

I Believe in One God...

Prologue : The Search for God

- Before Christ, we desired knowledge of ultimate things on our own terms.
- “The human spirit hungers for knowledge--for entire, integral knowledge. Nothing can destroy our longing to know, and naturally, our ultimate craving is for knowledge of the Primordial Being, of Whom or What actually exists. All down the ages man has paid instinctive homage to this First Principle. Our fathers and forefathers revered Him in different ways because they did not know him ‘as He is.’” (Fr Sophrony of Essex, *His Life is Mine*)

Credo

- “Creed” comes from the word “credo,” which means “I believe;” our Christian faith is a liberating trust.
- Creeds are also called “symbols.” In the ancient world, symbols were something like secret passwords that granted you entrance into special religious rituals called “mysteries.” These rituals were supposed to help people by giving them some sort of otherworldly blessing. In Christianity, the creed grants us entrance into the mysteries of Christ, baptism and communion, the only true way to salvation.
- A “symbol” also means *a coming together of things*. The confession of the creed makes us whole human beings, as we become united around our faith.
- “Receive, my children, the Rule of Faith, which is called the Symbol (or Creed). And when ye have received it, write it in your heart, and be daily saying it to yourselves; before ye sleep, before ye go forth, arm you with your Creed. The Creed no man writes so as it may be able to be read: but for rehearsal of it, lest haply forgetfulness obliterate what care hath delivered, let your memory be your record-roll: what ye are about to hear,

that are ye to believe; and what ye shall have believed, that are about to give back with your tongue. For the Apostle says, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” For this is the Creed which ye are to rehearse and to repeat in answer. These words which ye have heard are in the Divine Scriptures scattered up and down: but thence gathered and reduced into one, that the memory of slow persons might not be distressed; that every person may be able to say, able to hold, what he believes. For have ye now merely heard that God is Almighty? But ye begin to have him for your father, when ye have been born by the church as your Mother.” (St Augustine of Hippo, *De symbolo ad catechumenos* (A Sermon to the Catechumens) in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1.3, Augustine: *On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*.)

Credo in Unum Deum

- The Christian God has nothing to do with the many false gods of human invention.
- “Every concept relative to God is a false likeness, an idol. The concepts which we form in accordance with the understanding and the judgement which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself” (Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 33).
- “God does not belong to the class of existing things: not that He has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence: and, conversely, that which is above essence will also be above knowledge” (St John Damascene, from *The Exact Exposition of the orthodox Faith*).

- “The super-essential nature of God is not subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits--incomprehensible and ineffable to all for ever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue ... nor image which may afford any knowledge of its subject, if this be not that perfect incomprehensibility which one acknowledges in denying all that can be named” (St Gregory Palamas).

Father Almighty

- “Beloved, for us to whom it was given to believe, however, let us not believe that God is the sun nor the king of heaven, not in the sea, or its king, Neptune, or someone else, whom vanity rather than truth fashioned, nor in the earth and Pluto. Rather, let us believe in God the almighty Father, creator of the universe, king of the heavens.” St Quodvultdeus of Carthage, Second Creedal Homily
- God’s might is not the might of the world; his power is revealed in the cross of His Son Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of the Father.
- “St Gregory argued that the Passion of Christ is not ‘evidence of his weakness,’ as Eunomius took it, but evidence of the ‘surpassing act of power, by which this was possible,’ so that ‘it is necessary to honor the God revealed through the Cross just as the Father is honored.’... Christ’s taking upon himself the role of a servant, voluntarily going to the Passion, does not diminish our perception of what we might otherwise have considered to be his divinity, but actually manifests his true divinity. The transcendent power of God is manifest in this world in flesh, in darkness and in death, as a servant” (Fr John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*, 33-35).

