

UNIT 3A: DOCTRINE

66: The Trinity and the Holy Spirit - Applied Theology

First Principles

As St Peter of Damascus (c.1027-1107) has rightly insisted in his *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*, “doctrine is not simply a set of interconnected propositions about God; it also includes practical guidelines for daily life, so that one’s entire life becomes a theological enterprise.”¹ This enterprise might be experienced at times as an intellectual or emotional challenge, but it is primarily a promise from God that we can each become what He wishes us to be.

St Peter of Damascus also offers a beautifully balanced understanding of the relationship between grace and free will that is an essential first principle in applying the Trinity to our lives. In the context of grace:

There is no object, no activity or place in the whole of creation that can prevent us from becoming what God from the beginning wished us to be: that is to say, according to his image and likeness, gods by adoption through grace, dispassionate, just, good and wise, whether we are rich or poor, married or unmarried, in authority and free or under obedience and in bondage—in short, whatever our time, place or activity.²

St Peter is insistent that we can each experience “adoption through grace.” However, as we are offered this full experience of God’s grace, we each decide whether “the divine purpose” is to be fully implemented in our lives:

Briefly, we may say that in the nature of things, if someone wants to be saved, no person and no time, place or occupation can prevent him. He must not, however, act contrary to the objective that he has in view, but must

¹ *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*, cited and summarised by Augustine Casiday, “Church Fathers and the shaping of Orthodox theology,” p. 180 in Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 167-187.

² *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*, [*Philokalia*, III, p. 76], cited by Casiday, p. 182.

with discrimination refer every thought to the divine purpose. Things do not happen out of necessity: they depend upon the person through whom they happen. We do not sin against our will, but we first assent to an evil thought and so fall into captivity. Then the thought itself carries the captive forcibly and against his wishes into sin.³

Essentially, God adopts each of us through grace, and we remain His children throughout our lives, but we grow into adulthood with free will. In the previous lecture, Augustine Casiday indicated “the process of continuously appropriating the past ... animates Orthodox theology.”⁴ That process of renewal and animation applies personally to each of us, to Church structures, and indeed to all aspects of linking dogmatic Orthodox theology to life.

This lecture will consider three areas of application concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and of the Holy Spirit: namely, (1) ecclesiology, that is, the doctrine of the Church; (2) relations with other faiths; and (3) social justice in society. These three areas will each be addressed again later in year 3 in much more detail, so this is an introduction to the matters in hand. The starting point is, of course, the faith of the Church as examined in the previous lectures of years 1 and 2. Here is a summary:

1. God is a triune communion of Persons sharing one essence of which the Father alone has the monarchy, the Son the dignity of the Incarnation and the Spirit

³ St Peter of Damascus, *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*, Book 1, cited in the helpful website, Orthodox Church Quotes at: <http://www.orthodoxchurchquotes.com/category/sayings-from-saints-elders-and-fathers/st-peter-of-damascus/>. St Peter considers not only sins of intention, but also sins of ignorance. He continues: “The same is true of sins that occur through ignorance: they arise from sins consciously committed. For unless a man is drunk with either wine or desire, he is not unaware of what he is doing; but such drunkenness obscures the intellect and so it falls, and dies as a result. Yet that death has not come about inexplicably: it has been unwittingly induced by the drunkenness to which we consciously assented.”

⁴ Casiday, p. 167.

the life-giving power of God. In essence and in action, this God is one and acts as one in all the Persons.

2. Human beings are made according to the image of God; and salvation is a restoration of the likeness unto God and a deifying union with Him. Human nature is one and shared with God.
3. The Church is one in that identifiable communion which is the Orthodox Church but without prejudice to the salvation of any whom God calls.
4. Creation is good as the work of its loving Creator; and creation also is called to participate in the Resurrection of Christ through a redeemed humanity which is its microcosm. In this process, a redeemed humanity, a little universe in itself, is the seed of a cosmological liberation from corruption and death (Romans 8:18-21).

