

Why Do I Believe?

Faith: The Knowledge
Before Knowledge

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*To my Holy Elder and my spiritual father
Abbot of the Holy Monastery of the Blessed Gregoriou
Mount Athos
Father Georgios Kapsanis
who taught me how to believe Orthodox*

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INTRODUCTION

Christians, and especially the Orthodox, are called 'faithful'. The word 'Christians' reveals that we accept and worship Jesus Christ as God, Creator, and our Saviour. The word 'Orthodox' distinguishes us from the Christians that have adopted incorrect perceptions about the Triune God.

Why, then, are we called 'faithful'? The word 'faithful', despite the fact that it appears to be simple, conceals within itself unfathomable meanings, endless truths, and spiritual concerns.

'I believe' means that I accept and obey, that I am convinced and trust in somebody, that I accept something as true and that I am certain about its existence. Consequently, with the term 'Orthodox Christian faith', we mean the absolute certainty, acceptance, and trust in everything that Jesus Christ preached.

Through His life and teachings, Jesus revealed the mystery of the Holy Trinity to us. In other words, He taught us that God is Triune. Despite the fact that there is one God, He is three persons.

The Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, assumed the human form, which means that He assumed human flesh and was sacrificed for our salvation. Jesus is the only 'Theanthropos' (God-person) by nature since, apart from a divine nature, He also has a human nature.

Jesus taught us further dogmatic truths about the Church and its mysteries, as well as the afterlife. Also, He gave us basic moral commandments that are summarized by the commandment of love. Love towards God and love towards our fellow humans are two different sides of the same coin.

In this light, the Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, Vlasios, one of the greatest theologians of our time, quite rightly points out the following: It is not accurate to call Christianity, either a philosophy or a religion.

Indeed, philosophy is a human thought, in other words, a discovery of man. Nevertheless, Christianity is the revelation of God to man. Where there was weak human reason, now there is the Divine Logos, otherwise the Theanthropos Christ; the Word of God.

Accordingly, it is not correct to consider Christianity a religion, when basing it on the same meaning that other religions adopt. Christianity is not the result of man's psychological need and research towards the discovery of God; it is not a human creation. By feeling weak within the universe, man usually needs to create a powerful god that will help him in his weakness. A god that lives in heaven, who is demanding, strict and distant. Between man and god there is a wall separating them that is overcome with religion and its ceremonies.

In Christianity though, God is not created by man. God creates man and, in particular through the incarnation of the Divine Logos, He reveals Himself to man.

Jesus does not simply live in heaven, directing man's life from there. Instead, He is united with man in a divine human body: our Church. Through obedience to the commandments of Jesus, man is purified and in this way he achieves 'in His likeness' (Genesis 1:26), or 'Theosis'; the complete, ontological and existential union

with Him, even in this life. Solely based on the above two conditions, it is not possible to call Christianity a religion¹.

As previously stated, to be precise, Christianity is the revelation of God to man. It is chiefly faith towards all that Christ taught and revealed to us during His presence on Earth.² It is the reason we are called 'faithful'.

Faith is the safe path that leads us to God; it is a great virtue. Certainly, faith is not just a simple virtue; it is the base, the foundation and the gate of all the virtues. We must build on the virtue of faith to acquire the remaining virtues. Consequently, the value of faith in our lives is very high. Depending on whether a person believes in God or not, depending on how and how much he believes in Him, he accordingly regulates his life.

A person that does not believe in God, lives, thinks, decides and behaves differently to one that does believe in God.

In addition, those who belong to a different religion also lead a different way of life, since their faith is usually the reason for their different stance towards life.

Finally, someone that believes with immense fervour in the true God faces everyday reality differently than the one that is faithful because of tradition.

Especially for Orthodox Christians, since we believe in the true God, the value of faith in our lives is very high. Critical decision-making, choices, how we handle situations and behaviour, all depend on our belief in God and more broadly, on our obedience to His commandments.

