

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

I. PRECONDITIONS

- A. The World (understood as God's Creation but also as Fallen & Redeemed)
(Christian Vision of the world: created, fallen, redeemed)
- B. The Church
- C. The Kingdom of God (as "already" but "not yet")



II. PERSONAL SPIRITUALITY * Synergy (see below)

- A. Repentance (Metanoia)
- B. Faith Hope Charity (Theological Virtues)

III . The Essentials of Orthodox Spirituality

- (1) The aim and ^{END} of man's life is union with God and deification (theosis).

The Greek Fathers have used the term "deification" to a greater extent than the Latins. What is meant is not, of course, a pantheistic identity, but a sharing, through grace, in the divine life: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature ..." (2 Peter 1.4) This participation takes man within the life of three Divine Persons themselves, in the incessant circulation and overflowing of love which courses between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and which expresses the very nature of God. Here is the true and eternal bliss of man.

Union with God is the perfect fulfillment of the "kingdom" announced by the Gospel, and that of Charity or love which sums up all the Law the Prophets. Only in union with the life of the Three Persons is man enabled to love God with his whole heart, soul and mind, and his neighbor as himself.

Union between God and Man cannot be achieved without a Mediator, who is the Word made Flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ: "I am the Way, ...no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." (John 14.6) In the Son we become sons. "We are made sons of God" says St. Athanasius. Incorporation into Christ is the only means to reach our supernatural end. The Holy Spirit operates and perfects this incorporation. St. Irenaeus wrote "Through the Spirit one ascends to the Son and to the Father". The fact that the object of Christian spirituality is the supernatural life of the soul and not the natural effects, either normal or supernormal, obtained by human disciplines, even when they are called "religious", cannot be over emphasized. *What is here in question is the action of God on the soul, and not the human actions on the soul itself.* The basis of spiritual life is not psychological, but ontological. Therefore an accurate treatise on spirituality is not the description of certain states of the soul, mystical or otherwise, but the objective application of definite theological principles to the individual soul. The redeeming action of our Lord constitutes the alpha and omega as well as the center of Christian Spirituality.

(2) Divine Grace and Human will (A Serious Issue in Western Theology)

[Luther emphasized that salvation came about “only through Divine Grace” over against the emphasis on “human works” as important for salvation. An overemphasis on “salvation by grace” leads to the denial of human freedom, while the overemphasis on “salvation by personal effort (works)” could lead to the view of man as his own savior.]

The incorporation of man into Christ and his union with God requires the cooperation of two unequal, but equally important necessary forces: divine grace and human will.

Will -- and not intellect or feeling -- is the chief human instrument of the union with God. There can be no intimate union with God if our own will is not surrendered and conformed to the divine will, “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not....Lo, I come to do Thy Will O God:” (Hebrews 10. 5,9)

But our weak human will remains powerless if it is not anticipated and upheld by the grace of God. “Through the grace of our Lord Jesus we shall be saved” (Acts 15,11). ...St. Clement of Alexandria coined the word “synergy” (cooperation) in order to express the action of these two conjoined energies: grace and human will.

(3) Asceticism and Mysticism

Both the distinction between the human will and divine grace, and their interpenetration, help us to understand how, in the spiritual life, the ascetical and mystical elements can differ and mingle.

Asceticism is generally understood as an “exercise” of human will on itself, in order to improve itself. As to the term “mystical”, modern language has sadly misused it. “Mystical” is confused with “obscure”, “poetic”, “irrational”, etc. The ascetical life is a life in which “acquired” virtues, virtues resulting from a personal effort, only accompanied by that general grace which God grants to every good will, prevail. [An example of this could be the virtue of contemplation, or patience]. The “mystical life” is a life in which the *gifts of the Holy Spirit* are predominant over human efforts, and in which “infused” virtues are predominant over the “acquired” ones. Between the ascetic life, that is, that life in which human action predominates, and the mystical life, that is, the life in which God’s action predominates, there is the same difference as between rowing a boat and sailing it; the oar is the ascetic effort, the sail is the mystical passivity which is unfurled to catch the divine wind....The spiritual life is generally a synthesis of the ascetical and mystical...Graces of the mystic order are not necessary to salvation. Mystical life is not synonymous with Christian perfection: this last consists of charity or Love, and may be reached by souls who will never know any other way than the simple and loving keeping of the commandments.