Ecclesiology

Over the centuries of the Christian era the Church has changed, developed and adapted in matters pertaining to its life and mission across countless different cultures and times. This is to be expected and welcomed. What the Church has never done, however, is to abandon its legacy from Tradition concerning its own nature, vocation and leadership. The falling away of the West from Orthodox norms and the communion of our Church in the second millennium was very much a story of this progressive abandonment of the legacy of Tradition and then its (partial) replacement with an alien ethos within the inner life of the Latin church itself. This has been well covered in the third term of the first year of these lectures and in the Biblical commentaries of the second year. The question that has not been addressed thus far, however, and which is our concern here is this: "What drives and maintains this divine life within the Orthodox Church, and why has it become so compromised in other Christian confessions?"

First, a note of caution is advisable. When attributing causes to phenomena and events, false correlation and oversimplification must be avoided at all costs. For

example, some Orthodox believe that the introduction of the new calendar in some of the Orthodox churches in the 20th century has been the cause of many of the alleged ills which, it is claimed, have beset those churches ever since. Such claims are not backed up with sound reasoning, empirical evidence or the presentation of *necessary* causative factors. They simply become ideological or polemical points with which one proceeds to beat one's opponents into submission and at the same time create a pastorally damaging holier-than-thou, righter-than-thou mentality which is narrow-minded, sectarian and deeply divisive. Standards of proof or at least plausible causation must be more rigorously demonstrated and of a higher standard than this. That one thing should happen at the same time as another is not proof that either caused the other. We need to offer good evidence and non-polemical argumentation for any hypothesis we advance. With this caveat in mind, let us proceed.

From the start, it must be acknowledged openly that it is very difficult to prove *necessary* causal connections between differing Trinitarian theologies and the doctrines of the Church or ecclesiologies which are claimed to derive from them. It is rather more a matter of how the different elements of faith and life sit together within the experience of Church and in the context of culture.

In reflecting on this experience of Church in the context of culture, Father John Anthony McGuckin, has offered two important linguistically-grounded insights. First:

The English term church (German *Kirche*) derives from the Greek *kyriakon*, which means 'the Lord's belonging.' The term has a primary significance in terms of a building, or sacred object, and the Anglo-Saxon concept of church invariably confuses the ideas of property and community, which were originally quite distinct in Christian thought.⁵

⁵ Father John Anthony McGuckin, entry on "Church," pp. 64-68 in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 64.

In addition to this conflation of property and community, there is a further theologically-grounded challenge:

The ancient word for church as the society of believers was [the Greek word] *ekklesia*, a term that denotes the ‘calling out’ or election of a people. As such it is a profoundly important term in the New Testament writings used to signify the concept of the body of Christian believers as the newly constituted society of the covenant elect, the community of the new age, the mystical body of Christ.⁶

Furthermore, there is a third area of significant disagreement among Christians—when was the Church founded, “at the calling of the disciples, at the institution of the Eucharist, at the cross, or at Pentecost?”⁷ A resolution to this question should be grounded in a close reading of the Gospels, especially the Gospel of St John:

... the incipient signs of an organized community (albeit an apocalyptic one) are witnessed in Jesus’ selection of twelve apostles to represent the missionaries to, and judges of, the twelve tribes of a new Israel (Matthew 10:1-16; 19:28). The Fourth Gospel sets the birth of the church as a mystery that can only unfold as a result of the saving death of Jesus (John 12:20-23), after he has breathed out his Spirit (John 19:30; 20:22-23).⁸

Essentially, the Church as an *ecclesia*—a living community, “the society of believers”—arose from a direct response to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the community of believers.

It is worth noting that “the earliest patristic reflection on the nature of the [C]hurch is fragmentary, and little is known precisely about the institutional organization of [C]hurch life in the first century.”⁹ However, by the beginning of the second century, Father John notes that in the Second Epistle of St Clement there is a strong affirmation of *ecclesia*:

⁶ McGuckin, p. 64.

⁷ McGuckin, p. 65.

⁸ McGuckin, p. 65.

⁹ McGuckin, p. 65.

