

Orthodox theology is a living and eternal force which, in its essence, never changes, nor could it change any more than the Gospel and nature of the Holy Church could change. This is so because the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ our God, does not change.

The Orthodox Christian Church is, I would suggest, not a part of the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, there are sufficient differences between Orthodox Christianity and the myriad contemporary versions of the «Judaeo-Christian tradition» of Western societies so that comparisons between the teachings, theology, life, spiritual concepts and psychology of the two are useful and beneficial in building greater understandings between the different religions and traditions of the world. The renowned Western theologian, Karl Rahner, gives a fairly accurate assessment of the general basis of this spiritual difference in these words:

«The East thought in terms of a dynamic saving history and an ascending order of things, beginning with the economy of the Trinity and closely bound up with soteriology.... Redemption is regarded in the East as a real ontological process that begins with the incarnation, discloses the immanent economy of the Trinity, ends with the divinization [theosis] of the world and first proves its triumph in Christ's Resurrection....in contrast, Western theology regards the incarnation of The Logos almost exclusively as the means of constituting a fit agent capable of making satisfaction for sin. Though aware of the divinization [theosis] of the world, it lays much more stress on Christ's atonement for sin on the Cross and on forgiveness.»

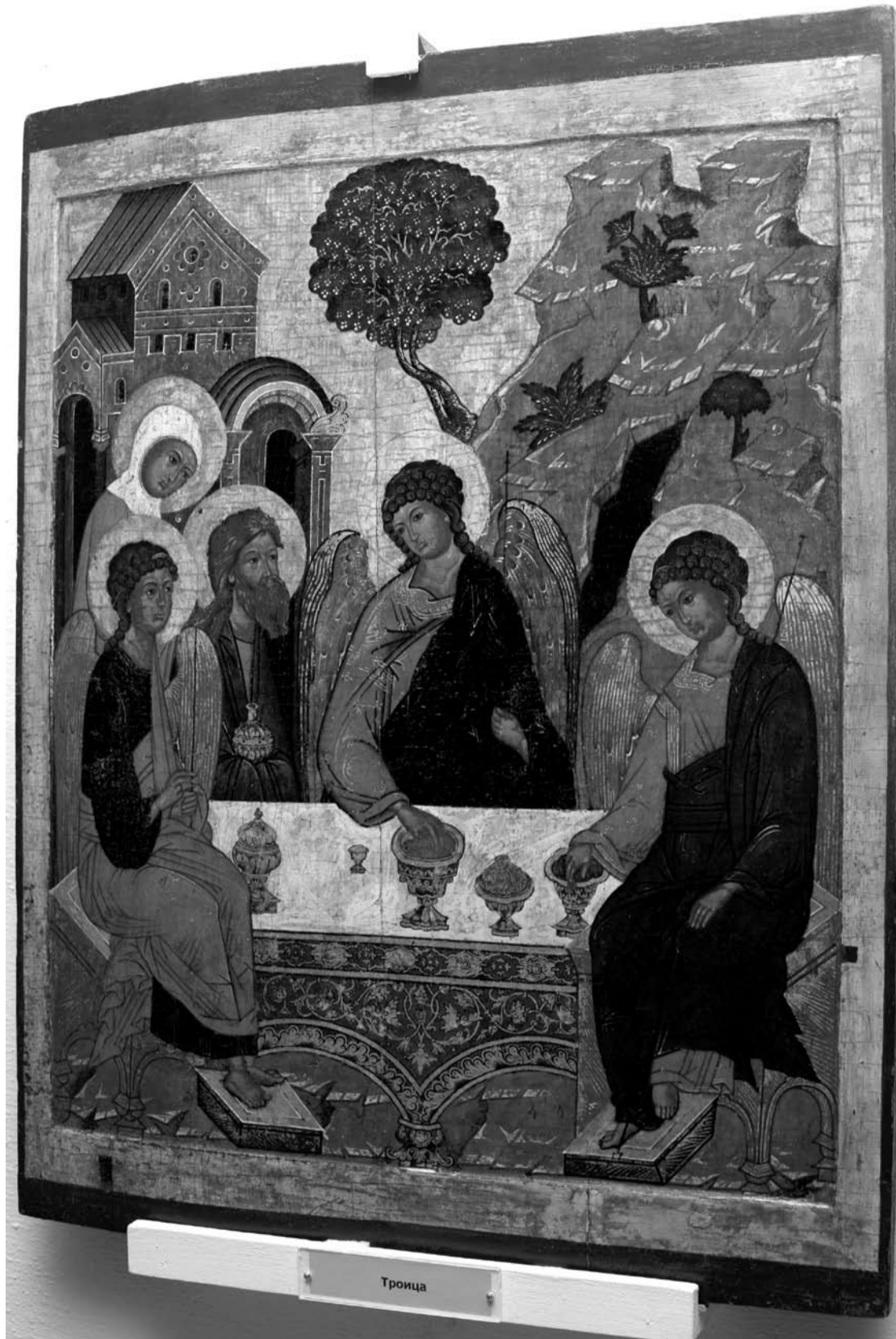
The Western version of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is really built largely upon the old Latin legal ideal — hence the doctrines of Original Sin and the Atonement or Juridical Justification theory of salvation, considered heresies by the Orthodox Christian Church — and upon the teachings of the neo-Platonist philosopher Augustine of Hippo, and the Scholastic system which was built upon both these teachings and Aristotelianism. In fact, the contemporary Greek theologian, Fr John Romanides, sorrowfully remarks:

«Beyond any doubt the most ironic tragedy in history is that Western theologians, and finally an illusionist papacy turned Augustine's endeavour into an infallible accomplishment and brought about the final touches of a separation which was long in the making.»