In the study which follows, I want to portray the great importance of faith in our lives and at the same time, I will answer

1 Μπροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου... *Τερόθεου, Ὁρθόδοξη ψυχοθεραπεία*, σελ.21- 25.

2 Ἀντωνίου Ἀλεβιζοπούλου, *Διαλογισμός ἢ προσευχή*., σελ. 237.

fundamental questions that relate to this particular virtue. More specifically:

We all have wondered at some point; 'is there a God?' If yes, 'what is God? Why do we believe In God?' Have we ever wondered, why we believe in God? Why do we believe in our God and not in the gods of other religions? Have we got the power to prove to our fellow man, but mainly to ourselves, the existence of God and chiefly, the existence of our God? How will we prove to an atheist that God exists? How can the existence of God be proven, but also, the validity of our faith?

In the Gospel, we meet the words 'faith', 'faithful' and 'believe', hundreds of times. Our Lord asked on plenty of occasions if man believed in Him and demanded from all that they believe in Him. What signs and proof did He give to them, and to us today as well, to believe in Him and to accept Him with all our heart? Should we ask for signs and proof to believe? Would this be beneficial to us?

How can we get to know God; to have an experience of God? What is the reason that both Jesus and His disciples refused to prove His divinity with human calculus and logical proof? Jesus preferred that we know Him, not so much through our intellect or the senses, but through faith. Why is it that He avoided the first two ways? What is the relationship between faith and intellect, and science and research? Should we research what is related to faith, or maybe both yes and no? Should we be gullible, sceptical, or perhaps both?

What is the essence, the value, the necessity, the power and the efficacy of faith? How many kinds of faith are there? How many ways of belief are there? Can faith be increased, reduced or even cease? What is the relationship between our faith and our actions? Can it be the case that, while many of us confess that we believe we prove the opposite with our actions?

In this study, which engages the reader with the important virtue of faith, I will attempt to answer all these questions, as well as many more relevant ones.

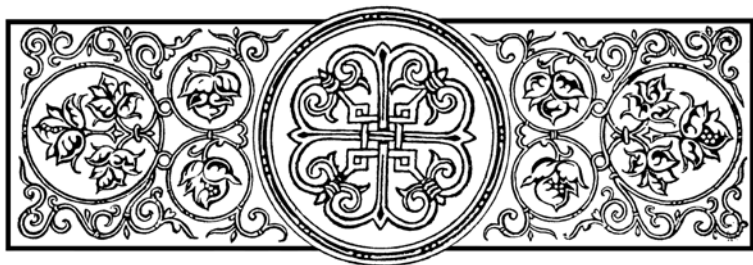
Unfortunately, most of us, in reality, do not, believe in God, despite the fact that we do not want to admit it. Our faith in God is reduced to ritualism and habit, and for this reason, we face many problems in our lives. If we believe in God genuinely and steadfastly, if we cast away every daily doubt, if we grasp the real purpose of our lives, then our life will change, it will make more sense, and we will become powerful and truly happy.

Especially nowadays, our faith, respect, and love for God are undermined by a series of worldly and ephemeral values and ideals that are not worthy in reality, because they usurp what is of unique and real value: true faith in God.

Young people are very easily willing to believe in philosophical and religious trends, without properly and responsibly researching them first.

Why is it that we so readily have such a strong stomach that digests whatever is on offer so easily? At the same time, why is it that we disclaim, so casually and frivolously, the research and engagement with the real and lifesaving Orthodox faith?





CHAPTER ONE

PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF THE TRIUNE GOD

1. MAN'S FAITH IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IS INNATE

The reason for man's fall from Grace was due to lack of faith. They lived in immense happiness, enjoyed communion with their Creator, the company of the angels and lived with the riches of Heaven. Despite the fact that they were free from sadness, stress, pain and other elements of modern life³, they disobeyed the guidance of their Creator.

