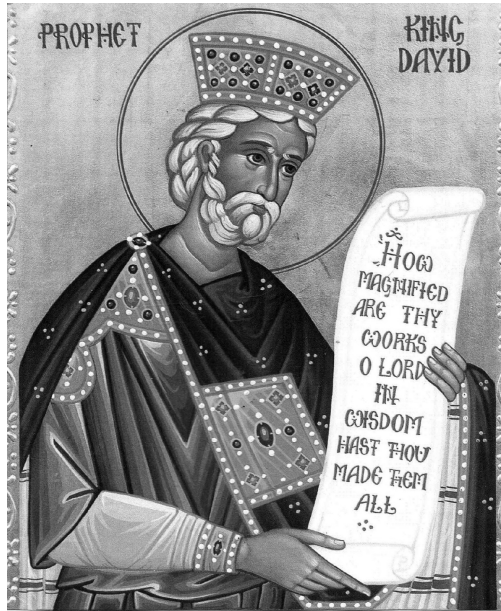


The Point of Faith

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
HANDBOOK

by Archbishop Lazar Puhalo



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FOREWORD

Early in this century, the deacon Fr John Smolin prepared an index of scriptural verses which Questioners often misquote or misrepresent when they wish to slander the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ and lead people away from His Holy Church. He arranged this index by categories, in an orderly fashion, and presented it in the form of a "handbook for Teachers." He suggested that priests and Teachers familiarize themselves with these verses of Scripture, and be prepared to respond to sectarians who misused them.

Much of Fr John's work was devoted to refuting various sects in Russia and contents became outdated; nevertheless, the organization of the book was valuable.

In preparing this Point of Faith Handbook for Teachers, we utilised Fr John Smolin's ideas for creating an index of Scripture citations. However, with the multitude of English renditions of the Bible, the list of Fr John, which was predicated on the standard Russian and Slavonic versions was not satisfactory. We used his concept as closely as possible, and added to it commentaries and instructions from

Archbishop Lazar Puhalo's popular Point of Faith series.

In our Handbook, the text is exclusively from Archbishop Lazar's Point of Faith series, and the index is essentially that of Fr Deacon John Smolin. In addition, the chapter on the Holy Communion was not covered by Deacon John, so we inserted the tract on the subject by Archbishop Lazar.

This Handbook is revised from time to time to respond to new questions raised by readers. Each subject is covered in much greater detail in the other volumes of the Point of Faith series, also available from Synaxis Press.

The Editor

CHRIST'S CHURCH

It is important to remember that the Orthodox Church is a spiritual hospital, not a court of law. The priest is called to be a spiritual healer, not a prosecuting attorney. We are not here to attack anyone, condemn anyone, hate anyone or persecute anyone, but to strive to live a life in Christ through the Holy Church. The Church does not send anyone to heaven or to hell, but rather prepares those who are being healed for their ultimate encounter with the love and glory of God. At that time, their consciences will judge them. The Church judges no one, but offers spiritual healing to all.

1. The true Church of Christ is composed of: all sincerely believing people united by the Orthodox Faith (one teaching) in Christ and nourished by the Grace of the Holy Spirit through the Divine Mysteries. They compose "one body," the Church, the head of which is Christ (Eph.5:23: "...as Christ is the Head of the Church, Himself the Saviour of His Body.")

2. We confess the unity of this Church in the Symbol of Faith with the words: "I

believe...in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church..." This confession is founded on the words of the Scripture. Apostle Paul tell us, at Ephesians 4:4-5 that There is "one Body, one Spirit, just as there is also one hope to the calling you received." There is "one Lord, one Faith, one baptism." This precludes the multitude of often contradictory denominations of Protestantism. Many of them do not even agree on what salvation consists in, and none of them agree with the Apostolic and Traditional Christian doctrine of redemption.

3. This Church is called Universal, Catholic and Apostolic because She is limited neither by place, nor time, nor nation, but includes in Herself the right believing faithful of all places, times and peoples (Col.3:11: In this new Creation [the Church], "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, slave nor freeman, but Christ is all, in all, to all men without distinction.")

4. The earthly Church is one with the heavenly Church (Hb.12:22-24; cp. Eph.1:10; Rm.14:9).

5. Within the Holy Church, there are certain administrative units called "local

churches" and these are administered by Patriarchs, Metropolitans or Archbishops (administrative titles of certain bishops). When we pray for the unity of the holy churches of God, we are referring precisely to all these "local churches" which maintain fully the Holy Orthodox Catholic faith.

6. The local parish temple is also often referred to as a "church" because the local parish (not the building) is a unit of the Church, as a cell is a part of the body.

7. God's promise (Mt.16:18-19) is given only to that union of members of the universal Church of Christ who "rightly believe" (Orthodoxos).

8. The gates of Hades, which refers both to the power of death and, as the holy and God-bearing fathers teach us, the servants of darkness of the age, the persecutors of Christ's Church, and the heretics of all ages. All of these try to "strike the shepherd in order to scatter the sheep" (Mt.26: 31). They are the gate-keepers of the "Gates of Hades."

9. Christ's Church is eternal; it stands firmly and will stand until the second coming of the Lord, for it is not an institu-

tion which arose suddenly, but is eternal, fore-ordained from above (Eph.2:20-21).

10. The Garden of Eden was a type of the Church. This pure, undefiled state of the Church existed until the fall of our first ancestors. The eras of Church history from the time of the fall are called: (1) From the fall till Moses, Patriarchal; (2) from Moses to Christ, the era of the law or the Old Covenant and; (3) from Christ until the Second Coming, the age of Grace, or the New Testament Church.

11. At first, the Head of the Church, Christ the Saviour, revealed His teaching personally (Lk.4:43). He later selected twelve leaders from amongst His disciples and gave over to them the right to teach: these were the Apostles (Lk.6:13, cp. Jn.15:16). (And the bishops are the successors of the Apostles. See, for example, the Epistle to Titus).

12. The Lord revealed the higher mysteries of the Kingdom of God to the Apostles (and not to the masses of the people at large) (Mt. 13: 10- 11). They alone were given the right to teach and officiate over the Church (Mt.28: 18- 20; Jn.20:21-23; Lk.10:16). And Paul, speaking of the Apostles and their successors, said, "So then let us be looked upon

as ministering servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1Cor.4:1).

13. Those who rise against this God-ordained structure are called, in Scripture, false prophets, false Christs, false teachers (2Pt.2:1-2; Mt.24:24). Their fate, which will befall them either here on earth or else in eternity, will be as the fate of Korah, Dathan and Aviram (Nm.16:3-32).

14. The Church is holy, not on account of Her members, but on account of Her Head, Christ Jesus, and Her teaching. The teaching is holy because it is received from the Lord Himself, was preached by the Apostles and preserved by their successors. It was elucidated and systematized at the Ecumenical Councils and by canonical "local church" councils which were ratified by the Ecumenical Councils, guided by the Holy Spirit, the "Conscience of the Church." The teaching is taught unchanged to the true-believers up to our own time, and will continue to be taught thus until the very end of the world.

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Taking the words of the Holy Fathers, examine these places in the Holy Scripture which are most often wilfully distorted by the Questioners in questions about:

- a. The composition of the Church:
Mt.18: 19- 20; 1Pt. 2:19;
1Cor.1:2.
- b. The fulness of the Church:
Eph.2:13-14.
- c. Her unity: Jn.17:20-21.
- d. Her holiness: Col.1:12-13.
- e. The bond of the earthly and
heavenly Church: Ecl.9:5.
- f. The eternalness of the Church:
Eph.3: 21; 4Ki.17: 20-23.
- g. Mutual communion of the
believers in the Church: 1Jn.1:7;
Eph.5:25-27.
- h. There is no salvation outside the
Church: Lk.13: 6-9; Jn.15:4-5;
Acts chapter 10.

SELECTED VERSES CONCERNING CHRIST'S CHURCH.

The following list was compiled with the original Greek and the Slavonic text in

mind. Most of the English versions, and the contemporary Russian and Serbian versions as well, have many errors in the translations and so it is important to check out the translations you use.

1. Holy teaching and Grace bearing means entrusted to the Church by the Lord: Eph.3: 8- 10; 1Tm.3:15.

2. The Church is built by the Lord: Mt.16:18.

3. The Church will exist until the end of the ages: Mt.28: 20.

4. The Church is a community of true believers: Acts 2:44, 46, 47; Hb.3:6; Acts 20:28.

5. The Church is guided by ordained shepherds: Acts 14:23; 16:4-5.

6. The true Church is loved and consecrated by the Lord: Eph.5:25, 26.

7. The Church is the Body, while the Head is Christ: Eph. 1:22-23; Col.1 :18.

8. The teaching and activity of the Church are holy: Eph.5:27; 1Tm.3:15.

9. The bond of the earthly Church with the heavenly Church: Hb.12:22; Eph.2:19.

10. Necessity of belonging to the Church: Mt.18:17; Acts 2:47; Mt.12:30.

11. The Church is one: Jn.10:16; Eph.4:4-6; 1Cor.12:13; 1Cor. 3:11; Rm.12:16; 16:17.

12. Christ allowed sinners to be in the Church: 1Jn.1:8; Ecl. 7:20; Mt.13:24-49; 2Tm.2: 20- 21; Lk.13:6-9; Lk.5: 32; Rm.11:16-18; 1Cor.4: 5; Rm.14:4.

13. The holiness of the Church is not injured by sinners being members of Her: Rm.3:3; Eph. 4:12-13.

2

SACRED TRADITION: SPOKEN AND WRITTEN

A

Sacred Tradition

1. Sacred Tradition consists of the Holy Scripture and other teachings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His Apostles which were written down subsequently by disciples or successors of the Apostles and which were preserved inviolate by the Holy Church.

2. What do we class as Sacred Tradition?

a. The Holy Scripture;

b. The Divine Liturgy (which is older than the compilation we refer to as "The Bible).

c. The ancient Symbols of Faith of the first centuries;

d. The canons of the Holy Apostles, Ecumenical and local councils;

e. The ancient documents or testimonies about the suffering of the most ancient martyrs;

f. The most ancient practices of the Church (fasts, feasts, order of church life, the use of the sign of the cross, etc).;

g. The works of the Holy and God-bearing Fathers, which really explain and clarify Sacred Tradition;

3. Sacred Tradition is the sole source of the canon of the Holy Scripture and of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament and their composition (and of other ancient writings useful and profitable for the soul — see canon 85 of the Holy Apostles).

4. Sacred Tradition is more ancient than Holy Scripture. From the creation of the world until Moses, there was no Holy Scripture. Knowledge of God from Adam to Abraham and from Abraham to Moses, was maintained orally (as Sacred Tradition). From the time of Moses, Sacred Tradition began to appear in writing. But even then, much of it was left unwritten and continued in oral form. The understanding of the Scripture was maintained almost exclusively by oral Sacred Tradition (for example, the understanding about the resurrection and eternal life, the actual significance of the sacrifice, etc.). God actually commanded,

through Moses, that oral Sacred Tradition be passed on from generation to generation: Ex.10:2, and Moses taught this to the people, Dt.32:7.

5. In the Holy Scripture of the New Testament, much that Jesus Christ and the Apostles taught is not written down, for example, what Jesus Christ taught the people "as was His custom" (Mk.10:1), or what Apostle Paul taught "day and night for three years" (Acts 20:31). (Compare Jn.21:25).

6. The Lord taught orally and even of the Apostles, only six left written epistles (and, in addition to the twelve Apostles, there were seventy immediate disciples). Even these epistles were left, not by design, but on account of specific circumstances which arose: 1Cor.11:34; 2Ths.2: 15; 2Jn.1:12.

7. Far from every aspect of the plan of salvation is written down in the Holy Scripture: Jn.21:25; 2Jn.1:12. The fulness of the revelation is made specifically through the Holy Church: Eph.3:9-10.