(4) Prayer and Contemplation

Prayer is a necessary instrument of salvation. (St. John) Cassian, whose voice is the echo of the Desert Fathers, distinguishes three ascending degrees of Christian prayer: supplication, (for oneself), intercession (for others), thanksgiving or praise. These three degrees of prayer constitute in themselves a whole program of spiritual life.

In contrast with prayer, contemplation is not necessary to salvation. But, as a general rule, assiduous and fervent prayer becomes contemplative. According to the ‘classics’ of spiritual life, contemplation begins with the ‘prayer of simplicity’. The

accompanies him to his burial; it constitutes the most authoritative treatise on the spiritual life. The order in which it presents the holy mysteries expresses the ascending order of the sanctification of the soul according to the mind and intention of the Church. Therefore one might say that the three holy mysteries of Baptism, Chrism and Eucharist are the three essential stages in the way that lead to God. The other sacraments and sacramentals may be connected in one way or another of these three degrees and mysteries.

THEOSIS - DIVINIZATION

Christian life can be described as a *relationship*, not with the bible or the creed, or doctrines, but with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a relationship with the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

"...for through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, build upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:18-22)

"Man is called to be by divine grace what God Himself is by nature". (St. Maximus Confessor. This is our vocation: to share in the nature of God, the process called *Theosis or Divinization*. This is possible because of the gift of the Holy Spirit.that you might become sharers in the Divine Nature.. (2 Peter 1:4)

How is this possible? The answer is the Christian life. The Christian life comes into being with the Sacraments and with holy works, those virtuous words which are done with a pure and holy motive in the name of Christ. The road toward our Theosis, our union with God can be formulated in the following short statement "divine grace and human freedom, theory and action, enthusiastic zeal and decision, abandonment of the world and return to God."

Spirituality in the Orthodox Church means the everyday activity of life in communion with God. The term spirituality refers not merely to the activity of man's spirit alone...it refers to the whole of man's life as inspired and guided by the Spirit of God.

(The material on "The Essentials of Orthodox Spirituality" has been taken from *Orthodox Spirituality, An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition*, 2nd Edition, by A Monk Of The Eastern Church. St. Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY. 1987)

December 9, 2020 St. Elias Church

Developing a rule of prayer...within the context of Orthodox Spirituality

- I. General Remarks on Prayer**
 - II. Essentials of Orthodox Spirituality**
 - III. The Prayers of the Church**
 - 1. The Sanctification of Time**
 - 2. The Sanctification of Life**
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I, General Remarks on Prayer

Christian life can be described as a relationship, not with the Bible or the creed, but with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The end is deification.

What is Prayer?

1. Talking to God, Raising the mind and heart to God
2. Conversation with the Living God.
2. The Value of Prayer: God knows our needs, why pray?
Prayer is the acknowledgement of our insufficiency and dependence on God.

Private and Corporate Prayer

Jesus speaks of prayer in two ways. Private prayer and prayer with others. (Mark 6:5) and (Mark 18:19-20). These are complimentary and linked.. We pray OUR FATHER.

Remarks by Fr. Georges Florovsky

We pray as members of the Church.
Things necessary for a rule of prayer

1. Have a fixed rule. Have a consistent time and place for daily prayer. AM and PM
2. Before you use the prayers of the Church, read and examine them.
3. Realize the presence of God. A goal of prayer is to make that awareness constant.
4. St. Seraphim of Sarov teaches that the goal of prayer is acquisition of the Holy Spirit
5. Use the prayers of the church.
6. You may pray anywhere or anytime.