Faith, otherwise known as the obedience of the command of God, was the first test for man. God demanded that they should avoid eating the fruit of only one tree in paradise, because 'death' would follow as their punishment: "*...but you must not eat from*

3 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ιζ΄, κεφ. γ΄, P.G. 61, 143.

the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2: 17).

The Creator required faith and obedience to Him and His commandment, in order that Adam and Eve could utilize the gifts He had provided them with. Therefore, through their obedience to their Creator's will, they would mature spiritually, consolidate their free will towards good, attain perfection and in turn, be a successful completion 'in His Likeness.' (Genesis 1:26) In this way they would achieve immortality and *'Theosis'* (the transformation of man to the likeness to or union with God).

Of course, Adam and Eve had to believe in the words of God and absolutely believe in the punishment of death, which would follow their unfaithfulness and disobedience. It is important to state that for them, death was a completely unknown phenomenon since, they had no prior knowledge as to the concept or the experience of death.

Their faith and trust towards the words of the Creator are challenged when the serpent appears to sow disbelief and disobedience: "*Ye shall not surely die*" (Genesis, 3:4). With the advice of the devil in the form of a serpent, Adam and Eve disobey their Creator's command, misusing their freedom. They attempt to become gods or achieve godliness through their own efforts and not with God's guidance. They change the way and the aim of their existence, and then they try to gain autonomy, interrupting their communion with God. They turn towards the satisfaction of the senses and love the creation more than the Creator.⁴

After the fall which leads to the spiritual and physical death of Adam and Eve, God does not abandon His creation. He tries to guide him back to knowing God again; through the absolute faith and love towards his Creator. This is the reason He sends

4 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, "Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Β' (30) 44, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ. 275.

His Son to be sacrificed for us. At the same time, His Son teaches the truths of our faith. Through Jesus' life on Earth, the Man-God Jesus reveals Himself to His creation, man, in a way He considers most appropriate, of course.

Nevertheless, until God's revelation on Earth through the incarnation of the *Divine Logos*, man is not separated from God. After all, man was the most honored of all living beings, having received special gifts, which had to be developed. Thus, he was created in his Creator's image and likeness, which means that he received all those gifts in order to differentiate him from animals, so that he is a precise image of God. In particular, man is gifted with reason, free will, conscience, the possibility of eternal life, creativity, the love and desire towards the Absolute, God, etc.

By having the advantage of being created 'in the image of God' therefore being superior to all other living beings, and having individual personalities, man is invited to be completed 'in His likeness', or else, to be existentially unified with God and to become a 'god by grace'.

According to the Fathers of our Church, among the many gifts awarded to man, God also gave him the knowledge of His existence, the desire for Him and the wish to seek Him out, as well as the ability to obtain knowledge, in order to be able to distinguish between good and evil; that is to say, with a conscience.

According to St. John of Damascus, "*God did not abandon us in perfect ignorance because the knowledge that God exists, has been sown by nature to all of us by God Himself.*"⁵

At the same time, when God "*created man, He put inside him a holy seed, like a kind of a warmer and brighter thought, to take the place of a sparkle in order to give light to his mind and show him*

5 "Εκδοσις ἀκριβής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α' (1) 1, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ. 54.

to distinguish between good and evil. This is called conscience and is the natural law.”⁶

“Nature taught men both these two things and also, to know God the Creator of everything and to avoid vice and love justice.”⁷

As my venerable father Giorgios Kapsanis distinctively says; *“The psyche of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God, yearns for God and desires union with Him.... Because holy God Himself placed within Him this holy thirst, the divine Eros, the desire for union with Him, for deification (Theosis in Greek). He has in himself the erotic power, which he receives from his Creator, in order to love truly, strongly, selflessly, just as his holy Creator falls in love with His world, with His creatures. This is so that with this holy erotic impetus and loving power, he falls in love with God. If man did not have the image of God in himself, he would not be able to seek its prototype. Each of us is an image of God, and God is our prototype. The image seeks the prototype, and only when it finds it does it find rest.”⁸*