This Epistle already shows the signs of how greatly reflection on the [C]hurch as a 'mystery of salvation,' much more than [as] a sociological phenomenon, will predominate in patristic thought; as for example when he discusses the pre-existence of *ekklesia*: 'I know that you are not unaware that the Church is the Body of Christ. For scripture says: God made them male and female. Here the male is Christ, the female is the Church. Moreover, the sacred books and the apostles say that the Church is not of the present, but existed from the very beginning' (2 Clement 14). This teaching evoked the Hebraic sense that the Torah was eternal, but now re-expressed it to connote the [C]hurch's apocalyptic reality. It pre-existed in God's eternal plan, and in the mystical union it was destined to achieve in the Logos, who is its husband and Saviour.¹⁰

Although the unknown author of Second Clement is right to see the Church as existing "from the very beginning," it is also appropriate to compare this with the teaching of the second century work, *The Shepherd of Hermas*. There the Church itself is an "unfinished tower" with seven women building the tower in a specific order of activity in which "from Faith is born Self-control; from Self-control, Sincerity; from Sincerity, Innocence; from Innocence, Reverence; from Reverence, Knowledge; from Knowledge, Love."¹¹ The vision that the tower (i. e. the Church) is "still being built" indicates that "the end" has not yet come.¹² Here, as in a further second century text, the Prologue to *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the Church has a "strong sense of a community at once manifested on earth in stability, and yet belonging to another order altogether."¹³

¹⁰ McGuckin, p. 65.

¹¹ The quotation about how the tower (i.e. the Church) is to be built up on earth is drawn from *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3 in Jack N. Sparks (Ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1978), p. 174, section 16. See also McGuckin, p. 65.

¹² Sparks, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3, section 16, p. 174.

¹³ The quotation is from McGuckin, p. 65, referring to the opening sentences of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, cited by Sparks, p. 65. For further study, see John D. Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, Trans Elizabeth Theokritoff, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).

This dual commitment of the Church over the centuries to life on earth and to the Day of Judgement challenges each of us to grow within ourselves a personal understanding of Orthodox ecclesiology that links heaven and earth. St John of Kronstadt has proposed that:

The Christian, even here on earth, must accustom himself [or herself] to live the heavenly life; in fasting, in renunciation, in prayer, love, meekness, gentleness, patience, courage, and mercy.... In church I am truly as if in heaven upon earth; here I see the images of the Lord, of the Most Pure Mother of God, of the holy Angels ... I feel myself in the visible presence of God, of His Mother, of the heavenly powers, and of all the Saints. This is truly heaven on earth: here I know that I am, and feel myself indeed a member of Christ and of His Church, especially during the celebration of the most heavenly Liturgy and the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. O, how I ought to live, think, feel, speak, in order to worthily be in this heaven on earth!¹⁴

It is important to see that this piety arises out of a genuine love of Orthodox doctrine in which, as St John of Damascus proposes, "One's entire life becomes a theological enterprise." Let us now turn to the different understandings of Church in the West and in the East.

In contrast to the many different approaches to ecclesiology evident in the West, the modern Eastern Orthodox approach to ecclesiology has been clearly delineated. Father John Erickson has sketched four key characteristics:

(1) The point of departure is the Ignatian vision of the local church: the Faithful coming together as Church, (1 Corinthians 11:17, 20; 14:23, 26) becoming the body of Christ in the Eucharist, becoming one out of many ... with the bishop personifying this unity... (2) This Eucharistic assembly under the presidency of the bishop is the Church in all its fullness, not just a part of

¹⁴ St John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1897/1994), p. 325. Cf. pp.330-331, 426.

the Church... (3) This essential unity of the local churches means the essential unity and equality of their bishops... Hence the council of bishops, with its emphasis on unanimity, with each bishop subscribing, giving his own testimony to the truth held by all: here we have an expression of the common mind of the episcopate, an expression of the authority of all, not a supreme power over all. (4) But this equality of local churches and of bishops does not mean uniformity, just as unity of essence does not exclude plurality of utterly unique hypostases. Each local church is unique....¹⁵

This perspective grounded in both Biblical reflection and Tradition is a sound template for Orthodox ecclesiology.

Although the contrast can be overdone, the Latin approach of the West tends to be juridical and inclined to see the unity of the Church in terms of vertical relationships between subordinates and superiors. This is its conception of authority even in the Protestant world where, arguably, the Scriptures have simply changed position with the magisterium and the papacy, albeit with precious little agreement on the interpretation of Scripture across the denominations. The Greek approach in the East tends to focus on the mystical union between the Church in Her members and God. According to canonical norms, a Bishop is someone who to some extent has already achieved union with God. His office is not compromised by his sin, but his authority is shaped more by his godliness than his position. This charismatic levelling tends to make the East emphasise the equality and conciliarity of the Church in her horizontal relationships under and in God.