Available prayer books

1. The Little Red Book,
2. Antiochian Service Book

3. The Essentials of Orthodox Spirituality

An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition

By (A Monk Of The Eastern Church) Les Gillet

St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1945, 1978

1. The Aim and Purpose of Christian Life is union with God and Theosis
2. This is made possible through Jesus Christ (Incarnation, Death & Resurrection)
3. Our union with Christ is established through faith and Baptism & the Holy Mysteries
4. Divine Grace and Human Will are essential (Synergy)
5. Prayer is an essential component of our spirituality
6. Asceticism is an essential component of our spirituality
7. The Communion of Saints

Man is person and in community

1. Prayer is personal and
2. corporate—Liturgical

The Purposes of prayer are:

1. adoration,
2. thanksgiving,
3. contrition repentance
- 4 petition, supplication

Degrees of Christian Prayer from the Desert Fathers

1. Supplication for oneself
2. Intercession for others'
3. Thanksgiving or praise

The stages of Prayer:

1. Purification,
2. illumination,
3. union

Prayer can be vocal or mental.

1. Vocal
2. Meditation and Contemplation

Traditionally, *Lectio Divina* has four separate steps: read; meditate; pray; contemplate. First a passage of scripture is read, then its meaning is reflected upon. This is followed by prayer and contemplation on the Word of God. *Origen*

THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

THE SANTIFICATION OF TIME

The Daily Cycle

1. **Vespers**
2. Compline
3. Midnight office
4. **Matins**
5. First, Third, Sixth & Ninth hour

The Weekly Cycle

1. **The daily cycle**
2. **Sunday celebration of Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy**

The Yearly Cycle

1. The Feast of Feasts, Pascha Easter
2. The Twelve Great Feasts
 1. The Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8
 2. The Elevation of the Cross, September 14
 3. The Personation of the Theotokos, November 21
 4. The Nativity of Christ, December 25
 5. The Theophany, Baptism of Jesus by John, January 6
 6. The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, February 2
 7. The Annunciation, March 25
 8. The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday
 9. The Ascension of the Lord (40 days after Pascha)
 10. Pentecost (50 days after Pascha)
 11. The Transfiguration of the Lord, August 6
 12. The Falling Asleep of the Theotokos, August 15

The Cycle of the Saints

The Seasons of the Church Year

1. The Paschal Season of 50 days'
2. The time after Pentecost
3. The Lenten Seasons
 - A. Great Lent
 - B. The Fast of the Apostles
 - C. The Dormition, first two weeks of August
 - D. The Christmas fast, November 15- December 24

THE SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE

- 1. Prayer at childbirth and naming of the child**
- 2. Churching of the mother and child**
- 3. Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist**
- 4. Confession or Reconciliation**
- 5. Anointing of the sick**
- 6. Marriage. (monasticism)**
- 7. Holy Orders, ordination of Deacon, Priest or Bishop**
- 8. Funerals and memorials**

The Jesus Prayer

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner.”

Man is fundamentally “Homo Adorans” man the worshiper.

We are followers of quietism, simply waiting for the Holy Spirit to act, or Pelagian, thinking that our works will do it all.

sweet smell of incense, it can raise up our hearts, reminding us of the beauty of God, such that turning to prayer can serve as a radiant oasis even in a gloomy desert of a day.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF THE PSALMS

It is the ancient custom of the Eastern and Western churches, Orthodox and Catholic, to number the Psalms liturgically in the way they are listed in the Greek (Septuagint or LXX) Bible, which the earliest Christians always used. Only after the time of the Reformation in the late Renaissance did the Protestant world change this custom to start using the Psalms as they are listed in the Hebraic Bible. The present prayer book refers to the psalms in Orthodox and Catholic custom, as they are referenced liturgically; in other words, in the Septuagintal numbering. This is slightly different from the Bibles many readers may have in their homes that follow the Protestant system of numbering. In most cases the ancient liturgical reference is going to be one psalm behind. If one has a Protestant Bible, the following chart will give the equivalent reading. All other biblical passages are the same in all editions of Scripture:

<i>Liturgical/Septuagintal Psalm Numbers</i>	<i>Hebraic/Protestant System</i>
1-8	1-8
9	9-10
10-112	11-113
113	114-15
114-15	116
116-45	117-46
146-47	147
148-150	148-50

With this in mind, let me commend the book of Psalms to the reader as a major resource—one of those things to be held alongside a cross and a candle and an icon as a “basic kit for serious prayer” in any Christian house.

As well as a cross, a candle, and so on, one needs to have a copy of the Gospels. The Gospels and the book of Psalms are the two basic “sacred texts” from which our prayer kit is constructed.

