

## Defining Orthodox Spirituality

1. “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” (Ezekiel 36:24–27)
2. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” (Joel 2:28)
3. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:16–17)
4. “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which ye have from God, and ye are not your own.” (1 Cor 6:19)
5. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom 8:7–14)

6. “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” (1 John 2:27)
7. “The whole life of Orthodoxy is bound up with visions of the other world. Without that vision Orthodoxy would not exist.” (Bukgakov, The Orthodox Church, 145.)
8. ‘The adjective "orthodox" comes from the noun "orthodoxy" and shows the difference between the Orthodox Church and every other Christian denomination. The word "Orthodoxy" manifests the true knowledge about God and creation. This is the definition St. Athanasios of Sinai offers. The term Orthodoxy consists of two words: "orthi" (true, right) and "doxa". "Doxa" means, on the one hand, belief, faith, teaching and on the other, praise or doxology. These two meanings are closely connected. The true teaching about God incorporates the true praise of God; for if God is abstract, then prayer to this God is abstract as well. If God is personal then prayer assumes a personal character. God has revealed the true faith, the true teaching. Thus we say that the teaching about God and all matters associated with a person's salvation are the Revelation of God and not man's discovery. God has revealed this truth to people who were prepared to receive it. St Jude expresses this point well by saying: "contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). In this quotation as in many other related passages it is clear that God reveals Himself to the Saints, i.e. to those who have reached a certain level of spiritual growth so as to receive this Revelation. The Holy Apostles were "healed" first, and then received the Revelation. And they transmitted this Revelation to their spiritual children not only by teaching them but primarily by mystically effecting their spiritual rebirth. In order for this faith to be preserved the Holy Fathers formulated the dogmas and doctrines. We accept the dogmas and doctrines; in other words we accept this revealed faith and remain with the Church so as to be healed. For faith is, on

the one hand, Revelation to those purified and healed and, on the other it is the right path to reach theosis, for those who choose to follow the "way." (OS, 15–16)

9. "We look for reliable witnesses who are to be found only in the Church whose age-old experience is immeasurably richer and more profound than our individual one. Such in the distant past were the apostles who bequeathed to us in the gospel and epistle the knowledge which they had received direct from God. They were followed by a succession of fathers (doctors and ascetics) who handed down the centuries, above all, the spirit of life itself, often endorsing their testimony in writing. We believe that at any given historical moment it is possible to find living witnesses; to the end of time mankind will never be bereft of genuine gnosis concerning God. Only after authoritative confirmation may we trust our personal experience, and even then not to excess. (St Sophrony of Essex, *His Life is Mine*, 27.)
10. "Christian faith is a mystical revelation in the human soul. It is broader, more powerful, closer to reality than thought. It is more complex than separate feelings. It contains within itself the feelings of love, fear, veneration, reverence, and humility. Likewise, it cannot be called a manifestation of the will, for although it moves mountains, the Christian renounces his own will when he believes, and entirely gives himself over to the will of God: "May Thy will be done in me, a sinner." The path to faith lies in the heart; it is inseparable from pure, sacrificial love, "working through love" (Gal. 5:6). Of course, Christianity is bound up also with knowledge of the mind, it gives a world view. But if it remained only a world view, its power to move would vanish. Without faith it would not be the living bond between heaven and earth. Christian belief is something much greater than the "persuasive hypothesis" which is the kind of belief usually encountered in life." (Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 53–54).
11. "In our own day there is a widely held view that belief in religious dogmas is not obligatory: even if they still have a certain historical value, they are no longer vital for Christians. Moral and social agendas have become the main preoccupation of many Christian communities, while theological issues are often neglected. This