Of course, this is not a polarised and exclusive distinction between East and West in ecclesiology. Father Andrew Louth has pointed out that:

Though the 'West' was 'Latin,' the 'East' cannot be restricted to what was 'Greek.' In addition to the Greek, that is, the Byzantine East, the East

¹⁵ Father John H. Erickson, Chapter 6, "Collegiality and Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology (1978), pp. 73-89 in *The Challenge of Our Past* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1991), p. 75.

included Churches linguistically defined by their use of the Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Armenian languages—and by other more far-flung languages... as well as an emerging Arab Christianity in countries that had fallen to Islam, together with the Slav version of Byzantium Christianity, that emerged from the ninth century onwards.¹⁶

At several times in the past, the Orthodox Church has been unduly influenced by a Western scholastic and legal frame of mind, but invariably the *phronema* or mindset of the Church has subsequently reasserted itself. Likewise in the West, conciliar movements and revivals in mystical theology have challenged, stretched and even broken rigid hierarchical relations of power and submission, yet only for the Petrine primacy to reassert itself in later times, most notably at the First Vatican Council with the definition of papal infallibility. Then there are those accidents of history (or the provisions of Providence depending on one's point of view!) that have reinforced the ecclesiastical divisions. There was, for example, only ever one patriarchal see in the West which suited Rome's seniority in the pentarchy, whereas in the East there were several patriarchal centres which inhibited centralisation.

The formal ecclesiastical separation of East and West is nearly a thousand years old, but no less important is that longer political separation which dates from the rise of Islam. In the East, caliphates exhibited a greater or lesser degree of antipathy to Christianity yet nonetheless afforded some limited protection to the Church against the growing power of the papacy, but at a terrible price of making Christians second-class citizens. Likewise, in the West, plague, poverty and war eroded the Roman Christian ideal to the point where the papacy felt that it had to try and control emergent nation states in order to be able to hold Christian Europe together in a reasonably united form. Were these two rival ecclesiologies helping to drive the social and political realities or merely responding to them and, therefore, essentially, being shaped by them? It is difficult to resolve this question one way or

¹⁶ Father Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2007), pp. xv-xvi.

the other. All we can perhaps conclude is that on each front the social, political and ecclesiastical realities in the East and in the West became more polarised, particularly after the disaster of the Fourth Crusade which drove the two traditions even further apart.

If, therefore, it cannot be conclusively shown that it was the social and political realities alone in Europe (including European Russia and the Middle and Near East) which shaped the churches could the ecclesiologies of those churches have been perhaps significantly influenced by their different Trinitarian theologies? I believe that it is possible that theology, or rather the lived experience of Christian life according to that theology, moved outward through the Church and into society, as well as being impacted in the other direction. Is it really a coincidence then that in the East, where God is described as a communion of triune persons, the doctrine of the Church emphasised *koinonia* (communion) in the Spirit with all its implications for the conciliar model of Church life and decision-making? Is it really a coincidence that in the West the Trinitarian emphasis on the dominating priority of God's essence, (hence the problematic nature of the hypostases in communion), its adoption of the filioque, (which as we have seen tends to subordinate the Spirit) sits alongside a very monarchical and top-down conception of authority? Should we be surprised that in the West the Holy Spirit was increasingly subordinated to the Magisterium, the Papacy claiming to sit in the place of Christ (whereas before it had merely claimed to sit in the place of St. Peter)? Perhaps we should reflect on precisely why it is that individualism and capitalism have flourished in the West, arguably to its detriment, whereas collectivism and utopianism have been defining and deadly distortions in the East.

Perhaps a direct causal connection is claiming too much, but there does appear to be a consistency and synergy between what is bound or loosed in heaven and what is bound or loosed on earth, or so it seems to this author. If humans are indeed made in the image and likeness of God, then this connection must be real and not

coincidental. Would the reuniting of the Latin West and the Greek East, for example, perhaps redraw the political map of an increasingly secular Europe and might that only be possible if Trinitarian theologies in both the East and West were resolved into a new synthesis that both traditions could recognise in Tradition? Is this prize, the resolution of our irreconciled differences in faith and practice. not worth the charity, work and prayer it would involve—for God, for the Church and for Society?

