by a disciple’s obedience, for all such occasions are the result of the assistance of the angels of God.<sup>13</sup>

If we each learn to discern God’s will for our lives and remain obedient to those divine purposes, we too can expect the presence of angels in our own lives, whether or not we are explicitly aware of their protection.

## Conclusion

With the angels, this account of the creation is more or less complete. Revelation can take us thus far, but it is important to acknowledge that much if not most of creation is hidden from us by the providence of God. Science will continue to unveil the mysteries of the cosmos, and theology will still plumb the mysteries of the dispensation of Christ, but we can still only confess with St. Paul: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). In an insightful exegesis of this verse, St Gregory of Nazianzus preached:

No one has yet discovered or shall ever discover what God is in His nature and essence. As for a discovery some time in the future, let those who have a mind for it research and speculate. The discovery will take place, so my reason tells

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<sup>12</sup> McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 224.

<sup>13</sup> McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 224.

me, when this Godlike, divine thing, I mean our mind and reason, mingles with its kin, when the copy return to the pattern it longs after. This seems to me to be the meaning of the great dictum that we shall, in time to come, know even as we are known.<sup>14</sup>

The “kin” of “our mind and reason” is our spirit; and it is this mingling of mind and spirit within each person that draws us as human “copies” to “return to the pattern” of the image of God which we “long after.” May this third year of E-Quip lectures prepare us “to research and speculate” and seek to live our lives in unity with Christ and His purposes for each of our lives. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> *Theological Oration 28.17*, cited by Gerald Bray (Ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VII, 1-2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p.