8. Oral Holy Tradition is called "the word of God" just as Scripture is: 1Ths.2:13; Acts

17:13. Paul preached long before a written New Testament collection existed.

9. Sacred Tradition comes from the Holy Apostles themselves and is also called "Apostolic Tradition": 2Ths.3:6, and is transmitted through their successors who must be in full accord with it: see Titus, especially 1:9. The whole Church is permeated with the Apostolic Traditions, since it is built on the foundation of the Apostles, having Jesus Christ Himself as the cornerstone: 1Cor.3:10; Eph.2: 20. The Apostle praises the preserving of Tradition: 1Cor.11: 2; and pleads that it be adhered to: 2Ths.2:15.

10. The influence of Apostolic Tradition upon man's soul is necessary for correct interpretation of the Holy Scripture, since many of the words of Scripture are hard to understand and often twisted and misinterpreted: 2Pt.3:16.

Sacred Tradition is completely different from the traditions of man, which concern the human flesh and not the spirit: Mt.15:1- 11; Mk.7:2-13.

11. Sectarians (both Latin and Protestant) have renounced the Tradition of the Holy Apostles and by, force of necessity, have

replaced it with their own human tradition. For example, they have created various understandings of baptism and perform it according to their own personal rites and "sing psalms composed entirely by themselves," (see Mt.15:3).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

a. Main points of Scripture which Sectarians distort in questions about Sacred Tradition: Lk.1:2-4; Acts 1:1-12; 17:11; 1Cor.4:6; 14-37; Gal.1:8-9.

b. For emphasis, study: Hb.2:1-4; Jn.21:25; 2Ths.2:15; 1Cor.11:2.

B

Holy Scripture

[The Keystone of Sacred Tradition]

1. From the creation of the world until Moses, there was no written law, no form of Scripture. Knowledge of God and the teaching of the faith was transmitted from generation to generation orally by the patriarchs as Sacred Tradition.

2. From the time of Moses, God's written Scripture appeared, in the form of the five

books of instruction, which Christ Himself called by the common name: the law of Moses (Lk.24: 44). It is notable that the Old Testament Liturgy was given by revelation before the five books were written. The Liturgy pre-existed Scripture in the Old as well as in the New Testaments.

3. When did the New Testament Scripture appear? In obedience to the Lord's command (Mk.16:15), the Holy Apostles spread through the whole world, preaching the Gospel orally. While the New Testament Liturgy was presented by the Apostle James, it was about five decades after the Ascension of our Saviour before the written narratives of the Apostles began to appear. No one is completely certain which one of the accepted four Gospels appeared first, but before the Scripture could come into full use, the Orthodox Church councils had to determine which of the multitude of "Gospels" were actual Scripture and which were false. At the end of the first century, the Gospel of St John appeared. The holy Apostle John, having the other three books at hand, concluded his own testimony by telling us that the written books of the Gospel are not at all complete, and do not contain a full testimony of the Saviour's teachings and deeds: Jn.21: 25.

4. The historical book, the Acts of the Apostles, which was written by the Evangelist Luke, encompasses the events of only thirty years and relates details concerning the Lord's ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the activities of the Apostles Peter, John, James and, mainly, Paul; and details concerning the formative ordering and growth of the Christian community. This book is actually older than the Gospels. At least some of the Epistles of Apostle Paul are also older than the books of the Gospel.

5. The books of teaching consist of the Epistles of the Apostles (7 general epistles and 14 written by Paul to specific local churches). Far from encompassing the entire saving teaching of the faith, these epistles were written for various specific occasions and were not intended to present a complete system of doctrine. For example:

a. The general Epistle of St James was written to counter the ideas of certain heretics who misinterpreted the teaching of Paul about salvation by faith and not deeds of the law, and taught that works of faith are not necessary for salvation.

b. The first general Epistle of Peter is directed against the heretical use of the teaching of salvation by faith. The second catholic epistle of the same Apostle was written against the Nicolaitans (Rev.2:14-15), those teachers who appeared among the Christians and, while living the most degenerate lives, spread all manner of errors and heresies under the pretext of "Christian freedom" (for example, the right of each person to "interpret Scripture as he sees fit.")

c. The first general Epistle of John was also written to reproach those same heretics (the Nicolaitans-Rev.2:14-15) who debased the Lord Jesus and gave themselves up to a dissolute life. The second and third Epistles of John were letters written to different individuals.

d. The general Epistle of Jude, the brother of St James, was written against those same Nicolaitan heretics with whom Peter dealt in his second letter — the false teachers who, leading degenerate lives, scorned Church authority and agitated others.

e. The fourteen Epistles of Apostle Paul were written to various local churches and persons on various occasions, as the

occasion demanded. One thing is common to all the Epistles: they admonish the faithful to turn away from teachers who teach other than that which the Holy Church has taught and they enjoin that we keep the Sacred Tradition.

f. The Revelation (or, Apocalypse) of St John the Theologian, is a prophetic book concerning the last years before Christ's return. It is never read in church services, and none of the fathers of the Church has ever offered an interpretation of it. The understanding of this book is reserved to those who will be alive in those very days. There was much doubt about its authenticity in the ancient Church.

6. The Lord as a man (in the Incarnation) did not change His commandments. God does not have even a shadow of change (Js.1: 17; Nu.23:19). Thus, doctrine and instruction and understanding come from both the Old and New Testaments: Mt.5: 17; Rm.3:31. Only the prefigurations of the Old Testament have been laid aside, because they have been fulfilled in reality. For example: the circumcision and the bloody sacrifice: Acts 15:24; Hb.10:4. Other Old Testament commandments, so far from being abolished, are enlarged upon with new, more complete

understanding: Mt.5:21-39; 2Pt.1:21. Christ reveals the spirit of the law as well as the letter. It is the spirit which must be fulfilled, and fulfilling the letter without the spirit is of no value.

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Selected verses concerning sacred tradition

1. What is Tradition? Is the Gospel transmitted only in writing?: Gal.1:11-12; Acts 13:5, 17:13; 1Ths.2:13.

2. Sacred Tradition is preserved in the Church: Acts 20:31; 1Cor.11:32; Ti.1:5; 1Tm.3:14-15; 2Tm.2:2.

3. Sacred Tradition can be preserved: Mt.10: 27; 1Cor. 11:2; 1Ths.1:8; Rm.1:8; 2Ths.2: 15.

4. Those who teach contrary to Sacred Tradition are anathematized: Gal.1:8-9 (when these words were spoken, there was no New Testament Scripture).

5. Jesus Christ instructed the Apostles orally, as did the Apostles instruct others: Acts 20:27; Ti.1:9; 2Tm.1:13-14; 1Cor.14:40.

6. From Tradition, people learned to know God: Gen. 18:19.

7. Moses did not write down all the God-revealed teaching: Ex.10:2; Dt.32:7; Ps.77:3-7; Sir.8:11-12

8. The Divine teaching was spread in the same manner in the beginning of the New Testament times: Jn. 18:20-21; Mt.10:1-8; Acts 1:3; Mt.28:19; Rm.10:14-17; Lk.1:14.

9. Not everything our Saviour and the Apostles taught is recorded in the New Testament: Jn.21:25; Jn.20:30; 3Jn.1:13; 2Jn.1: 12; Acts 20:35.

10. Tradition is necessary for a correct serving of the Mysteries and of Divine Services: Mt.26:26-28; 1Cor.10:16-17; 1Cor.11: 23; 1Tm.2:1-2 (but he does not write what these prayers were).

11. Without Tradition the Scripture is not understandable: Mt.1:17; Lk.3:23-28; 2Pt.3: 16. In this latter regard, THE TEACHER ought to make note that of all the people in the Gospels who quoted Scripture well, not one of them actually accepted and followed Christ. Of the people who did follow

Christ, not one of them is recorded as ever having quoted Scripture. Those who followed Christ recognized Him from Sacred Tradition alone).

3

INTERPRETING DIVINE SCRIPTURE

1. Reading the Divine Scripture is salutary for one only if one reads it with reverence and turns to the God-bearing fathers of the Church for interpretation of it (2Pt.3:16). It should be remembered that the New Testament was created on the authority of the Orthodox Church alone. The texts were chosen and edited by the Orthodox Church. Like the Torah, the New Testament is a text of the Community, not the individual. This is why the Torah cannot be read in by jews with out the presence of a “minion,” a quorum of ten of the faithful presence. The New Testament in particular is not for any private interpretation, but is to be understood through the Church.

2. In reading the Bible, we must remember that, while some passages are understood in the literal sense (such as historical data), much of the Scripture has a figurative sense (such as the parables). All the Scripture has a deeper, more spiritual sense than first meets the eye, whether the passage is seen in the literal sense (such as the genealogy of Christ in Matthew's Gospel,

which has considerable deeper, spiritual meaning) or the figurative (see, for example, Christ's own explanation of His parables, which He gave to His Apostles in private). The fulness of the Scripture is not readily perceptible to every reader. This was true even of the Holy Apostles, as the Bible itself clearly testifies (ex. Lk.24:19- 32). Our holy and Godbearing fathers, filled with Divine Grace, have been the instruments of the Holy Spirit in explaining the Scripture for us. The parables and symbolic examples may never be given literal interpretations, for they are spiritual and symbolic revelations about the Kingdom of God, and many gross errors have come from literalism in reading them (particularly the rationalistic interpretation of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man).

3. It is absolutely necessary for the Scripture to be read in context. This is a major deficiency of the Protestant religion: that it takes Christian Scripture out of context, using often highly incorrect translations to begin with, separating it from its original meaning, and forcing preconceived notions or ideas upon it.

4. In order to avoid errors, one ought to verify one's understanding of Scripture with people whom the Lord has placed in the

Church to teach (Eph.4:11-12). If some passage is difficult to understand, make a note of it and ask your parish presbyter to explain it whenever possible. The Scripture does not make it compulsory that everyone understand everything (1Cor.14:38). The Scripture itself refers to the impossibility of everyone quickly understanding it (Wis.3:21; 38:24- 25).

5. In interpreting Holy Scripture, it is necessary to remember that the matters set forth in God's word for our salvation are deep even for the prophets and the Apostles (1Pt.1:10- 12; cp Mt.24:36). There are some things in Scripture which are above the intelligence of man (2Pt.3:16). Man himself does not have the ability to explain any prophecy (2Pt.1:20- 21). Even the minds of the Apostles were not opened all at once to the understanding of the Scripture (Lk.24:25).

6. Not everyone who hears the words of Christ understands them, but only those to whom it is given to understand (Mt. 13:10-11). These people are not guided by mere human reasoning in explaining the Holy Scripture, but by the direct action of the Holy Spirit and guided by Sacred Tradition. Only by such means can one "soundly and

faithfully" interpret the written and unwritten teaching of Christ (2Cor.2:17).

7. When we make use of the instructions of the fathers in understanding the Scripture, then we are not depending upon their person alone, but upon the Holy Spirit acting through them (Acts 20:28-29).

8. Just as the bee gathers honey from the flowers, and the spider makes poison from the same flowers, so it is that Orthodox Christians, under the guidance of the Church and through the action of the Holy Spirit, receive benefit from Scripture, while the sectarians, arbitrarily interpreting the Holy Scripture, receive harm (2Pt.3:16). Boasting of some independent knowledge of the Scripture, the sectarians forget the words of the Scripture (1Cor.8:2; 10:12).

9. How do most sectarians look upon the Divine Scripture? When they entrust the Bible to a newly led astray follower, they say, "Read it and live in the way in which you personally understand it; this is all that is necessary for salvation." These sectarians ignore Acts 8:30-35 and Rm.10:13-16.