dissociation between dogma and way of life, however, contradicts the very nature of the religious life, which presupposes that faith should always be confirmed by deeds, and vice versa. Thus, in the Epistle of James we find: 'Faith apart from works is dead' (Jas. 2:26). St Paul, on the other hand, claims that 'a man is justified by faith apart from works of law' (Rom. 3:28). The 'works of law' here means the Old Testament rites and sacrifices which are no longer necessary after Christ's saving sacrifice. Good deeds are necessary and essential, yet when separated from faith they do not in themselves lead to salvation. We are justified by faith, but only by a faith which informs the way we live. No less alien to Christianity is the dissociation of dogma from mysticism, or of theology from the spiritual life. There is an essential interdependence between dogma and mysticism: both lead to knowledge of the truth, but in different ways. 'And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free', says the Lord, who himself is the only Truth, Way and Life (John 8:32; 14:6). Every dogma reveals truth, opens up the way and communicates life, while each heresy puts us at a distance from truth, closes off the way to salvation and renders us spiritually dead. The struggle for dogma which the Church has conducted throughout her history is, as Vladimir Lossky demonstrates, a fight for our being to be brought into the true Life, for our union with God and deification." (Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, xiii-xiv)

12. "Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other. If the mystical experience is a personal working out of the content of the common faith, theology is an expression, for the profit of all, of that which can be experienced by everyone. Outside the truth kept by the whole Church personal experience would be deprived of all certainty, of all objectivity. It would be a mingling of truth and of falsehood, of reality and of illusion: 'mysticism' in the bad sense of the word. On the other hand, the teaching of the Church would have no hold on souls if it did not in some degree express an inner experience of truth, granted in different measure to each one of the faithful. There is, therefore, no Christian mysticism

without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism... All the development of the dogmatic battles which the Church has waged down the centuries appears to us, if we regard it from the purely spiritual standpoint, as dominated by the constant preoccupation which the Church has had to safeguard, at each moment of her history, for all Christians, the possibility of attaining to the fullness of the mystical union.... The main preoccupation, the issue at stake, in the questions which successively arise respecting the Holy Spirit, grace and the Church herself— this last the dogmatic question of our own time—is always the possibility the manner or the means of our union with God. All the history of Christian dogma unfolds itself about this mystical centre, guarded by different weapons against its many and diverse assailants in the course of successive ages. The theological doctrines which have been elaborated in the course of these struggles can be treated in the most direct relation to the vital end—that of union with God to the attainment of which they are subservient. Thus they appear as the foundations of Christian spirituality.” (Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 8–11)

13. “Orthodox theology regards the sacraments as sacred actions through which the encounter between God and the human person takes place. In them our union with God, in so far as it is possible in this earthly life, is realized; the grace of God comes down upon us and sanctifies our entire nature, both soul and body. The sacraments bring us into Communion with the Divine nature, animating, deifying and restoring us to life eternal. In the sacraments we experience heaven and a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, that Kingdom which we can only ever become fully a part of, enter into and live in, after our death.” (Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Christ*, 130)
14. “The inward life of the Church is mystical (or sacramental). It does not at all coincide with the history of the Church, which shows us only the outward facts of the Church’s existence, and especially its coming into conflict with the life of the world and the passions of the world. The inward life of the Church is the mystical cooperation of Christ as the Head, with the Church as His Body, in the

Holy Spirit, by means of all mutually strengthening ties: “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church, instructs the Apostle” (Eph. 5:32)... Therefore it is entirely natural that in the Church’s life the series of special and most important moments of grace-given ministry, the series of sacred rites, gradually acquired preeminently the name of “mysteries.”... The sacred rites called “mysteries” are, as it were, peaks in a long mountain range composed of the remaining rites and prayers of the Divine services. In the Mysteries, prayers are joined with blessings in one form or another, and with special acts. The words of blessing accompanied by outward sacred acts are, as it were, spiritual vessels by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is scooped up and given to the members of the Church who are sincere believers. Thus, “a mystery (sacrament) is a sacred act which under a visible aspect communicates to the soul of a believer the invisible grace of God.” (Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 266–267.)