Of course, this does not just concern Europe, but arguably it is in Europe this process of the reconciliation of Trinitarian theologies might start because this is where those divisions started. In considering the relationship between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity, Father John Anthony McGuckin has argued forcefully that the very term “The East” indicates the extent to which Orthodoxy has suffered silently in subservience to a colonial mentality forced upon it by Western academics. His blunt analysis offers a fitting conclusion to this consideration of ecclesiology:

No longer do we, as Orthodox, need to take upon ourselves the false moustaches and exotically weird disguises that European Christian theorists would like us to adopt. We do not aim to be the Church of the East, but [rather] know ourselves to be the Church which is the heart and soul of European Christian civilization ... which is as broad as Christian humanity itself.¹⁷

It is essential to escape from these colonial projections implying that the Orthodox are always “reactionary conservatives” (to use Father John’s term) in order to advance both interfaith relations and the true Orthodox mission.

¹⁷ Father John Anthony McGuckin, “Orthodoxy and Western Christianity: The Original European Culture War?” pp. 85-107 in Valerie Hotchkiss & Patrick Henry (Eds.), *Orthodoxy & Western Culture: A Collection of Essays Honoring Jaroslav Pelikan on His Eightieth Birthday* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2005), p. 102. Cf. p. 104 with its use of the term “reactionary conservatives.”

Interfaith Relations and Mission

God made humanity to share one nature. This is the firm basis for our confidence that the Word in the Incarnation has recapitulated all of human nature and is indeed able to save all human persons. That is the model given by St Irenaeus of Lyons in *Against the Heresies* that we are called to implement in our lives and in the Church: “Now this is his Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times was made a human being among humans, that he might join the end to the beginning, that is, the human being to God.”¹⁸ Applying that insight to the question of interfaith relations and dialogue, Orthodox Christians should expect to see the human face of Christ in “the other” for the other is not only a person for whom Christ died but also a person who Christ “is.”¹⁹

In times past, Christians have often wondered how Christ can be the “God-Man for all” since His humanity was of a specific culture from a specific and particular place and time. The question is loaded with false assumptions and starting points. Although Christ was both a man and a Jew, it is not his maleness or his ethnic background which saves, for if that were the case women and Gentiles would lie beyond the pale. Rather, it is his *humanity united to his divinity* in the person of the Word—the Logos—which saves.

The Church Father who develops most excellently the Logos Christology where we first encounter the gospel of St John is St Maximus the Confessor. St John the Theologian referred to the Light that enlightens every man as coming into the world (John 1:9). The universal enlightenment of the Logos is a theme which enables St Maximus to appropriate the pre-Christian Greek idea of the “logoi” that permeate the cosmos. These logoi are inherent creative potentialities embedded within the universe. In the synthesis of St Maximus they are described as creative potentialities

¹⁸ *Against the Heresies*, 4.20.4, cited by Father John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 96.

¹⁹ For further development of this theme, see Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, edited by Paul McPartlan (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

derived from the Logos to which in the end all created things tend, since in the beginning they also derive their being through Him (John 1:1-3), and only in Him can they find their fulfilment, their *telos*, their end purpose or goal. It is in this characterisation of the Logos that we discover new depths in the Johannine idea of the connectedness of humanity, the Cosmos and Christ.²⁰ Let us now take hold of these insights concerning the economy of the Word and the Spirit and apply them to the issue of the Orthodox Christian dialogue with other faiths and our relations with them.

In John 14:6 our Lord confesses Himself to be the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Him. This verse causes no end of problems to those who, having the right instinct for universality in the reach of the Gospel nonetheless trip themselves up with a faulty doctrine of Christ; in short, their Christ is too small for the task. The next step is either to settle for a domestic Jesus who is incapable by reason of his cultural limitations to be the Lord of all or, alternatively, universality is seized and Christ is surrendered altogether in exchange for some new religious synthesis of all the world's religious teachers allegedly upholding a common theme. Many Christians in heterodox communities have made a shipwreck of their faith by failing to steer between these twin sirens. If on the other hand, they had an Orthodox Christology they would have no problem in confessing Christ who could save all, even beyond the boundaries of the canonical churches and even embracing those who know not Christ or who reject Him in ignorance. If the Person of the Incarnate One is the Logos and if the Logos is the cosmic Christ in whom and by whom all things were made by reason of their logoi, then we have both a vision of what interfaith dialogue could be and could become, for we know that Christ, that is, the Word, can be found in all that is pure, loving and true in any person. The Orthodox Christian works and prays and loves to the point that a person of his own free will discovers the living Christ within his own

²⁰ For further development of these ideas, see George C. Berthold (Ed.), *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985) and Andrew Louth, *St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Routledge, 1996).

life, and so he comes to the Father implicitly if not explicitly, yet nonetheless in reality.