10. The result of such thinking is that there is no uniform faith or belief amongst

the Protestant religions. Some believe that Christ is truly God, others that He was a mere superior man; still others that He was some sort of avatar. Some confess the Holy Trinity, others deny it; some say the Scripture is absolutely literal, others say that the entire Scripture is only figurative, some even deny its historical accuracy. Some accept the Holy Apostles, others place themselves above the Apostles; some baptize while others merely sprinkle water on the head and call it baptism, while yet others do not even consider baptism necessary. Some, such as the Pentecostalists practice shamanism, mass seances, spiritism and demonic ecstasy; others reject these things. The confusion caused by Protestant Biblical theory is endless.

11. Further, sectarians claim that in matters of faith, one must submit only to the most precise instructions of the New Testament (as each one personally interprets them, of course). But the Bible says: "Submit yourselves to your teachers" (Hb. 13:17); and to the teachers it says: "Take heed to yourselves and to your flocks over which the Holy Spirit has made you over-seers..." (Acts 20:28).

12. The sectarians also claim that "The Holy Scripture can be understood by anyone, and one who reads it cannot fall into error, since the Holy Scripture itself leads to truth." But the Bible says otherwise: (2Pt.3:16; 1:20; Mt.21:44; Hb.4:12).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

a. Main points of Scripture distorted by sectarians in justification of self-willed interpreting: Jn.5:39; 1Jn.2:27-28; 1Cor.1:19, 26-28; Col.3:16; Mt.11:25.

b. Main passages which sectarians distort in the question of reading the Bible: Js.1:5; 2Cor.3:14-16; Phil.3:15; 2Tm.3:16; Lk.10:21; Dtr.8:3.

c. Study the following passages of Scripture: Mt.13:11; Mk.4:11, 33-34; 2Tm.1:13; Acts 8:30-35; Rm.10: 14, 15; 1Cor. 12:30; 2Cor.2:17.

4

TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

1. At the very beginning of His earthly ministry, our Saviour chose Apostles for preaching (Mk.3:14), and He directed them to preach to the whole world (Mk.16:15; Mt.28:19, 20).

2. It is clear that the Apostles would not live on this earth forever and could not themselves have preached to all people of all ages. Therefore, they consecrated bishops and presbyters in each Church (Acts 14:23) and entrusted them with the teaching in the Church (Acts 20:28; 1Tm.4:14-16; 2Tm. 4:2).

3. In ordaining bishops, instructions were given to them: "What you have heard from me...hand over to faithful men who will be competent to teach others" (2Tm.2:2). And these faithful men are identified: "appoint presbyters and set them over the churches in every city" (Ti.1:5). Thus, the bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and they in turn may ordain presbyters to teach in their behalf.

4. The Bible says: "So God has appointed some in the Church: first Apostles; second

prophets; third teachers..." (1Cor.12:28). Thus we see that the consecration by the Apostles and their successors of teachers in the Church is not the invention of man but the law of God, and that they receive the Grace for their task from God (Eph.4:11-13) through a visible ordination (Acts 14:23).

5. The Sacred Tradition (including the Holy Scripture) serves as the source of Church teaching: (Mt.13:52).

6. The objects of Church teaching must be:

- a. The explanation of Holy Scripture;
- b. dogmatic and moral truths;
- c. biblical-historical truths of the Old and New Testaments and;
- d. the truths from the Church liturgical and ritual practices.

7. It is an irrefutable truth that Christ the Saviour is the first and highest Teacher, Who brought His divine teaching from heaven. In this sense He alone can be called a Teacher (Mt.23:8), but for spreading His teaching, the Lord chose special people (Lk.6: 13; 10:1), and sent them to preach the Gospel to the lost sheep (Mt.10:6), and afterwards to all peoples (Mt.28:19). Christ says to the Apostles, and through them to their

successors: "He who harkens to you, harkens to Me" (Lk. 10:16; Mt.10:14).

8. The Apostles maintained for themselves and constantly fulfilled the obligation and right of teaching which they had received from our Saviour (Acts 5:42; 6:1-5), no matter how much unbelievers tried to hinder them (Acts 4:18-19; 5:28-29).

9. Teaching us that all men ought to enter into their own positions, the Apostle Paul says: "Having gifts that differ according to the Grace given us, let us use them...He whose gift is practical service, let him give himself to his serving; he who teaches, to his teaching..."(Rm.12:6-8). Concerning himself, Paul said: "...I was appointed a preacher and an Apostle..." (1Tm. 2:7). And to Timothy, he wrote: "Look well to your own self and to your teaching...hold to (your duties); for by so doing, you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1Tm.4:16).

10. We see from all this, that no one must, of his own will, take to the interpretation of God's Scripture or other Church teaching (1Cor.12:28-30). "How can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rm.10:15). Therefore, the Apostle testified, "Not many should

become teachers, my brethren" (Js.3:1; cp Hb. 5:4).

11. Those who are not obedient to the Gospel concerning preaching, and spontaneously take this matter upon themselves, are called, 1. false teachers (2Pt.2:1-2; cp Mt.24:11; Mk.13:22); 2. distorters of the Gospel (Gal.1:8); 3. speakers of perverse things (Acts 20:30, cp 1Tm.4:1).

12. God warns about such false-teachers (Col.2:8; Hb.13:9; 2Pt.3:17). One is not even allowed to receive them in one's house (2Jn.10). The Apostle Paul calls them ferocious wolves; evil doers who disguise themselves as Christ's Apostles (2Cor. 11:13-15).

13. In order to recognize these false teachers, refer to the law and the revelation. The beloved Apostle says: We are from God; he who knows God harkens to us (1Jn.4:6).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Taking the works of the Holy Fathers, examine these places in the Holy Scripture which are most often distorted by sectarians in questions about Church teaching and

preaching: Mk.4:11, 25; 9:38-39; Lk.12:8-9;
1Jn.2:2, 27; Rm.2:17-24; 1Cor.14:26-27,
30-31; Phil.1:15, 18; Hb.3: 13; 8:8-13; Isaiah
54:13.

5

GRACE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

A General

Let us remember first and foremost that the struggle if the Orthodox Christian life is aimed precisely at the acquisition of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, A life in Christ.

1. The salvation of a sinner is accomplished from two sides: on the part of the person himself through repentance (Lk.15: 18-19) and living in the renewed life (Rm.6:4), and on the part of God, by mercy and Grace (Eph.2:8).

2. Grace is the name given to God's gifts, or rather, to the invisible, uncreated energies of God which preserve the whole visible world and man, and which directs them toward the final aim of their existence.

Grace is seen in various aspects by man. For example, man senses "providential Grace" which governs the life and movements of the whole world, preserving it from self- destruction and annihilation (Ps.64:9-

13; 103:27-30); and man feels Grace drawing him toward salvation (Gal.1:15- 16; 1Cor. 12:13).

3. God's Grace is dispensed to believers from the Holy Spirit, through the Apostles and their successors (1Cor. 4:1). The Holy Spirit also bestows certain "gifts" directly upon certain faithful and obedient children of the Holy Church, giving to each one what is proper and fitting (1Cor.12:4-11). Grace is given to the faithful through the Holy Mysteries.

4. The Holy Mysteries of the Church bring the faithful into union with God's Grace in various aspects. We often describe this action by saying that the "gifts of Grace are dispensed through the Holy Mysteries." Baptism, for example, grants remission of the sinful state of the fallen nature with which we are born; Anointing with consecrated oil heals one of spiritual and physical illness (Js.5:14-15); Holy Communion brings one into unity with Christ (Jn.6: 56); Marriage sanctifies the union of two people and makes them one in God (Eph.5: 31-32).

5. It is the commandment of God's word that no one except the Apostles and their

successors take upon themselves the celebration of the Holy Mysteries (Hb.5:1-4). The Holy Spirit designated only lawful successors of the Apostles "to feed the flock of the Lord" (Acts 20:28).

6. If you are asked to show, from God's word, that it is evident that the Holy Spirit always abides in the Church, turn to Jn.14:16-17 and Acts 1:3-5. This promise was fulfilled on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

7. It was only to the faithful and obedient sons of the Church that the Apostle wrote: "Your bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you" (1Cor.12:13).

8. Those who dispense the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Mysteries are ordered to dispense them with scrutiny (Mt.7:6).

9. If the Holy Spirit acts in the Church only through the Apostles and their successors, and acts in the Holy Mysteries only when they are served by them as lawfully ordained shepherds, then it is clear that self-willed and self-appointed clergy, and those ordained by heretical Christian societies (Questioners, Latins, etc). do not

have the Grace of the Holy Spirit and cannot bestow it upon others. Therefore, their pretended Divine Services and empty "sacraments" are without Grace and devoid of saving power. In vain is their "faith," futile is their hope, feigned is their love and fruitless are their deeds, for they are left without Christ, they have fallen from Grace (Gal.5:4-7).

10. God's Scripture clearly speaks concerning those who dare to serve the Divine Services, not having been lawfully consecrated for it: (Nm.16:1-3, 8-11, 32, 35; 2Chr.26:16- 19; 1Ki.13: 8, 10, 13, 14; cp. Mt.7:21-23).

11. One must remember that extraordinary gifts were necessary for preaching among the unbelievers of the time (1Cor.12:4-11; 1Cor.14:22), and therefore, the Holy Spirit provided gifts necessary for the time (cp.1Cor. 13: 8).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Taking the works of the Holy Fathers, examine these places in the Holy Scripture which are most often distorted by sectarians in the teaching about God's Grace:

1Cor.15:10; Phil.4:13; Jn.3:18; 6:47;
Rm.10:9.

Finally, study the words of the Apostle:
Hb.12:15-28.

B

The Church Councils

[The continual, effective operation of Grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Church is clearly shown in the holy councils of the Church. In these councils, the Holy Spirit, as the "Conscience of the Church" guided and directed the Holy Fathers gathered together in the truth of the faith of Christ, as the Lord Himself had promised. The absurdity of the Questioners is quite clear when they arrogantly assert that the Holy Spirit failed to guide the "ancient Church," but that it now guides them in their contradictory and disharmonious beliefs.]

1. In the first centuries, those who followed our Lord Jesus Christ lived like brethren, comprising one Body — the Church, having one Head: Jesus Christ. Thus, when quarrels or misunderstandings arose, they resolved them by common agreement in a council of bishops and presbyters, upon the inspiration of the Holy

Spirit (Acts 15:28-29). These meetings are called "Councils" (Acts 15:6-8).

2. During the time when the Holy Church was heavily persecuted in the Roman Empire, the councils were only local or regional. From the time of Constantine, when the Church was freed from persecutions, however, general councils of the whole Church began to be convened, at which the bishops of the whole Christian world participated. Those general councils which were ratified as being truly Orthodox are known as "Ecumenical Councils."

3. At the end of the first great persecution, there was a large number of questions to be settled and problems to be solved. Consequently, there were numerous councils of varying sizes (for example, in the 4 century there were 89 and in the 5 century there were over 70). Of all these councils, however, the Holy Church, by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, sealed only nine of these early local councils, together with the seven Ecumenical Councils, as canonical. In later years, fewer councils were held, and some of these are also canonical (that is, the resolutions and canons of these councils are of the Holy Spirit, and are binding upon the whole Church catholic). At these councils,

heresies and disagreements in the faith were judged and rules of Church order and the Christian life were defined.

4. The Holy Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils preached nothing new. They preached that which our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles taught. They did not compose dogmas, but only gave explanation to those expressed in the Holy Scripture. Thus, for example, the Symbol of Faith is drawn entirely from Scripture.

5. The main reason for convening the Ecumenical Councils was to define and correct heresies or disagreements in the faith:

1. 1st Nicea (325) was convened in Nicea (present day Isnik in Turkey) for the purpose of correcting the teachings of Arius, who taught that Christ was not consubstantial with the Father.
2. 1st Constantinople (381) gathered on account of the false teachings of Macedonius, who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. At this council the words, "and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,

the Giver of life," were included into the Symbol of Faith.