Creator of Heaven & Earth, Seen & Unseen

- God created the cosmos for Christ, and Christ reveals God's love for creation.
- “Concerning the motive for the creation in the mind of God, the Orthodox Confession and the Longer Orthodox Catechism express it thus: The world was created by God “so that other beings glorifying Him, might be participants of His goodness.” ... Blessed Theodoret writes, “The Lord God has no need of anyone to praise Him; but by His goodness alone He granted existence to angels, archangels, and the whole creation.” Further, “God has need of nothing; but He, being an abyss of goodness, deigned to give existence to things which did not exist.” St. John Damascene says, “The good and transcendently good God was not content to contemplate Himself, but by a superabundance of goodness saw fit that there should be some things to benefit by and participate in His goodness.” Fr Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 112.
- “The invisible, angelic world was created by God and created before the visible world. “When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice, said the Lord to Job” (Job 38:7, Septuagint). The Apostle Paul writes, “By Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers” (Col. 1:16). The Fathers of the Church understand the word “heaven,” in the first words of the book of Genesis (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”), as being not the physical heaven, which was formed later, but the invisible heaven, the dwelling place of the powers on high. They expressed the idea that God created the angels long before He created the visible world (Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Anastasius of Sinai), and that at the creation of the visible world the angels already stood before the Face of the Creator and served Him.” Fr Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 115--116.

- “For we believe that a logos of angels preceded their creation, a logos preceded the creation of each of the beings and powers that fill the upper world, a logos preceded the creation of human beings, a logos preceded everything that receives its becoming from God.” St Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7
- “The scriptural text calls the mystery of Christ “Christ.” The great Apostle clearly testifies to this when he speaks of the mystery hidden from the ages, having now been manifested (Col 1:26). He is of course referring to Christ, the whole mystery of Christ, which is manifestly the ineffable and incomprehensible hypostatic union between Christ’s divinity and humanity... This is the great and hidden mystery, at once the blessed end for which all things are ordained. It is the divine purpose conceived before the beginning of created beings. In defining it we would say that this mystery is the preconceived goal for which everything exists, but which itself exists on account of nothing. With a clear view to this end, God created the essences of created beings, and such is, properly speaking, the terminus of His providence and of the things under His providential care. Inasmuch as it leads to God, it is the recapitulation of the things he has created. It is the mystery which circumscribes all the ages, and which reveals the grand plan of God (cf. Eph 1:10-11), a super-infinite plan infinitely preexisting the ages” (St Maximus the Confessor, from *Ad Thalassium* 60).
- “The soul is the breath of God, and while being heavenly, it endures being mixed with what is of the dust. It is a light enclosed in a cave, but still it is divine and inextinguishable ... The Word spoke, and having taken a part of the newly-created earth, with His immortal hands formed my image and imparted to it His life; because He sent into it the spirit, which is a ray of the invisible Divinity” (Homily 7, “On the Soul”).

Epilogue: The Fall

- “The ancestors of our race wilfully desisted from mindfulness and contemplation of God. They disregarded His commandment, and made themselves of one mind with the dead spirit of satan and, contrary to the Creator’s will, ate of the forbidden tree. Stripped of their resplendent and life-giving garments of supernal radiance, they became, alas, dead in spirit like satan. But since satan is not merely a dead spirit, but also brings death upon those who draw near him, and since those who shared in his deadness possessed a body through which the deadly counsel took effect, they transmitted those dead and death-dealing spirits of death to their own bodies.” St Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetical Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, 46.
- “The story of the Fall prefigures the entire tragic history of the human race. It shows us who we were and what we have become. It reveals that evil entered the world not by the will of God but by the fault of humans who preferred diabolical deceit over divine commandment. From generation to generation the human race repeats Adam’s mistake in being beguiled by false values and forgetting those that are true--faith in God and fidelity towards him.” (Met. Hilarion Alfeyev, *Mystery of Faith*, 67.)
- “The consequences of the Fall were catastrophic for the first human beings. Not only were they deprived of the bliss and sweetness of Paradise, but their whole nature was changed and disfigured. They fell away from their natural condition and entered an unnatural state of being. All elements of their spiritual and corporeal make-up were damaged: their spirit, instead of striving for God, became engrossed in the passions; their soul entered the sphere of bodily instincts, while their body lost its original lightness and was transformed into heavy sinful flesh.... Disease, suffering, and pain

entered human life. Humans became mortal, for they had lost the opportunity of tasting the tree of life.” (Met. Hilarion Alfeyev, *Mystery of Faith*, 69--70.)

- Before we encounter Christ, we are blind to sin, but Christ confronts us in our ignorance and this experience makes us existentially aware of how sinful we are and of the fallenness of the world which longs for its redemption.