THE ART OF PRAYER

One’s basic prayer kit is gathered now: a special corner or part of the house set aside as a domestic altar containing an icon, a cross, a book of prayers, a copy of the Psalms, and the book of the Gospels (which ought to be bound or covered with especially “joyous” bindings or coverings; in ancient times they used gold and silver and enamels, and we might have to make do with festive paper, but the point still remains). One has an icon lamp or a candle here too. At the time of prayer in morning or evening, light a candle when you start prayer. In Orthodox homes, the faithful usually have a small home censer (Orthodox sites on the Internet offer them for sale) and a small amount of charcoal with a few grains of incense on top, for praying (especially in the evening): “Let my prayer arise like incense in your sight, O Lord.” If one wishes to offer incense, the suitable places are marked in the text for morning and evening. Offering incense to God was a basic ritual of the ancient temple in Jerusalem and has remained integral to most Catholic and all Orthodox rituals. In the Eastern churches, the ordinary faithful laity also offer incense at home during their prayers—a lively reminder of their priestly status and dignity as baptized and chrismated servants of God. Whenever we pray, we stand as cosmic priests of Christ at the heart of the grace of salvation, which is the ongoing divine process of the metamorphosing of materiality into the light of glory.

Always be glad to come to pray. Never allow it to become a “chore.” When one starts to have a regular prayer life, what first seemed like the most pleasant part of the whole day—a quiet time given over to God—will soon enough become a time when one would rather dig the garden or climb on the roof (anything at all!) in order to avoid prayer. This is a normal reaction. The correct way to meet this *acedie* (spiritual dryness) is to not be bothered by it and to not give it any real significance.

It does not really matter whether we feel fervent or dry as a bone. It does not really matter whether we feel God’s presence breathing on our face or feel as if he is locked up behind a bronze heaven, never showing a sign of his presence. What matters is how he sees us. We do not need to “feel” his presence at every turn, when we know, by faith, that he is more present to us, at every moment of our life, than we are present to ourselves or our most beloved family. And if at morning and night we present ourselves before God and sing his praise, we have (no question about it) stood in the presence of Christ, prayed along with Christ our High Priest in the pure presence of the Holy Spirit of God, and offered our prayer like incense in the sight of the Father.

In being faithful day after day, we establish a habit, like that of healthy eating or good exercise, and our lives are changed dramatically at the core. We stand in the presence of the craftsmen and women of the Spirit of God who have gone before us.

Most of the prayers here are designed to be fairly short, not demanding too much time. If one wants to extend them, it is easy enough to weave in more psalms or more readings from the Gospel, or to begin the Jesus Prayer, about which there is a short concluding note at the end of this book—a brief word about a mystical subject of such profundity it properly escapes speech. Also, perhaps, one might

find it very helpful to find a book of the writings of the ancient saints on prayer (there are so many in the ancient Christian tradition, and so many modern spiritual classics). One can use these writings in the manner of *lectio divina*—reading a few paragraphs, leaving the book aside, mulling over what the author has said about the Christ life and how is it like that in our own Christ life—always with a view to dialogue with the presence of the Christ here and now.²

By “short” and “long,” in our modern domestic circumstances, I am talking of something relative. Twenty minutes seems a long time for a pressed twenty-first-century dweller. Longer than that, we may want to set a small timer to mark our time of praying, for those who swim the ocean of prayer find that time starts shrinking. The monks of Athos even today sometimes spend thirteen hours a day in prayer. They are, undoubtedly, something of an exception!

God sees the willing soul who sets out on a journey of prayer. He never fails to bless the generosity of such a soul and confirm the priestly role of the one who prays—even if at the end of the time of prayer one feels very deeply a “could-have-done-better” sensation. That does not matter. He sees our intent more than he sees our accomplishments: and he has pity on us because of it and blesses us anyway in his immense love for our race.

May God bless you as you pick up this book, strengthen you as you set off on the road of prayer using it, and bring you speedily to that place at the end of the road where the church of God is merrily assembled in the light of the Father’s mansions—entertaining the Head of our vast extended family and being entertained by him in such wondrous company.

Fr. John A. McGuckin

Priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church

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