3. Ephesus (431), met to refute the false doctrine of Nestorius, who taught that Christ was not truly God from all eternity, but was a man, born miraculously from Mary and that Divinity was added to Him later. He refused to acknowledge Mary as "Theotokos" (bearer of God), but would call her only "Christotokos."
4. Chalcedon (451), set aside the extreme teaching of Eutychius, who declared that, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His humanity was dissolved into His Divinity.
5. 2nd Constantinople (553), reaffirmed and clarified the condemnation of Nestorius, Eutychius, Arius, Origen and others.
6. 3rd Constantinople (680) (also called the Council of Trullo, after the section of Constantinople in which it was held) dealt with

moral questions, confirmed the canons of the various councils and the 85 Apostolic Canons, decreed that bishops shall not be married and that deacons and priests may not marry after their ordination.

7. 2nd Nicea (788), affirmed and defined the veneration of holy ikons.

6. There were nine canonical local councils convened in the period from 314 to 860, mainly for the ordering of Church life and the Divine Services, and to correct errors and false teachings which had occurred locally. Since that time, other local councils have been held which are also canonical, such as the famous "Palamite Councils" of 1341 and 1351, the Council of Jerusalem of 1583 and the Councils of Constantinople of 1583 and 1593, are examples.

7. The Holy Fathers of the councils did not introduce rules arbitrarily, but were guided by the essential needs of the Church. Moreover, they never introduced rules which were contrary to the teachings of the Holy Scripture.

8. The Councils discerned, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, the canon of the Holy Scripture, and set and established the validity of the books of the Scripture, in fact, created the "Holy Bible" as it is now called. The sectarians, who claim to follow the Bible, while denying Christ's Church and its councils, and blaspheming the Sacred Tradition, are like people who steal another person's passport, not considering that the validity of the passport rests upon the actual identity of the person to whom it was given, and that behind the passport, there is a birth certificate.

9. The right of the Apostles and their descendants, the bishops, to order the Church, define its teachings and set the Divine Services, is quite clearly shown in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15.

6

WORSHIP OF GOD

Liturgical worship was revealed to Moses by God Himself, just as icons in the sacred place were. This God-anointed Liturgical worship was continued in the New Testament Church immediately after Christ's ascension. Apostle James adapted the Old Testament Liturgy for use by Christians.

Sectarians are erroneously opposed to true worship. They condemn Liturgical worship as "formalism," etc. From their point of view, worship consists in listening to a histrionic lecture, sometimes a quite hysterical, demeaning sermon, and singing campfire type songs, which are not designed to lead one into a spirit of repentance, but into a feeling of giddy well-being.

Worship, however, consists in "pouring oneself out" before God, humbling oneself in repentance, and spiritually entering into the Heavenly Kingdom.

1. True worshippers are those who render to God worship which is consistent with both the nature of the One being worshipped (God) and with the nature of those doing the worshipping (mankind).

2. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth (Jn.4:24). How could one possibly assert, on the basis of this Scripture, that God must be worshipped only in spirit and by spirit alone? The verse says, "in spirit and in truth." This means in spirit and in reality (cp. Jn.4:23: "...true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (reality)....")

3. Both the soul and body of man originated from God and they benefit from God's gifts. Therefore, they must together worship God and thank God as the Scripture teaches: (1Cor. 6:20, "So then honour God and bring glory to Him in your body.")

4. Worship must be consistent with the nature of the worshipper if it is to be done "in reality." Both the angels (bodiless spirits) and men (spirit and body) worship God with their whole beings.

5. Man's entire life must be a service to the Lord (1Ths. 5:17).

6. Man is composed of both body and spirit (soul). Neither the body nor the soul alone is the real person. Thus, worship of God must be done with both body and soul,

physically as well as spiritually (1Cor.6:15, 19-20).

7. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gives us an example of spiritual-bodily worship (Lk.22:41- 44).

8. God required and accepted such worship (Mt.4:9-10, 28:9; Lk.17:16-18).

9. The Holy Apostles worshipped not by spirit alone, but also by body, and they taught others to do so (Eph.3:14; Acts 20:36; 1Tm.2:8).

10. We even see a figuration of bodily worship of God in a vision of the spiritual world (Rev.4:10-11).

11. Christ's Church provides Her children with various means which aid in the preservation, strengthening and elevation of the moral Christian life. The first of these means is prayer, as our Saviour Himself taught (Lk.21:36; 18:1-8; Mt.6:6-13; 7:7-11; Jn.16:23- 24; Lk.5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29). The Holy Apostles taught the same (Col.4:2; Eph.3:14-21).

12. While we are commanded to pray "always and everywhere" (Lk.21:36;

Eph.6:18), Christ also showed us that God Himself chose and consecrated special places for prayer and service to Him (Mk.11:17).

13. Remember the Gospel narrative about the pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee prayed "within himself" (Lk.18: 11), while the Publican expressed his prayer in external, bodily action (vs.13). Which of them left the temple accounted righteous?

14. Sectarians, who renounce external worship, are not even consistent with themselves. For, they do speak their prayers and sing their songs aloud. They introduce their own customs, wave their arms about, demonstrate meaningless dramatic gestures, march in processions or sit on pews with formalized rigidity. Some of them even babble and howl like beasts.

15. Having condemned the ancient Christian practice of making the sign of the Cross in prayer, the Protestant sectarians demonstrate the truth of the words of the Apostle: "For the message of the Cross is absurdity to those who are perishing" (1Cor.1:18).

16. And so, true worshippers of God are those Christians who worship God both in

spirit (in prayer and repentance) and in truth (they serve God with their bodies also) (1Cor. 6:20), in true faith in Christ, Who has given His Body and Blood, and Who has commanded us to perform the Holy Mystery in remembrance of Him (Lk.22:19; cp. 1Cor.11: 28).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Taking the works of the Holy Fathers, examine these places in Holy Scripture which have been distorted by sectarians in the question of worship of God: Jn.4:23, 24; Acts 17:25; Rm.8:5-8; Eph.6:18; Phil.3:3-4; 1Tm.4:8; Mal.1:11.

[Since Questioners frequently argue against the Divine Liturgy, calling it "formalism," "ritualism" and other such concocted terms, it is very important for THE TEACHER to have a sound knowledge of both the history and the meaning of the Divine Liturgy. Many Orthodox people do fall into these sectarian traps because they are ignorant of the meaning of, and history of, Orthodox worship. It is vital, therefore, for THE TEACHER to study this very carefully, and teach it to Orthodox Christians also.]

THE MYSTERY OF HOLY COMMUNION

What do we mean when we say that Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ? Some people say that it is only symbolic, but the Bible clearly says that it is real.

The Bible — the very words of Christ Himself — does indeed tell us that we must partake of the real Body and Blood of Christ (Jn.6:48- 58). At His Mystical Supper before His crucifixion, Christ revealed that we receive this gift liturgically, through the special consecration of bread and wine mixed with water.

Let us first explain why there is confusion about this in the West. In the West, people usually want a scientific explanation for everything (even if it is only "pseudo-scientific.") They seek this kind of explanation even for the great miracles and deep mysteries of God, things which must be accepted on pure faith. The Roman Catholics thought up an artificial "scientific" explanation called "transubstantiation." The Questioners did not like this explanation, but since they could not think up a better

one, they decided to change the Bible itself, and deny that we truly receive the Body and Blood of Christ at all. Many people in the West simply found Christ's teaching too difficult to understand and so they rejected His words and pretended that He had said something different.

This is exactly what happened when Christ first revealed this teaching to us. It is not an accident that John 6:66 is the verse chosen by the Holy Spirit to record that those who thought the teaching about Christ's Body and Blood was too difficult to accept, turned and walked away from Him. People who do not have enough faith to accept His word without doubting, still turn and walk away from His Holy Church.

Orthodox Christians do not reject Christ's teachings just because the weak human mind cannot "scientifically" understand them; instead, they pray for a higher, spiritual understanding.

For us, the fact that the Bible — and Christ Himself — tells us clearly that we receive the real Body and Blood of Christ, is enough. We know that as we grow and develop spiritually, God will give us the understanding we need.

We say that the bread and wine are "changed" when the priest says the prayer asking the Holy Spirit to change them. That

is all we can say. We do not try to think up some clever explanation about it. We do not need them. We do not try to scientifically explain how the Body and Blood of Christ are present in the Communion or how the consecrated bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ. We only know that He Himself said that it is, and that we all must receive His Body and Blood. We do not try to replace faith in His Word with clever explanations or "second guess" our Saviour.

It is not really that difficult to understand, however. Let us think about it for a moment:

1. God created everything that exists, from nothing.

2. He created energy and turned energy into matter.

3. If God is the creator of all things, then He has power over all things, and He can do whatever He wills to do with them.

4. He turned water to blood in Egypt, and he turned water into fine wine at Cana. He turned dust and water into a living human being — body, blood and soul — in Eden.

5. Is it really so difficult to accept that He turns the bread and wine into Christ's own Body and Blood in the Liturgy? He only leaves it in the outward form of bread and wine for the sake of our weakness.

Thus, we Orthodox Christians take Christ our God at His word, and do not seek to second guess Him as some do, or try to think up clever human explanations for His Mysteries, as others do. The Body and Blood of Christ are truly there in the Holy Communion because He said they are, and He wills them to be there. What could be more powerful than that!

VENERATION OF THE THEOTOKOS

There is only one Lord and Saviour of mankind, Jesus Christ, as the Scripture says, "There is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Nevertheless, we are called upon to be "co-workers with Christ in salvation" (2Cor. 6:1) and we can "save" others by leading them to the Source of Salvation, and rescuing them from falling away from salvation, as Apostle Paul says: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means and in any way, save them" (1Cor.9:22). And, he wrote to Bishop Timothy, "Look well to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, hold to them; for by so doing you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1Tm.4:16). Moreover, in the same context, we often use the expression, "Most Holy Theotokos, save us." No one would suggest that we are our own saviours, or that Apostle Paul, the holy Bishop Timothy or the Theotokos are saviours in place of Christ,

even though the Divine Scripture clearly says that they can "save" others.

Nevertheless, all Orthodox Christians are called upon to serve in the process of the salvation of each other and of the world, both through their prayer, the active witness of a life of Christian love and struggle, and by the very act of working out their own salvation. The saints who have become filled with Grace and received the greater gifts of the Holy Spirit, are foremost in this process of mutual salvation. Sectarians who are angered at our Orthodox veneration of the Most Holy Theotokos (and of the saints) and who spew malice on our pleas for their intercessions are ignorant of the true nature of redemption. They hold a totally pagan notion that Christ saved us by offering Himself as a vicarious, punitive sacrifice, to fulfil the Father's "justice" and satisfy His offended honour. Indeed, the Protestant/Latin teaching really comes down to the doctrine that Christ died to save us from God the Father. In reality, however, salvation consists in the union of the faithful with the life of God, in the Body of Christ (the Holy Church), where the evil-one and his power are being progressively and really destroyed in the life of co-suffering love and mutual struggle of true believers. Since our redemption from the bondage of death into

this new, grace-filled life of the Church consists also in the restoration of the human nature, to those who will struggle to acquire it, the lives, deeds and intercessions of the saints are of obvious value in saving us. They "save" us because there is a single, unified nature of all humanity. It is fallen and enslaved, and the liberation and restoration of any unit of this universal nature to perfection, its real union with the perfect nature in Christ, is part and parcel of the redemption and salvation of the whole. The Holy Virgin Theotokos who is the very apex of new creation, is venerated as such, and as such, serves most greatly in the process of salvation. Thus, we call upon her for her help in our struggle to be saved, and venerate her as the foremost of our race, as one wholly united with God, one who has now received, by Grace, full union with the restored perfect human nature. If their concept of redemption were not clouded by paganism and Hellenic philosophy, then Questioners would not challenge our veneration of the Theotokos, the "Mother of God," but would embrace it also, as being a clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

1. We call upon the Theotokos for her intercessions for the same reason that we call upon each other and the saints and

angels for theirs. The Holy Scripture commands us to intercede for one another (1Tm.2:1-2).