This is why, as the venerable father goes on, *“in the years before Christ, many wise and virtuous people had appeared. For example, the ancient Greeks had reached quite high standards of philosophy about the good and about God. Their philosophy, in fact, contained seeds of the truth, the so-called ‘spermatikos logos’. They were very religious people, after all; they were not at all atheist, as some of our contemporaries are trying to present them, who do not know the facts well. But of course they did not know the true God; they were idolaters, yet very pious and god-fearing people...”*

6 Ὁσίου Δωροθέου, Διδασκαλία γ', κεφ. α', PG.88, 1652D

7 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς..., τόμος α', ὑποσημείωσις 36, σελ. 71

8 Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, σελ. 38.

*“...In the philosophy of the ancient Greeks we can perceive a certain yearning for the unknown God; a yearning for the experience of God. They were faithful and pious, but they did not have the correct and completed knowledge of God; Communion with God was lacking. Deification (gr. Theosis) was not possible for them.”*⁹

Thus, mankind that lived before the First Coming of Christ, before the incarnation of the Divine Logos, did not have exact and perfect knowledge about the true God but instead they had an innate knowledge and certainty about the existence of God; the ability to distinguish between good and evil as well as the yearning to look for God.

As it is mentioned by St. Nicodemus the Athonite, mankind, *“as everyone before and after the Mosaic Law, were righteous, and as many of them were Greek and philosophers”*¹⁰, developed during their lifetime some seeds of piety and virtue in their soul. They finally accepted Christ and utterly believed in Him. This was materialized when our Lord, with His death on the cross, descended into Hades and preached with a supernal and inconceivable way¹¹ for humans, to all that had died before His coming to earth (Pet. 1st, 3rd, 18-19 and 4th, 6).

After all, as St. Nicodemus goes on, our Lord's descending was two-fold; the first was from the heavens into Earth and the second from Earth into Hades. At the same time, the salvation that He offered to people was also two-fold; one towards the living and one towards the souls of the departed.¹²

9 *Ἐνθ' ἀνωτ. σελ. 17-18.*

10 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς., ὑποσημείωσις 62, σελ. 275.*

11 *Νικολάου Π. Βασιλειάδου, Τό μυστήριον τοῦ θανάτου, σελ. 201.*

12 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς., σελ. 274.*

Mankind which existed during the era before Christ, who are mentioned above, believed and were saved when Christ descended into Hades. Indeed, they *“recognized Jesus, all the ones that were in communion with the fleshless Logos during their lifetime... The ones that were in communion with Him believed that He is powerful and mighty; the Saviour of man and this is how they were set free.”*¹³ Additionally, even some that had lived sinful lives but had the seeds of repentance and reversion in their soul, *“when the Lord descended into Hades and preached, they believed in Him and were saved.”*¹⁴

2. GOD INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO MAN THROUGH HIS CAUSELESS CAUSE ACTIONS

Man is not guided to knowing God only through the innate gifts given to him by God. The Apostle Paul characteristically says that, *“because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so they are without excuse”* (Romans, 1, v19-20).

Thus, Paul says that God proved and is proving His existence through His creations. Therefore, when seeing the perfection and beauty of all the creations, as well as the wisdom with which, the Earth, the sun, the planets and the galaxies were created, are maintained and ruled, and at the same time observing the smallest being in the endless animal kingdom and nature as a whole man is

13 Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου... Γερόθεου, *Οί Δεσποτικές Εορτές*, σελ. 271.

14 Αγίου Νικοδήμου του Άγιορείτου, *Ερμηνεία εις τās έπτά καθολικάς Έπιστολάς...*, ύποσημείωσις 66, σελ. 280.

then reduced in admiration of his creator. Man understands that all these beautiful creations broadcast and prove the existence of their masterful Creator. We see with the eyes of our soul, as if in a mirror, the harmony and unswerving laws that retain the universe through the face of our Creator.