Of course, this journey to Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit but there is a difference here between the economy of the Son and the economy of the Holy Spirit and this is beautifully explained in that wonderful work by Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. In chapter 8, he summarises the argument as follows: "The work of Christ unifies; the work of the Holy Spirit diversifies."²¹ In the previous chapter, Lossky shows how the Logos, by assuming our shared human nature, both unifies and makes universal the saving action of God in Christ. To use a phrase of St Leontius of Byzantium (c. 485-c.543), "we are enhypostasised" in that hypostasis which is the second person of the Trinity. It is therefore in Christ that humanity finds its unity, purpose and goal. He has broken down the wall of separation that used to divide Jews from Greeks, men from women, and in former times, slaves from freemen (Ephesians 2:11-18; Galatians 3:27-28). This is an elucidation of a theme in Logos Christology that has already been explored.

Moreover, In a complementary fashion, inasmuch as Christ unites, so the Holy Spirit within the body of Christ ensures the inclusion and glorification of that manifold diversity of human hypostases of his own Divine Person by anointment with the holy chrism and the daily renewal of the Spirit in the lives of the faithful. Put simply, the Church as the Body of Christ and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit is big enough for all humanity. Here every person's story, his or her formative experiences, spiritual journeys, aspirations and commitments, inside or outside of the Church are the raw material which God the Potter uses to populate His Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor within the Trinity of the diversification of salvation and sanctification across not only the whole of humanity but also the cosmos itself, (certainly including ET if and when we eventually find him!) Universality finds expression not only in unity but also in diversity. In the Logos there is the unity,

²¹ *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1991), Chap. 8, p. 167.

but in the Spirit there is also the diversity. If we wish to understand how the infinite richness of creation can be restored and made new in the blessed Trinity, then it is to the Holy Spirit and to his role that we must look.

It would be remiss to conclude this section without emphasizing that the Son and the Holy Spirit together are, in the memorable phrase of St Irenaeus, “the hands of the Father.”²² At the eschaton, the End of all things, it is to the Father that all things will be surrendered so that “God may be all and in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). This is the goal to which we must aspire and, encompassing which, our hearts and minds must be enlarged and our wills strengthened by divine grace. In the midst of the exercise of our own free wills, we can be confident that, as St Maximus concluded, “The Incarnate Logos gave to humanity the potential for the redemption of [human] will [through] the redefinition of human freedom as perfect communion with God.”²³ In other words, for each of us to be truly free, we need to experience “perfect communion with God.” Quite a challenge, but an experience worth seeking in prayer and action!

Social Justice

God cares about our common life with others because our identity, character and purpose as persons is to a large degree forged out of our social relations, that is, what others bring to us and what we bring to others. Metropolitan John Zizoulas has shown that this sociality of being is understood by the Fathers to be based upon

²² The phrase is from St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1: “Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modeled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God.” For further discussion, see the article by the Roman Catholic priest, Father Thomas G. Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei*: The Importance of Being Human,” *Logos* 6:4, 15-34, with the quotation on p. 19. The full article is available on the web: <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/logosjournal/archives/2003vol06/64/6-4Article.pdf> .

²³ For a careful exposition of the theology of St Maximus the Confessor, see Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 409, from whom the quotation is taken.

our common life in the Trinity who is a Communion of Persons.²⁴ Since we are made in His image and likeness, our common life both reflects and participates in His. The perichoresis or mutual indwelling in love of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity reveals another truth about our humanity, namely, that the unique character of our personhood finds its perfection relationally in others. As Metropolitan Kallistos has summarised these truths:

Salvation is social and communal ... because of our faith in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The determining element in our humanity is the fact that we are created in the image of God, and that means in the image of the Holy Trinity.... God as Trinity is mutuality, self-giving, 'I-and-Thou.... My personhood is fulfilled in relationship and in community. I am truly personal, truly human, only so far as I show love to others and live out my life in terms of 'I-and-Thou. My salvation, then, as a human person in God's image, can be attained only in union with other persons.²⁵

Orthodox doctrine is clear, but applying it in specific situations requires much prayer and discernment.