In the West, one can speak of an «Apostolic-Patristic Age» in the past tense because the apostolic-patristic tradition was replaced there by the superstitions of the Dark Ages and the era of Scholasticism. There, the great Orthodox Church fathers, such as Sts Cyprian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Germain of Auxerre, Hilary of Arles, John Cassian, Lupe of Troyes and Irenae of Lyons, were eclipsed by the new school men and Aristotelian Realism and nominalism. In this new era of Western philosophical theology, the laws and ideals of the medieval duel and feudalism were adapted into the «satisfaction» theory of salvation, and the concept of the relationship between God and man was reshaped by a number of factors, renaissance humanism and the industrial revolution cult of the ego, etc.

In the Orthodox Christian East, one cannot speak of a separate «Apostolic-Patristic Age» because the Orthodox Church has never ceased to live in that tradition. We find, therefore, a clear and easily visible line of great Church fathers, from Apostle Paul, Sts Polikarp of Smyrna, Ignatios the Godbearer, through Sts Basil the Great, Irenae of Lyons, John Chrysostom, to St Symeon the New Theologian in the 11th centu-

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ry, St Gregory Palamas in the 14th century, to Sts Paisy Velichkovsky and St Nikodemos the Agiorite in the 19th century, and Sts Antony the Metropolitan of Kiev and Justin the New of Serbia in the 20th century. As a matter of fact, we should note that, in the Orthodox Christian Church, there is no «theological system,» no scholastically systematized body of expressed theological theory, as for example, the Summa Theologica. Only one of the earlier fathers, St John the Damascene, even set down in outline form an exposition of the basic teachings of the Church. Such a systematized theology would be an absurdity for the Orthodox Christian Church, because it would contradict the apostolic-patristic spirit and tradition, which never sought to rationalize the gospel or reduce theology to a legalistic code of systematic philosophy.

The fathers have always «theologized» in precisely the same manner and in exactly the same spirit as the apostles «epistolized.» Neither the apostles nor the evangelists ever decided at one or another time to «sit down and write a Bible,» nor did any one of them claim that he had been given a special «call» or «commission» to take up pen and write some «holy scripture.» Indeed, the apostles and evangelists were never in any great hurry to write anything. When they

did write, it was primarily in the form of letters addressed to specific problems or questions which had arisen. In other words, they did not write for the purpose of establishing a «Bible,» but rather to preserve the unity of the faith in sound doctrine and defending the unity and uniqueness of the Holy Church. They gave nothing new, but only drew from what was already there in the Sacred Tradition of the Church, maintained by the Holy Spirit. Thus, for example, Luke wrote not a book of the gospel, but a letter to Theophilus, expressing for him the life of Christ and its meaning and significance as contained in Sacred Tradition. John, whose version of the gospel is very theological indeed, wrote it nearly a hundred years after the incarnation of God, and he wrote it only upon the entreaties of the presbyters of the churches in Asia Minor. Paul wrote to the Galatians not to establish some divine scripture, but to explain correct doctrine to them against a false teaching which contradicted the First General Council — the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem. And James wrote his Epistle, not trying to contribute to the writing of a Bible, but to correct the false teachings of those who had misrepresented Paul's words about salvation by faith without works. Yet, all these letters expressed the doctrines of the faith which the apostles had received from Christ, and which were and are woven into the very fabric and practice and being of the Orthodox Church. These doctrines were not «developed,» but were drawn forth from the Sacred Tradition and expressed as the need arose, for the sake of the unity and uniqueness of the Holy Church. Indeed, the Orthodox Church, when it was establishing and creating the Bible, did not accept everything that was written by every apostle as being «Scripture.» Some were only histories, and there were also apocryphal works, contrived by various Gnostic sects in order to delude the faithful. As a matter of fact, it was precisely because of these contrived, false gospels that the Holy Orthodox Church felt compelled, for the safety of the faithful, to create the Bible.

The fathers dogmatized in precisely the same manner. Just as Paul had to expound sound doctrine against the Gnostic heresies in Corinth, for the sake of the gospel of salvation, so also the early fathers, gathered in the ancient councils, had to give more precise and detailed form to the dogmas of the faith in order to preserve the faithful from other heresies.

The dogmas were not acts of legislation, but clear pronouncements of the gospel revelation, around which all believers could gather as a visible point of unity of faith. No one invented or contrived doctrines, dogmas or teachings. They were always present in the Church as the «Apostolic Rule of Faith,» and one could say that the first example of New Testament Scripture is the Divine Liturgy itself, written by Apostle James. When, however, the revelation and apostolic tradition were challenged, they had to be set forth in more precise expressions for the sake of the faithful.

Neither the apostles, evangelists nor the fathers of the Church have been concerned with metaphysics, or speculative or dialectical theology. Their theology has always been existential in the true meaning of the word; that is, Orthodox theology is practical, being expressed in life itself. Man has free will and bears responsibility for his personal decisions and commitments. He may choose to accept or reject the cooperation of God's grace in the shaping of his life. This is the primary concern of theology: the «working out of one's own salvation with fear and trembling» (Phil.2:12), as Apostle Paul instructs us.

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