2. We call upon the Theotokos for her help in our salvation ("Most Holy Theotokos, save us") in the same context that Apostle Paul and Bishop Timothy are able to save the faithful (1Cor.9:22; 1Tm.4:16).

3. The Holy Virgin is called "Theotokos" (Birthgiver of God) on the basis of Scripture (Lk.1:31-35, and especially verse 43). Moreover, the prophecy of Ezekiel is precise in the matter (Ez.44:2). Few of the Protestant sects would dare to deny that the Child whom Mary bore is truly God and, therefore, they must confess that Mary is the "Theotokos" (the "Mother of God.")

4. Questioners revile the Theotokos and deny her veneration because they have no truly Christian knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scripture, and from sheer, careless mistranslations of the Scripture which they pridefully persist in. An excellent example is the section concerning the wedding at Cana, which so many sectarians twist and seek to turn against the Holy Virgin. Read John 2:1-11 in the King James Version. Questioners claim

that this section demonstrates Christ's own disregard for His mother ("Woman, what have I to do with you?") However, in the actual text, the correct translation reads:

"3. And when the wine was all gone, the mother of Jesus said to Him, `They have no more wine.'

"4. Jesus said to her, `Dear woman, what is that to you and Me? My time is not yet come.'

"5. His mother said to the servants, `Whatever He says to you, do it.'

Let us think about this for only a moment. What does the verse actually demonstrate? Christ asks, "Why should we care if the wine is gone? What difference does it make to us?" Then He makes it plain that the time for Him to work miracles has not yet arrived. In the order of God's plan, it is not yet time for Him to begin this work. But as we read on in this chapter, we discover that he does work the miracle. Why? Because of Mary's intercession. And think of it. Because of the intercession of the Theotokos, the order of God's plan is changed. Christ works the miracle before the time has come. How powerful then, are the intercessions of the Theotokos shown to be. Moreover, she is shown to be His first Apostle, since she

instructs the servants, "Whatever He tells you, do it."

5. Even at the moment of His death on the Cross, Jesus took thought for His mother and gave her special place (Jn. 19:26-27).

6. The Theotokos was honoured even before the Nativity of our Saviour (Lk.1:41-45).

7. If the Holy Scripture proclaims that "all generations" shall call Mary blessed (Lk.1:48), then certainly those who refuse to call her blessed do not belong to the generation of Grace, the generation of the New Testament.

8. The Virgin is called the "Queen" in prophecy, by David, "At Thy right hand stood the queen, arrayed in vesture of inwoven gold, adorned in many colours" (Ps.44:8). Thus, she is honoured occasionally in prayers as the "heavenly queen." Of course, she is the mother of the King, and the title "heavenly queen" is just another confession of our faith that the Child Jesus born of her is truly God our King. Sectarians will sometimes attempt to apply the words of Jeremy the prophet (Jer.44: 17, 25) to condemn our use of the term "heavenly queen"

when referring to Christ's mother. But Jeremy was here condemning the worship of the idol Astarte by the astrology cults, which considered Astarte to be an actual deity.

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Concerning the ever-virginity of Mary and the position of Christ as her "first-born," read the Exegetical Sermons on Matthew's Gospel, by Archbishop Lazar Puhalo (esp. Sermon Nr. 2) available from Synaxis Press. For general responses to heretical opinions about the Theotokos, read the appointed sections in the homilies and commentaries of Sts Cyril of Jerusalem, Ignatios the God-bearer, Justin the Philosopher and Irenae of Lyons. Consult the indexes in the respective works to locate the sections.

Make a list of Protestant arguments against the Theotokos and, by research and discussion with other Orthodox clergymen, compile your own responses to them.

VENERATION OF SAINTS

When sectarians ask the question, "Where do you get all these saints from?" (as they often do), instead of being offended, we should take it for granted that they are seeking information. We should be prepared to supply that information to them.

Our subject is not about icons, but a few words about the icons of saints will help us to understand the meaning of the saints themselves.

As you enter an Orthodox Church, you find yourself surrounded by icons of the saints. There are many deep and meaningful explanations for this, but for our purposes here, let us look at the icons of the saints on the walls of our churches as our family album.

Among every family, every nation and people, the biographies and portraits of its greatest heroes and most beloved, famous citizens are kept, treasured and well known.

In the case of Orthodox Christians, we are not simply members of the same nation (the "New Israel"), but members in particular of the same family, the household of the living God. The saints whose icons surround

us in the church are our older brothers and sisters, our ancestors in the faith. It matters not at all that they were from different earthly nations, for we are speaking of scriptural concepts, of divine realities. As Apostle Paul says, "If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29), for, "those who believe are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-7).

Thus, when we see the icons of the saints as our own family album, the spiritual portraits of our most notable and perfected forebears, be they Russian, Aleut, Serb, Greek or Chinese, we come to a full understanding of the words of Christ, that God is our Father. In this, once more, is proved the faithfulness of the icon to Holy Scripture, for the icons of the saints, seen as our family album, clearly verify to us the words of the Apostle: "Consequently, you are no longer strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph.2:19-20).

The icons of saints are profoundly doctrinal. Many important dogmatic concepts of Orthodox Christianity receive scriptural illumination in the icons of saints: the dogma of redemption and the general resurrection; the doctrines of theosis, of the

nature of the human person and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are among those made clear in the icon. Moreover, clear interpretations of significant, but difficult, passages of Scripture are provided by canonical icons of the saints.

Not only are the lives of the saints an extension of the Book of Acts, but they are a clear expression of the ancient Christian understanding of the way the life of Christ and His Gospel impacts on the human nature. Moreover, they help reveal the true, scriptural doctrine of redemption, as opposed to the Western pagan doctrine of divine justice and the notion that Christ was a sacrifice to pay off a "just death penalty" on our behalf.

There are three questions which arise at once when we mention icons of saints. Answering these questions will also help to explain who and what the saints are: 1. What is the meaning of the word "saint?"; 2. How does one become a "saint?"; 3. At what point does a picture become an icon, or an icon become merely a picture?

What does the word "saint" mean?

The word saint means holy (indeed, the words are interchangeable).¹ In the New Testament, both words, saint and holy, are translations of the Greek 'agios, which means "consecrated, set apart."² It is, therefore, obvious that the word holy is used in more than one sense in the divine scripture. No one would imagine that the scriptures call God holy in the same sense as it calls the temple holy, nor that God is called holy in the same sense as people and objects are called holy.

Holy refers to God in this sense: holiness resides in Him, and objects and people are called holy when they participate in Him or are consecrated to His service. Thus, holiness as it is used for God is undefinable, and

1. It is only in English that we have two different words for holy. One, "saint," comes to us from the French root of our language, while the other, "holy," comes to us from the Germanic ancestry of English. In Greek (as in Slavonic), there is only one word, 'agios. Thus, in Greek, Saint Nektarios is 'Agios Nektarios, while "Holy God" is "agios o Theos."

2. The King James Version translates more than one word "saint." However, in nineteen instances, the word should be "pious," or "pious ones," because it is translating the Hebrew word hasid. Hasid often indicates not merely "pious," but also a "zealot for piety." Hasid occurs, for example, at 2 Chron.6:41 and Prov.2:8. The word "saint" at Mt.27:52 should probably also be understood in the context of the Hebrew hasid. In Deuteronomy and in the books of the Prophets, particularly Daniel, the Hebrew word being translated as "saint" is kadosh or kaddish, or a variant of those words. In those cases, the Hebrew word is properly translated into Greek as 'agios, and into English as saint, because the word indicates "consecrated, set apart."

is simply a way of referring to God. Any person or thing that is consecrated to His service or which, by divine grace, participates in Him, is "holy." Holiness does not consist, therefore, in "correct behaviour" or "perfect morality." It consists in consecration to God.

Everything which is consecrated to the service of God is holy. The Holy Scripture calls angels "holy" (Mk.8:38) and it calls the faithful holy (the KJV occasionally uses the word "saint" as well, but it means exactly the same thing). The word "saint" in the New Testament invariably refers to those who are set apart and consecrated to God (e.g., Acts 9:13, Rm.1:7, 2Cor.1:1; 8:4; 13: 13, Rev.5:8, etc).

Everyone who truly believes in Christ and truly accepts His Gospel will seek to be united to His Body, the Holy Church. In baptism, one is consecrated to God and joined to His Body. Thus, everyone who has been baptized into Christ has put on Christ (Gal.3: 27), and is holy in the sense of having been consecrated to Him, and become a participant in His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. The Apostle calls them "holy," and the King James Version translates this as "saint."

Very well, then, what is the difference between the congregation of the faithful who

are "saints," and those specific individuals who are portrayed in icons and called "saints" in a special manner?

Who are those special "saints"
portrayed in icons?

It should be evident that the degree of holiness attributed to a person or thing signifies the degree to which that person or thing is consecrated to God and His service — that is, quite simply, the degree to which the person participates in God and in His holiness. We can also easily understand that consecration means purifying. Scripture tells us that man was created "in the image of God" but that this "image" had become dimmed and perverted in man by sin, by the accumulation of the passions and the misuse of the body in which that "image" was to abide. In short, the whole person, body and soul, became dedicated to sin and carnality rather than to holiness (consecration to God), and thus lost its original state of consecration.

Christ became incarnate in our flesh to reconsecrate it, our whole person, body and soul, to renew in mankind the image and likeness of God. Christ cleared the path and showed the way. By His incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension, He made

it possible. He commanded us to "be perfect [complete] as God is perfect" (Mt.5:48); but how is this possible? Man could not possibly possess the same perfection as God. Of course not, but, because of Christ, man can participate in God's perfection.

How, then, does someone become a saint in that special sense? By following that path and that way which Christ has opened through His Holy Church, by struggling to purify, and thus consecrate oneself, completely and without reservation, to God. This means the conquest and weeding out of the passions, and the acquisition of a completely selfless love — for that is what is meant by "God's likeness": absolutely selfless love. Such a person becomes truly humble and thus able to bear participation in God, and the highest gifts of divine grace which come with it. These are the very people of whom Christ said, "The works that I do, he shall do also, and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn.14:12). It is this completeness of purification and consecration to God, this height of participation in His perfection and holiness which makes a person a "saint" in that special way. And this sainthood is verified by the fulfilment of the Gospel promise: "the things that I do, he shall do, and greater than these." These people are participants in Christ in that special way

Apostle Paul described, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal.2: 20).

In relation to humanity, the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises is shown forth in the icons of Christ, the Theotokos, the Twelve Great Feast Days and the Mystical Supper, while icons of saints reveal the evidence of the fulfilment of the New Testament promises. For just as the Old Testament promise was fulfilled in Christ, so the New Testament promises of Christ are fulfilled in the faithful, according to the strength of each vessel. And the strongest vessels, the saints, bear in themselves the complete fulfilment of the promises given by Christ in the New Testament. Their icons reveal this fact, for they testify that, in the words of the Scripture, "Whoever purifies himself from these [passions and ignoble things] will be a vessel sanctified and meet for honourable use, consecrated and profitable unto the Master..." (2Tm.2:21).

The Saints and the Meaning of Salvation

"We who, with unveiled faces, behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into His image, from glory to

glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor.3:18).

"Whereby is given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature" (2Pet.1:4).