15. “Christian union with God realizes the true sense of this union. It is perverted when it tends to identify man and God, when it leans toward the actualization in the consciousness of an identity which is thought to have existed previously and substantially, as the case is in all pantheist religions and philosophies... Christian teaching, however, is a total stranger to the tendency of pantheistic identification of man with God. Nevertheless, it asserts with courage the possibility of a ‘union’ of man with God, of a direct ‘vision’ of Him, of a ‘participation’ in Him through grace... Christian teaching rejects both identification and the absolute separation, because of the creaturely character of man and of the whole world; their creaturely character is a necessary consequence of the absolute character of the Supreme Being... For Him the world can’t be a necessary destiny... It can’t be an emanation or an involuntary unfolding of His being. Because then how could He show His sovereignty over any necessity or law? So the world must be a free production of His will... Thus nothing of the being of God, as supreme reality, enters into the constitution of the world nor into that of man either... Without the power of God, in the final analysis, the world would be reduced to the

nothingness which has no power whatsoever to sustain it.” (Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 30–32.)

16. “Created being, however, is of a different nature from God: it is not, as in pantheism, an emanation, a pouring out of the Godhead. Creation ‘is not the least like the Creator in substance, but is outside of him,’ says St Athanasius of Alexandria.” (Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith*, 43)
17. “It is unfortunate that there is widespread confusion, not to mention delusion, in the inexperienced, whereby the Jesus Prayer is thought to be equivalent to yoga in Buddhism, or 'transcendental meditation', and other such Eastern exotica. Any similarity, however, is mostly external, and any inner convergence does not rise beyond the natural 'anatomy' of the human soul. The fundamental difference between Christianity and other beliefs and practices lies in the fact that the Jesus Prayer is based on the revelation of the One true living and personal God as Holy Trinity. No other path admits any possibility of a living relationship between God and the person who prays. Eastern asceticism aims at divesting the mind of all that is relative and transitory, so that man may identify with the impersonal Absolute. This Absolute is believed to be man's original 'nature', which suffered degradation and degeneration by entering a multiform and ever-changing earth-bound life. Ascetic practice like this is, above all, centred upon the self, and is totally dependent on man's will... Man's main struggle is to return to the anonymous Supra-personal Absolute and to be dissolved in it. He must therefore aspire to efface the soul (Atman) in order to be one with this anonymous ocean of the Suprapersonal Absolute, and in this lies its basically negative purpose. In his struggle to divest himself of all suffering and instability connected with transient life, the eastern ascetic immerses himself in the abstract and intellectual sphere of so-called pure Existence, a negative and impersonal sphere in which no vision of God is possible, only man's vision of himself... Even in its more noble expressions, the self-denial in Buddhism is only the insignificant half of the picture. In the mind's desire to return to its merely 'natural' self, it beholds its own nakedness in a 'cloud of divestiture'. But at this point there is a grave risk of

obsession with itself, of its marvelling at its own luminous but created beauty, and worshipping the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). The mind has by now begun to deify or idolise itself and then, according to the words of the Lord, 'the last state of that man is worse than the first' (Matt. 12:45). Such are the limits of Eastern styles of contemplation, which do not claim to be the contemplation of God, and are in fact man's contemplation of himself. This does not go beyond the boundaries of created being, nor does it draw anywhere near to the Truth of primordial Being, to the uncreated living God Who has revealed Himself to man...When man sees himself as he is in the sight of God, his only response is one of repentance. Such repentance is itself a gift of God, and it generates a certain pain of the heart which not only detaches the mind from corruptible things, but also unites it to the unseen and eternal things of God.” (Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, 66–67)

18. “Many theologians of the philosopher type rise to supernatural or, rather, supralogical spheres of thought but these spheres are not yet the Divine world. They lie within the confines of human created nature and, as such, are within the reach of the understanding in the natural order of things... The overcoming of discursive thinking is proof of high intellectual culture but it is not yet true faith and real divine vision... This enables them to arrive at a supramental contemplation but what they then contemplate is still merely beauty created in the Divine image. Since those who enter the first time into this sphere of the ‘silence of the mind’ experience a certain mystic are, they mistake their contemplation for mystical communion with the Divine, whereas in reality they are still within the confines of created human nature... This experience of the limitations of the intellect, whatever the dogmatic interpretation one applies, relates it to pantheism... Man contemplates the beauty of his own mind which many identify with Divine being. They do see a light but it is not the True Light in which there is no darkness at all.’ It is the natural light peculiar to the mind of man created in God’s image.” (St Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, 161–162)