Consequently, even well before the Divine Logos was incarnated and revealed His first coming to Earth, everyone knew the existence of God both from His innate gifts and from the communion of man with the perfect creation.

Thus, we know God through the creation, not through His essence or nature but through what is “considered to be related to His essence, which may be invisible to the bodily eyes but is comprehensible to the intellect through the orderliness of the creations.”¹⁵ What is related to the essence of God and is invisible to bodily eyes but visible, known and approachable to the eyes of our soul, are the virtues of God or in other words,¹⁶ the qualities of God, the natural characteristics of God, the natural and substantial powers of God, or even better, His unconstructed (not made and godly) actions.

Through the creation, we know the kindness, wisdom, power, majesty and providence of God. *“With these, His uncreated energies, God created the world and still continues to preserve it. He gives essence and substance to our world through His essence-creating energies. He is present in nature and sustains the universe with His preserving energies; He illuminated man with His illuminating energies; He sanctifies him with His sanctifying energies. Finally, He deifies him with His deifying energies. Thus, through His uncreated energies, holy God enters nature, the*

15 Ἀγίου Θεοφυλάκτου Βουλγαρίας, *Τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Παύλου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους...*, P.G.124, 353C.

16 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', ὑποσημείωσις 41, σελ. 74.

world, history and human life. God's actions are divine energies. They too are God, but without being His essence. They are God, and therefore they can deify man."¹⁷ Thus, when we say that the Holy Spirit is communicated to man, we mean only through His energies and not His natural essence.

It is important to mention that, what is related to God's essence, which is invisible to the human eye, or His uncreated energies, become visible to the Saints of our Church and truly holy men. According to Saint Gregory Palamas, *"the light of God's Grace is uncreated... in fact deified men see this light (with their human eyes) as the ultimate, the highest experience of Theosis."*¹⁸

3. THE CREATION REVEALS THE EXISTENCE OF THE CREATOR

Let's see though, how the holy Elders interpreted the above excerpt from Paul's Epistle to the Romans and how they correlate the knowledge of God with the perfection of the creation.

Characteristically, Vasileios the Great says that, *"If you observe the sky and the order that exists in it, then it becomes your guide towards faith because it reveals the Creator through itself. Also, if you notice the arrangement and the beauty that exists all around the Earth, then through all these, your faith in God will increase. Therefore we did not believe in God because we saw Him with our bodily eyes but instead because we saw Him with the power of our mind that sees the invisible through the visible."*

"And all His Works are done in faith" (says the prophet David, Psalm 32, verse 4) *"which means that His works are full of faith;*

17 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 36.

18 Ἐνθ' ἁνωτ. σελ. 40.

*they teach us faith. If you examine, even the stone, this too, has some proof of the Creator's power; just like the ant the insect and the bee. Quite often, the Creator's wisdom is distinguished even in the smallest of his creations. Wherefore He, Who unfolded the sky everywhere and spread the countless and vast seas, He is the One who has curved the dainty dart of the bee like a tube, so that through this, it'll excrete poison. Thus, all His works have faith. Nothing should become the motive for you to have no faith. Do not say that something happened coincidentally or that something else sprouted automatically. Nothing was created in vain, without order or vaguely, without some purpose and nothing came into existence accidentally."*¹⁹

In yet another sermon according to the Saint, "it is certain that the one who examines and observes human nature with discretion, knows God; not only from the sky and the Earth but mainly by our own making. After all, this is also what the prophet David says; 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me' (Psalm 139, verse 6). Thus, I observed myself and I was taught well about Your immeasurable wisdom."²⁰

The viewpoints of Saint John of Damascus are quite relevant. "In the same way that somebody admires the maker or the craftsman when he sees a house that is technically and aesthetically well-built, or a vessel made with talent, so do I; having been made from zero and having come into existence, even though I cannot see my Creator and Provider of my existence. Nevertheless, I have seen His wisdom through my harmonious and wonderful formation. I have not seen, of course, what He is exactly but I only know what I can understand; that I was not created randomly or created by myself, but He created me as He wished..."