If salvation consisted only in a person being juridically justified by the death of Christ — saved by Christ having paid his or her legal penalty in that person's behalf, then Western humanistic paintings would suffice, and we would not have icons of saints. At the same time, we would not have a clear understanding of the nature of the saints and the reason that we venerate them.

The ministry of Christ on earth was not, however, a legal excursion. Christ's ministry was one of healing. He did not come to earth as an attorney or a vicarial sacrifice to absorb a death penalty owed by man, but as a physician. He came to redeem the whole fallen human nature from bondage to the evil-one, to heal it and bring it to its intended state as an image and likeness of God, filled with His grace, a reflection of His glory. The icon is scriptural: the saint portrayed in the icon attains his position through the process of illumination and,

finally, glorification. He is not, however, alone in this, for those "ordinary" saints, the congregation of the faithful, likewise attain their position by the same process and that higher state of consecration is available to all through Divine grace and the struggle of pure and true faith.

The loss of this fundamental truth of Christian life, of the true nature of redemption, has deprived Christianity of all power to transform the world as it did in ancient times.

If the words of the Apostle cited above seem enigmatic, symbolic or beyond comprehension, it is only because the authentic apostolic revelation has been buried under the influences of legalism and Gnosticism, and become obscured by philosophical pollutants. Let us look at this verse in the light of apostolic tradition, in the light of the holy and God-bearing fathers and understand that those who have struggled to illumination behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror. If one continues this struggle and ascent, he shall become glorified, that is, transformed into the same glory, from glory unto glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

This is the purpose of the fasts, prescribed by the Holy Church, of the prayers, the coming together for worship, the very liturgical cycle itself. Indeed every discipline,

every action, every manifestation of worship and love which is prescribed is given to us, as St Seraphim of Sarov says, for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. It is all given so that we may "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," so that those who have received the seed of illumination, in holy baptism, may ascend to glorification. This was testified to by the glory that encompassed St Seraphim as he spoke about the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

If it were sufficient, as the Gnostics taught, to merely accept Christ as your Saviour and believe, then the Apostle would not have found it necessary to enjoin us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2: 12).

The saints teach us this profound scriptural truth, that salvation is the result of a healing of the broken and fallen human nature, and its gradual restoration to its original goal of illumination and glorification. While Christ redeemed the whole nature of mankind by recapitulating that nature in Himself, each person must bring about that restoration in himself through moral struggle, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The canonical Orthodox icons of the saints reveal to us the true nature of redemption, of salvation and the true destiny

intended for us by our Creator: illumination, glorification, theosis.

When is a portrait an icon;
when is one of the faithful a "saint?"

When, then, does a painting of a saint become an icon? A painting is a holy icon when, consecrated by obedience to the Holy Church and the sacred form of the illustration, it reveals the fulfilment of the Gospel in the person being portrayed. It accomplishes this in the very essence and nature of the portrayal itself, in the essence and nature of the saint. Since the "person" consists of both body and soul together, and not of a mere part of the person (neither the soul alone, nor the body alone), the spiritual condition of a glorified person can be seen not only in the intangible, but in the physical body, which is promised an equal glory with the soul.³ For, as Divine Scripture clearly says: "There are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, and the glory of the celestial is one, while the glory of the

3. In this context, it is important to recall the sequence of colour build up used when painting an icon. This sequence, beginning with the base colour, and building upon it toward the transfiguration and glorification revealed in the finished icon, is theological and deeply spiritual. It teaches us that the person is sanctified and glorified gradually, from the inside, beginning with the "heart." This sanctification gradually grows and fills the whole being, moving through the soul and mind of man, to encompass his body, and unite his whole person – body and soul – with God.

terrestrial is another...So also is the resurrection: it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption....If there is a sensuous body, there is also a spiritual body ..." (1Cor.15:40-44). Thus the holy icon shows us not an ordinary person still waiting for the advent of Christ, but a person who has already received Christ, followed Him, and been transfigured by Him. It shows us a person who is already participating in the perfection and immortality of Christ our God, by means of divine grace. This means that the saint is no ordinary person, nor even an ordinary member of the community of the faithful. When we look at the icon of a saint, we must see Christ, for the saint "no longer lives, but Christ lives in Him..." The saint's personality has not been swallowed up or dissolved, but regenerated, transfigured and fulfilled by grace. Thus, for a painting to be an icon, it must proclaim that, in this person, called "a saint," the highest promises of the Gospel have been fulfilled, and this person is able to testify from living experience to the truth of the entire Gospel, and to the resurrection of Christ. Here, in the icon, we see that absolute faithfulness to the Scripture which declares: "We who...behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same im-

age, from glory unto glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Cor. 3:18).

The saint has become a participant in the fulness of grace so that real miracles are worked in him or her, and they have become participants in the immortality of God so that even before the resurrection, they can receive our prayers and help us. In the saints we see explained and fulfilled that mysterious and troubling statement "Is it not written in your law, `I have said ye are gods'" (Jn.10:34). This is called "The doctrine of theosis." It is a clear teaching of Holy Scripture, which tells us: "The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given unto them; that they may be one even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (Jn.17:22-23). Moreover, Apostle Peter says, "Whereby is given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature" (2Pet.1:4) and both of these teachings must be seen in the icon. The icon must clearly communicate the doctrine of theosis, it must proclaim that: in this person, uniquely called a saint, and glorified by the conscience of the Holy Church, the highest promises of the Gospel of Christ have been fulfilled. This person is able to testify from living experience to the truth of the entire Gospel and to the resurrection of

Christ and the transforming power of divine grace.⁴ The saint himself proclaims the saving incarnation of Christ and His redeeming cosuffering with man, for it reveals what these acts have made possible for man; it proclaims the reconciliation with God made possible by the God-man, for it clearly shows that man can now participate in God's perfection and immortality. The icon of the saint proclaims the resurrection and ascension, for it shows that by grace man can become divine, because Jesus Christ Himself united God and man, and invited the faithful to have the Holy Trinity dwelling in them spiritually. The best icons capture the spirit of cosuffering love in the eyes of the saint, and cosuffering love is the essence of the mystery of redemption and theosis.

4. In this context, it is important to note that the icons of saints, whenever possible, are recognisable portraits of the original person. Thus, for example, icons of St Nicholas are always recognizable because the icon presents an accurate representation of the historical person. This is true of the icons of all the more well known saints, although seldom for the ancient martyrs, who were martyred in the tens of thousands, and whose actual appearances were seldom known. It is important to remember this if one is to understand the fulness of the message of transfiguration and theosis. It is not an idealized or romanticised person who is being transformed by grace, nor is it only the inner person, the soul, thus rendering the material body superfluous, or subject to idealization. In the icon, the actual human being is shown, recognisable by all, and thus we receive the message that such consecration, such holiness, such transfiguration and theosis is the calling of all mankind, of all the congregation of the faithful, and not a select few only.

Concerning The Glorification of Saints Who Are Represented in Icons

Let us briefly examine the meaning of the glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Christian Church does not "canonize" saints; they are glorified in the Church. The glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church is a fulfilment of that holy love and sacred unity to which we are called by Christ in His own words and through His Apostle. The Apostle explains to us that we are all members of one Body of Christ (the Church), and if one member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers with it, but if one member is honoured, the entire body rejoices with it. Thus if God honours a certain member of the Holy Church, visibly revealing this honour and bringing the conscience of the whole Church to an awareness of this honour, either by working miracles for those who ask that person for intercessions, or by the direct action of the Holy Spirit upon the Church conscience, then the whole Church honours that person.

The saint is glorified in the Church on earth because he or she has already attained to glorification and been glorified by God. A holy person is either a saint already in his or her own lifetime, or they never become a

saint. When a saint has reposed, he or she is received into the heavenly Church with the honour and glory befitting the moral grandeur and total consecration to God of his or her earthly life.

Thus, the glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church is a glorying of the whole body of the Church in the highest attainment of the Holy Spirit by one of the members of that body. As when the eye beholds beauty and the image of that beauty is perceived by the mind of the entire body, and the sensation of that beauty affects every member of that body in proportion to the sensitivity of that member, so also the glory of the saint is not his alone, but it is perceived by the conscience of the whole body and each member of the body glories in it according to the spiritual sensitivity of that member. The spiritual attainments of the saint uplift the entire Church, and each and all Her members, and draws them closer to God. Moreover, the revelation by God of the glory of the saint affirms and instills the revelation of theosis, and the fact that salvation really consists in illumination and glorification through repentance and moral struggle.

We mentioned in Section 8 that to a large degree the Protestant prejudice

against the veneration of the Theotokos is based on their false idea of the nature of redemption. Certainly the same is true of the sectarian prejudice against God's saints.

Salvation is not a matter of Christ having paid some penalty to God on our behalf. We were not redeemed from God by Christ, we were redeemed to God. Redemption consists in the restoration of the fallen human nature, redeemed from its bondage to sin. Salvation consists in assimilating that restored nature, which is in Jesus Christ. It is wrought by our struggle, with God's help, to acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Those special people whom we venerate as "saints" are venerated precisely because of the fulness of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. But apart from this, the veneration of saints is an essential element in our being penetrated with a deep understanding of the nature of redemption. Our awareness of the glory of the saints and our veneration of them is actually a confession of the true doctrine of redemption. The saints, like the Theotokos, have shown us the true path of salvation and, having become truly participants in the perfect nature, indeed, in God Himself, they have become vessels of Divine Grace.

Recently, some sectarian group accused us of "praying to dead saints." We

responded with the words of the Christ Himself, "You greatly err, for you do not know the Scripture or the power of God. For God is a God of the living and not the dead...have you not read in the book of Moses how God spoke in the bush to him, saying `I am the God of Abraham, of Isaak and of Jakob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: you therefore do greatly err" (Mk.12: 24, 26-27).

Thus, if the righteous ones of the Old Testament, from before the "age of Grace" are still numbered among the living, how much more are those of the New Testament alive. They are living testimonies to the victory of Christ over death and the certainty of mankind's redemption by Jesus Christ, our God.

1. The word "saint" means "holy" or "consecrated." In this sense, all truly believing Orthodox Christians are saints, because they are "consecrated to God" (Acts 9:41; 26:10).

2. Those special holy people whom we venerate as saints with ikons and troparions, are the members of the Holy Church who struggled so greatly to become temples of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.6:19), that they became special channels of God's Grace

(Rm.12:6; 1Cor.12:4; Hb.2:4). We venerate them because of the very special and exceptional manifestations of the Holy Spirit and Divine Grace given through them by God.

3. The saints are worthy of our veneration (Prov.10:7).

4. We honour them because they are truly God's friends (Jn.15:14) and God is glorified in them and in their lives (2Ths.1:10-12).

5. The saints intercede for us continually, for the Holy Scripture commands this of all believers (1Tm.2:12). The saints who have departed this world are still very much alive (Lk.20:35-38; Rm.14:8) and care for us, and their prayers are beneficial to us (Js.5:16; Gn.20:17; Job 42:8).

6. Whoever honours and receives one of God's servants, such as the saints, honours and receives God (Mt.10:39-41).

7. We find examples in the Holy Scripture of the honouring of saints (2Ki.2:14-15; 1Chr.21:9-18). The honouring of saints certainly does not contradict Holy Scripture (see, for example, Hb.11:17-40, 12:1).

8. We must honour God's saints (Sir.44:10-14; Ps.111:6; Js.5:10-11); and it is beneficial to turn to them in prayer (Js.5:16-18; 1Pt.3:12; Mt.10:40).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Examine the places in Holy Scripture distorted by sectarians in the question of:

(a) Honouring God's saints: Mt.4:10-11; Acts 10:25, 26; 14: 11-15; 1Tm.1:17; Dt.10:20; Ex.42:8.