It is important to remember that in Orthodox anthropology, there is a commonplace distinction between the "individual" and the "person." The etymology of the word "individual" is 'that which cannot be (further) divided.' It is an atomised understanding of humanity, which, from an Orthodox point of view, is utterly false and unnatural. Such a perspective falls all too easily into individualism—the mother and father of greed, crippling self-sufficiency, isolation and alienation. As Christos Yannaras has stressed, the modern focus on "individual rights" ignores "the primordial and fundamental meaning of politics: politics as a common exercise of life 'according to the truth,' politics constituted around the axis of ontology (and

²⁴ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1997)

²⁵ Bishop [now Metropolitan] Kallistos Ware, *How are we saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1996), pp. 68-70. Cf. Bishop [now Metropolitan] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Revised Ed. (Crestwood, NY: SVSP), p. 21.

not self-interested objectives).”²⁶ In the Orthodox understanding of this matter, our natural God-intended identity is both uniquely and relationally personal and that personhood can only develop and flourish in the context of human relations, from family to friendship with others to participation in a wider community to engagement with humanity as a whole.

Consider God's dealings with His people. From antiquity, and then in His revelation to the Church, God has sought to forge, develop and strengthen a covenant relationship with His people as a living sign of that which He desires for all. These covenants, supremely the Sinaitic covenant and the New Covenant sealed in the body and blood of Christ, the Messiah, successively inaugurated deeper and more thoroughgoing relations between God and humanity and finally enabled the very destruction of death which otherwise would have left humans in their sin, compromising those relations with God forever. In this progression from the old covenants to the new, the Law may have been refined and reformed, but it was never abrogated. The grace, the love and the truth of Christ has fulfilled the Law, inscribing it deeply within the hearts of the faithful such that they live now this Law freely out of a Spirit-filled generous heart and not by way of external constraint. In the same way that God both internally and externally is under no such constraint, so also Christians practice love, justice and mercy freely as an expression of the life of the Kingdom into which they entered at baptism and now sustain themselves through faith and grace-filled repentance until the end when God shall be all and in all.

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, therefore, social justice is the fruit of our life in Christ and not an ideology or political system of human invention bolted on to a privatised faith. We act justly because we know God and share in His life. We do not have to learn justice as an external precept but rather we find the Law

²⁶ Christos Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church,” pp. 83-89 in Emanuel Clapsis (Ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (Geneva: WCC Publications; and Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), p.88.

truly inscribed in hearts which have been transformed, and are being transformed, by the Love of God.

It is at this point, however, that we encounter a further problem or issue. In the Bible, the Law is God's gift to his people. It is not a gift to the world, even though the Scriptures consistently show appreciation of God's action and righteousness in peoples outside of Israel and the Church. Nonetheless, from the covenant with Abraham onwards it is clear that God intends that His people should become a blessing to the nations. The covenant is not, of course, a private arrangement between God and the elect but rather an effectual sign of a life restored in God which is open to all. There is a difference, therefore, between a society and nation which is fundamentally Christian and which might be expected to pass laws that reflect Christian values and one where Christianity is a minority faith, those values have not yet commended themselves to the people and their political leaders. The Christian way of life cannot be forced on others; and where this has been attempted in the past the outcome has been to alienate others rather than to attract them. This clearly means that judgement really does begin with the household of God and that we cannot expect others to live righteously if we do not. However, where the fruits of the Spirit are manifest, Christian preaching and witness will not be in vain. The life of God will be visible in the Church, and so people will be converted. Recall the reaction to the early Christian Church from the pagans who wondered at the love that was known in and shown by Her members. Only in such circumstances could we say that a church is Trinitarian in practice as well as in faith. As always, the doctrines of Orthodox theology need to be lived out in our lives—Orthodoxy needs to lead to Orthopraxy.