(b) Prayerful intercessions of God's saints: Mt.6:14; Lk.16: 27-31; 1Jn.2:1-2; Rm.8:26-27; Hb.7:24-25; Ps.117:8-9; Jer.17:5; 3Ezd.13:52.

10

VENERATION OF HOLY RELICS

The veneration of the relics of saints serves four major theological purposes, in addition to being an act of sincere piety.

1. It protects us from false teachings about the nature of the human person. There is a heresy, drawn from pagan Hellenic philosophy, which teaches that the soul alone constitutes the human person. According to this heretical teaching, which was spread in some Christian sects from the teachings of such heretics as Origen and Augustine of Hippo, the body is a "prison of the soul." The soul must be liberated from the body in order to truly know God and be with Him. The body is supposedly coarse material and thus a hindrance to the action of Grace. (In more extreme expressions of this anti-Scriptural teaching, not only ancient heretics, but heretical writers of our own time have based occult teachings of "out of body experiences" on it).

The veneration of holy relics, however, brings us to the truth, clearly expressed in the Holy Bible and by the great theological

fathers of the Church. The human person is formed of body and soul united. Both the body and soul are sacred, both receive the Grace of God together, both will be transfigured and stand together as one before God after the Great Judgment (or, be swept away from God together if the person has chosen to be separated from God). Neither the soul without the body, nor the body without the soul is the actual person. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that we venerate the relics of the saints, as well as praying to them, so that we do not think that we are commemorating merely disembodied spirits but realize that we are commemorating and venerating the whole person of the saint, as one who has been glorified by God and His Holy Church. Indeed, the very reason that God does work miracles through the relics of the saints and keeps so many of them incorrupt, is to teach us this truth: that both body and soul together constitute the "person" of man, experience the Grace of God, can be vessels of His Grace and channels of His miracles, and are to be brought forth, re-united and transfigured so that they, as an actual person, can abide in the Kingdom of God with Christ Who is Himself both Body and Spirit.

2. The veneration of holy relics is an expression and confirmation of our faith in the general resurrection, exactly as the Holy Scripture teaches it (1Ths.4:15-18).

3. The veneration of holy relics teaches us that matter is not evil. It was created by God, it can be Grace bearing and it is also being redeemed by Christ through His Holy Church (Rm. 8:18-24).

4. The veneration of holy relics confirms for us the Orthodox teaching that death and corruption are results of sin, not legalistic punishments of God. Since death and corruption are results of sin, the more a person conquers the fallen human nature and his own sinfulness in this life, the less intensely he should experience death, and the less he should experience corruption. The prayers and intercessions of saints and the incorrupt, wonderworking relics of many of them, teach us the truth of this and show the nature of redemption in the conquest of the power of Satan, sin, death and corruption (Hb.2: 15f).

Most sectarians reject the veneration of holy relics from an ignorance which is not entirely their fault. The Latins changed the veneration of relics from a profound theological manifestation of Grace into a

crude superstition and later, into a cheap mercantile enterprise, selling all manner of fake and bizarre "relics." It is really the Latin concept of relics which Protestantism initially rejected (and rightly so). Our first task is to restore a correct understanding of the veneration of holy relics and its meaning both as an act of deep piety, and as a profoundly theological act among our own Orthodox people among whom, in many cases, it has been forgotten and our people often do not even know how to venerate relics or what to do in their presence.

1. Through the veneration of holy relics, we are taught that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. If this is true of the bodies of all Christians, how much more is it true of the bodies of those special servants of God who have been filled with Divine Grace during their lives. (1Cor.6:19).

2. The Holy Scripture testifies that the relics of holy ones were venerated in Old Testament times also, even before the act of our redemption by Christ (Hb.11:39-40; cp. Ex.13:19; 4Ki.23:18; 13:20-21; Sir.48:14-15).

3. The fact that God does, and has always, worked miracles through the relics of saints is clearly revealed in the Holy Bible. He rais-

ed a dead person to life by mere contact with the bones of Holy Prophet Elisha (4Ki.13:21), worked miracles through the cloak of Holy Prophet Elijah (4Ki.2:14), through garments which had only touched Apostle Paul (Acts 19:12), and even through the shadow of Apostle Peter (Acts 5:15).

4. The fact that we have relics of saints which have remained incorrupt for centuries, in some cases, more than a thousand years, is testimony of the truth of Holy Scripture. For, when Christ conquered death, many graves were opened and the bodies of dead saints were raised (Mt.27:52). Jesus, having destroyed death, revealed the mystery of life and incorruption (1Cor.15:20; 2Tm.1:10), and revealed a special glorification of the relics of the saints (1Cor.15:49; cp. Phil.3:21).

5. If such things were fulfilled on the Old Testament righteous who were not even glorified or released from the bonds of death until Christ's resurrection (see 3 above; Sir.46:14-15; Ps.33:20-21, e.g). then how could they fail to be fulfilled even more on the New Testament righteous (2Tm.1:10; Hb.11: 32-39). When such things occurred in the Old Testament, even before the "age of Grace," how much more ought we to expect

sacred relics to be Grace bearing now in the "age of Grace."

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

1. Examine the main places in Holy Scripture which sectarians distort in the question of:

(a). Venerating holy relics: Mt.23:29; Acts 13:36-37; Hb.1: 9; Gen.49:29; 50:26; Nm.9:6; 19:11; Sir.17:25; Jer.8:1-2.

(b). The incorruptibility of holy relics: Jn.11:11-44; Acts 8:2; Gen. 3:19; Deut.34:6.

2. Rewrite, in your own words, the four theological reasons given in the foreword, for the veneration of holy relics. Expand on these if you can, and add others. But be sure to verify your ideas with the Holy Scripture.

3. During your own Scripture reading, make notes of information which you feel relates to the veneration of holy relics.

[Note: If you complete number 2, the editors would be grateful to receive a copy of your work for their own information and to help expand this present work].

VENERATION OF HOLY ANGELS

The Orthodox missionary in North America is primarily interested in defending our Orthodox young people from the aggressive attacks of various Protestant sects. It is well to remember that the brands of Protestantism we are dealing with here are really American sects. Their interpretations of Divine Scripture are almost always based on contemporary, semi-literate misunderstandings of the King James version of the Bible. Despite its many, sometimes dramatic, errors, and their own inability to understand the obsolete classical British text, many American sects consider the King James rendition to be a holy replacement for the actual text of the Bible. Certain words in the King James version are misunderstood and misconstrued more or less consistently in modern American English. "Terrible," for example, denotes something which is magnificent or awesome, just as "awful" really means "full of awe" or "awe inspiring." Yet in modern North American English, terrible is used almost exclusively to denote something mean, vengeful, bad or wicked. The word "worship"

comes from the Old English *weordh* (worthy), and it is applied to the mayors of large cities, magistrates, even sheriffs in England. In Scripture, "worship" is applied to ordinary people, not only to Christ or the Godhead, because it means "to render due respect to the worthiness of." Thus, it is quite correctly applied to the Lord Mayor of London, or of Toronto and Vancouver, or to a justice of a court of law, not as an assessment of their personal worthiness, but as a mark of respect to the worshipful position which they occupy and what it stands for. In correct English, it is perfectly correct and quite Christian to worship the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, as indeed one may call him "My Lord Justice" or "Mr Justice," not because he is the ultimate source of justice, but because he is the authority through which it is dispensed.

The two terms "worship" and "adore" have become quite confused in modern American English. Holy Scripture does not at all restrict worship to God alone, but it clearly does restrict adoration to God alone. In Matthew 4:10, we read (in a correct translation), "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou adore." Here, worship (*proskenesis*) is rendered to God, but adoration (*latria*) is restricted to Him alone. In correct English, to "worship"

means to "treat with honour or respect, to salute, bow down to, honour or revere as a supernatural being or power or as a holy thing" (p.2453, Great Oxford Dictionary) whereas, to "adore" means, "to make an act of the mind and the will in acknowledgement of the infinite perfection of God; to make an outward reverence expressing such an act" (ibid, p.26).

Thus, one can "worship" the mayor of Vancouver and a justice of Queen's Bench, so one can all the more "worship" holy angels and, indeed, holy ikons. Nevertheless, we feel that it is advantageous to employ the term "venerate" in general, because of the misunderstanding in modern American English. It facilitates the task of THE TEACHER and avoids a certain stumbling block. However, one must avoid using such scholastic formulas as, "we venerate angels, but we render worship only to God," or "we render relative worship to ikons, but Divine worship only to God." Such expressions sound like mere sophistic plays on words. In fact, such statements are really false and they only increase and perpetuate an error. We should also correct our own use of the term "adore." One often hears that someone "adores" his older brother or sister, etc. Holy Scripture absolutely restricts adoration to

God alone, while it is not at all wrong to worship an older brother or sister.

1. The word "angel" signifies a herald or messenger. It is the name of a duty or responsibility rather than the description of a nature. John the Baptist is also referred to in Scripture as an angel (Mt.11:10), and the demons are sometimes referred to as "angels." In general, however, and for our purposes here, the term "angel" refers to the bodiless, immaterial spirits who serve God.

2. When we call upon the angels for their intercessions, we are calling on them as members of the Holy Church to pray for us as fellow members of the Holy Church, as the Holy Scripture commands (1Tm.2:1-2). Moreover, according to the Bible itself, our guardian angels constantly intercede for us before God (Mt.18:10), and we learn from the holy prophet Zachary (1:12-13) and Tobit (12:12) that the angels intercede for people.

3. We all willingly honour and worship the appointed servants of the earthly rulers, mayors, magistrates, etc, and so it would be absurd to refuse to worship and honour those servants of the Heavenly King who, by Grace, are pure and sinless, and totally

devoted in their very essence to the perpetual adoration and service of God.

4. We call upon the heavenly angels, especially our own guardian angel, to help and aid us in working out our own salvation since the Holy Scripture clearly says, "Are not the angels all ministering spirits, sent out in service of those who are to inherit salvation" (Hb.1:14). Moreover, the angels attend and enhance our own prayers to God (Rev.8:3-4).

5. The examples of holy men in the Bible teach us to render honour and veneration to holy angels, appealing to them in prayer, asking for their intercession: Lot worshipped two angels, with his face to the ground (Gn.19:1); Valaam the prophet bowed his face to the ground in worship of an angel of God (Nu.22:31); Joshua fell on his face before the Lord's angel (Josh.5:14-15) and the holy prophet king David and the elders also fell down in worship before an angel of God (1Chron.21:16).

6. The greatest events in man's life since the Creation were heralded by holy angels: the annunciation to the Theotokos (Lk.1:26-35), the Divine Birth (Lk.2:8-15), the first announcement of the Resurrection

of Christ (Mt.28:1-8). Moreover, angels delivered the law to the Hebrews (Acts 7:53; Gal.3:19; Hb.2:2).

7. The holy angels serve God more perfectly than any other creatures, and whoever serves God is worthy of honour from men (Rm.14:18).

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

Write out your own explanation of the nature of "worship" as applied to those who are considered "worthy" or who occupy "worthy positions." Prepare an explanation for Orthodox people, so that they will understand the nature of veneration or "worship" as it applies to people and to angels and holy things. We suggest, however, that when you are dealing with direct missionary work in any form, you employ the term "veneration" rather than "worship," for the reason mentioned above.

Examine the main places in Scripture distorted by sectarians in the question of honouring and venerating holy angels: (1) Acts 7:42. The reference to "hosts of heaven" here refers to the stars, and is a condemnation of astrology and astrology cults. Ironically, very many questioners, especially

"evangelicals" and "pentecostalists" openly subscribe to astrology, worshipping "the hosts of heaven"; (2) Col.2:18, 19, 23 (see St John Chrysostom, Homily 7, on Colossians, v.13, p.298 in the Eerdmans edition); (3) Rev.19:9-10; 22:9 (in these latter cases, the Apostle indicates that he was paying Divine honour to the angel and was forbidden to do so); (4) Jer.19:13 (which refers to the astrology cults, the constellations being the "hosts of heaven.")

THE VENERATION OF HOLY IKONS

The condemnation of holy ikons by Questioners is another example of their lack of real knowledge of Divine Scripture and the doctrine of redemption. There are three major theological aspects of ikonography which are of great importance, and which are greatly misunderstood. Veneration of ikons is both bound to and a revelation of the doctrine of the Incarnation of God, the redemption of all creation and the doctrine that matter can be Grace bearing. These are subjects which THE TEACHER ought to study very deeply and understand fully. We may begin to understand the deep necessity of correct Orthodox ikons when we compare them with modern Protestant or Roman Catholic portrayals of Christ. A correct Orthodox ikon clearly portrays the incarnation of the Creator. Protestant portrayals depict either a mere effeminate human or Anti-christ (in the form of the modern T.V. sex symbol "Christs.") One may also compare correct Orthodox ikons with westernized depictions of Russia's three-century long Latin captivity. These westernized portrayals (also

popular in Serbia and Greece) depict Christ not as the incarnate Creator, but as a soft, effeminate mere human. All Protestant portrayals of Christ are Arian and idolatrous. And this is a vital point: Questioners condemn Orthodox for making depictions of Christ and the saints on the grounds that it is forbidden by the Second Commandment. Yet, Orthodox depictions, being ikonographic, are in full accord with the commandment of God regarding the decoration of His temple (Exodus, ch. 25). Questioners also have depictions of Christ, but their depictions are totally unscriptural and absolutely pagan. It is Protestant depictions which are in violation of the Commandment because they are idolatrous.

Ikons are not objects of adoration. They are objects of high theology, of Divine revelation. In correct ikonography, ikon and Bible are synonymous: they are two forms of the same thing. Both are visual, but of the two, the ikon is the most powerful and direct form of the Holy Scripture. Let us, therefore, begin at this point: ikons are the condensation of the Holy Scripture and of all man's positive experience with God, portrayed in such a way that they penetrate the faithful with the whole fulness of the Gospel and the Divine revelation.

1. God created the whole universe to be both spiritual and material, invisible and visible. Man himself was created both spiritual and material. This is reality, the "truth" of things. God did not create anything evil. Matter is not evil, and it is not a hindrance to salvation or the knowledge and experiencing of God. Indeed, nowhere does the Bible suggest that matter will cease to be after the Dread Judgment, but it makes clear that matter is to be glorified together with the spiritual.

Therefore, worship of God must have a means of incorporating both the visible and the invisible, if it is to be a worship "in spirit and in truth."

2. Ikons of Christ are depictions of the True God, not only as He appeared to man but as He revealed Himself to man. (e.g. 1Tm.3:16; Jn.1:18, 14:9). Orthodox Christians confess that the incomprehensible God became comprehensible and visible in the person of the Son, Who accepted human flesh. God became also material man, and everyone saw Him (1Tm.3:16). This appearance of God to humanity is sealed on the sacred ikons as an actual, not only historical, but present fact, clearly described in the Holy Bible (Jn.1:14; Acts 1:3).

3. Neither God the Father, nor the Holy Trinity can be portrayed in Their essence. We cannot make ikons depicting God the Father or the essence of God. Portrayals which purport to depict God the Father are heretical and idolatrous. God the Father has not revealed Himself to us in any form at any time (Jn.1:18). Nevertheless, God the Son has manifested Himself to man in a visible form. Thus the Word appeared to Abraham (Gen.18:2); to Jakob (Gen. 32:28-30); to Moses (Nu.12: 8); to Isaiah (6:1); to Daniel (7:9), and to others. All the appearances of God in the Old Testament were appearances of the Son and Word. In the New Testament, "The Word became flesh" (Jn.1:14), "God appeared in the flesh" (1Tm.3:16). The Only-begotten Son revealed God in the appearance of a person Who was "an image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).

4. God Himself expressly commanded that ikons of holy angels be made for His church (Ex.ch.25) just after He had expressly forbidden idolatrous images of "that which is in heaven..." (Ex.20:4). There is, therefore, clearly a difference between images which are theologically sound and those which are heretical or idolatrous. Ikonography in the churches is blessed and sanctified by God. For, Solomon had such

depictions made on all the walls of the temple (3Ki.6:18; 7:18-29; 2Ki.4:3), "and the Lord told Solomon: I have consecrated this temple...that My name might abide there forever" (3Ki.9:2-3).

5. The ikonographic portrayals were in the temple at the time of Christ, and He went regularly to that temple to pray, calling it "a house of prayer" and manifesting a deep "zeal for the temple" (Mk.11:15, 17). And speaking of the temple and the Jewish worship, our Saviour said "we know what we worship" (Jn.4:22). (And He also, in the same place foretold that true worship would no longer be restricted to that temple in Jerusalem). Nowhere does the Holy Bible speak against the ikonographic depictions, they remain fully Scriptural Sacred Tradition. On the other hand, the Protestant condemnation of them has no basis at all in Scripture, and their rejection of them is merely a "tradition of men."

STUDY AND PREPARATION FOR THE TEACHER

1. Examine the places of Sacred Scripture most frequently distorted by sectarians in their renunciation of sacred ikons: Acts 7:41; 1Pt.1:8; Rm.1:21-25; Gal.4: 8; Rev.9: 20; Lev.

19:4; Wis.Ch.13; Lam.1:4-72; Rev.9:20; Hab.2:18-19; Jn.1:18; 1Jn.4: 12-14 ; Ex.33: 20; Deut.4: 15, 28; 7:25-26; 4Ki.17:33-41; 18:4; Ps.113:12- 16; Is.44: 9; 2:18-20; Ez.8: 10-12.

2. Study the following Scriptures concerning worshipping in the presence of Holy ikons: Ex.25:18, 40; 26:1, 34; 29:4; 30:6, 36; Jos.7:6; 1Ki.4:3; 3Ki.8:22, 29, 42; 9:3; 2Ki.3:10, 14; Ps.5:8; 131:7; 1Ki.28:2; Ps.94:6; 137:2; Wis.15:5-7; Ez.4:1-3; 41:17-19; Mt.22: 21; Rm.13:7; Mk.11:11, 17; Lk.2:41, 49; 18:14; 24:53; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 22:17; 24:11; Gal.3:1; Rev.5: 8; 11:19; 13:15.

3. Study these passages of Scripture concerning miracles from holy ikons: Ex.14:16; 17:6; Nu.20:8; 21:8; Josh.4: 5, 7; 1Ki.5:6, 9; 6:19; 2Ki.6:7, 11; Lk.8:44; Acts 5:12, 15; 19:12.

4. Study these passages of Scripture referring to the origin of depicting holy ikons, especially those of Christ: Gen.3:8; 18:2; 49:9; Ex.12:5; 3Ki.22:19; Ps.21:17-19; 79:2; 109:1; Ex.6:1, 2; 52:14; 53:2, 5, 9; Ez.1:5, 10, 26; Dn.7:13; Lk.3:22; Jn.1:14; 14:9; Phil.2:7; 1Tm.3:16.

VENERATION OF THE CROSS

The Veneration of the Cross is one of the most ancient and meaningful traditions of the Church. In the Old Testament, the sign or fore-image of the Cross was given several times as a prophecy of the redemption of mankind. By a fore-image of the Cross, the chosen nation was delivered from bondage in Egypt. By a sign of the Cross, the Red Sea opened, saving Israel from Pharaoh, and closed, destroying Pharaoh and his legions. A fore-image of the Cross delivered the Hebrews in the wilderness four times, and by the sign of the Cross, Amalek was defeated and Israel saved. The Cross is central in our redemption, and the most ancient Christian writings mention the tradition of signing oneself with the sign of the Cross, both as a sign of the great and holy "passover" of Christ, and as a weapon against the evil-one and his deceits. From Apostolic times, the followers of Christ have always blessed their food and drink with a sign of the Cross. This is clearly demonstrated by the writing of many ancient Christian authors.

The veneration of the Cross and use of the sign of the Cross are an indication of a

direct, unbroken accord with the life and faith of the Holy Apostles and first disciples of Christ. Failure to venerate the Cross and use the sign of the Cross are clear signs of a break and separation from the life and faith of the early Church.

The Cross is not a symbol of death, punishment, justice or "atonement." It is a symbol of transformation and regeneration. Before Christ the "T" shaped torture stake was an instrument of shame, degradation and terror. Once the Saviour had allowed Himself to be enthroned on it in humiliation, however, it was utterly transformed. Christ is God. Wherever He is, it is the throne of the Almighty. The Cross was transformed from a symbol of corruption and shame to a symbol of redemption, life, hope, rebirth and eternal joy. The Cross has become a revelation of the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We call the Cross "All-honourable and life-bestowing," and for us, by the power of Jesus Christ enthroned upon it, it has become that and more. Through the Cross, the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled. By the Cross, Satan was overcome and mankind was exalted. On the Cross, redemption was held up to all the world, the seal of the redeeming life of Christ, the prelude to His redeeming Resurrection.

This transformation of an earthly created thing teaches us that matter is good, as created by the Good one, though it is often used for evil purposes. Nevertheless, even that which man, inspired by Satan, has changed into evil, can be redeemed by Christ. We ourselves are like the Cross. We were created for good, but we have become instruments and symbols of death, degeneration, corruption, bondage and shame. If, however, we will enthrone Christ in our hearts, cover ourselves with Him as the Cross once bore Him, we too can be transformed from shame to honour, from corruption to regeneration, from death to life. And this is precisely why we trace the sign of the All-honourable Cross over ourselves no matter what we are about to do, to confess this transforming power of Christ and, by His Grace, to participate in it.

We also make the sign of the Cross over objects to bless them, demonstrating our understanding that all things can be used either for good or evil and resolving to use only what is good, only for good purposes.

Therefore, together with the blessed first disciples, let us, on the sacred and all venerable feast of the Holy Cross, chant with joy: "We venerate Thy Cross, O Master, and we glorify Thy Holy Resurrection."

1. The Cross is a sword which divides the world. To those who venerate it, it is the power of salvation. Those who refuse to venerate it or who criticize the Orthodox for venerating it are, according to Holy Scripture, "perishing," for the Apostle says: "The word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1Cor.1:18).

2. The Scripture testifies that the Cross has power (1Cor. 1: 17).

3. People refuse to venerate the Cross or sign themselves with the Cross only from cowardice, because they fear persecution for the sake of the Cross. They choose rather a path more acceptable to the world around them (Gal.6:12).

4. Sectarians who condemn us for our giving glory to the Cross and of venerating it, have cast aside the Holy Scripture which says: "May I never glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal.6:14).

5. Many who call themselves Christians have actually become enemies of the Cross of Christ (Phil.3:18).

STUDY AND PREPARATION
FOR THE TEACHER

1. Examine the following Places in Holy Scripture: Lk. 9:23; Col.2:14; Wis.14:7-8; Jer.10:3-5; Mk.8:3.

2. Study the concepts of the following Scripture passages:

(a)The Cross as a holy thing of veneration: Ex. 3:5, 17:11, 25:22; Josh.5:15; 1Kgs.21:9; Wis.14:7; Mt.23:17; Jn.7: 39, 12:23, 17:1; 1Pt.2:24; 1Cor.2:2, 6:20; Eph.3:18; Phil.3:18; Col.2:14; Ps.59:6; Ex.11:12; Mt.24:30; 1Cor.11:26; Gal.6:12-14.

(b)Old Testament prefigurings of the Cross: Gen. 2:9, 6:14, 28:12, 48:13; Ex.17:8-11, 12:13, 14:21, 15:25, 17:11-12; Nm.17:8-10, 21:8; Ez.9:4; Is.62:10.