19 'Ομιλία στ' εἰς τόν λβ' ψαλμόν, κεφ. γ', P.G.29, 329.

20 Εἰς τήν Ἐξαήμερον, ὁμιλία θ', κεφ. στ', ΕΠΕ τόμος 4, σελ. 366.

“Thus, from all that is related to my being but at the same time, by seeing the harmonious construction and maintenance of the whole universe, I am led to the knowledge of the Creator’s magnificence ... How else could something remain had He not wanted it? Alternatively, how else could something be maintained, as it is mentioned in the Bible, had He not called it into existence? Wherefore if a ship that is adrift cannot be rescued but can be easily sunk instead, and if a small house cannot stand if there is nobody to look after it, then how could the world, which is a creation so great, beautiful and admirable, have been maintained for so many years without some superior, great, worthy of admiration, governing and omniscient providence?”²¹

Athanasius the Great also says that “we even receive our knowledge of God when seeing the creations of the universe. It is as if the creation itself, with its wondrous order and harmony, declares and writes it and through these letters of hers, she shows and cries out that her Creator and Master does exist.”

“Since God is invisible and incomprehensible in nature, and entirely different from every creation, it is natural that the human race cannot have adequate knowledge of Him. Besides, all the creations were brought to life from non-existence but He is eternal and unborn. God is certainly Good and a Philanthropist and provides for all the souls that He created. For this reason, He adorned His creation with wisdom so, even though His is invisible in nature, humans can recognise Him through His works. After all, quite often we get to know a craftsman from his works.”²²

In a different sermon, Athanasius the Great stresses that, in the same way the good shipwright can be recognised from the vessel that he has constructed, so can our wise Creator be dis-

21 *Ιστορία ψυχωφελής*, κεφ. ιζ´, ΕΠΕ τόμος 10, σελ. 210-210.

22 *Κατά Έλλήνων (εἰδωλολατρῶν)*, κεφ. λδ´ - λε´.

tinguished by the harmony, the magnitude and the beauty of the creation.²³

Let's examine the viewpoints of Saint John Chrysostom through: *"From the beginning, God planted in man the knowledge about Him... Where is it obvious that He planted this knowledge in man, Paul? 'Because' says the holy Paul, 'the real knowledge of God is evident in man's intellect'."* (Romans, 1: 19)

Yes, but this is an opinion, not proof. Prove and explain it to me that the knowledge of God was apparent in them and that, with their own will, man despised it. Where is it obvious from, then? Did He cry out from the heavens? Of course not. In contrast, God did something that could attract man much more than crying out. He presented man with the creation so that the wise, the ignorant, the Scythian and the barbarian, after having understood the beauty of all visible things, will ascend towards God."

Thus, the holy Paul goes on to say, *"Because the endless perfections and virtues of God, are not visible to the bodily eyes of man, but can be clearly seen with the eyes of their intellect. (Romans, 1: 20) This is precisely what the prophet David said, 'The skies narrate God's glory.'" (Psalm 18, 1).*

*"What, then, will the idolaters say on that day? Will they say that we did not recognise You? Yes, didn't you hear the sky that cried out when you looked at it? The call of the harmonious order of the universe, calling louder than a trumpet? Didn't you see that the laws of night and day always remain firm? The neatness and the order of Winter, Spring and the other seasons, which are stable and unmovable? The discipline of the seas, despite the great storms and the waves? While everything remains in order, and with their beauty and magnitude to reveal their Creator?"*²⁴

23 Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸν ἐν ᾿ ψαλμόν, P.G.27, 124.

24 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία δ΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.60, 412-413.

“God wished that men are edified through works and not through letters. What does ‘through works’ mean though? Through the creation itself... Did you see the magnitude of the creation? Admire the power of Him that created it? Did you see the beauty? Be amazed by the wisdom of Him, Who has adorned it?”

“Prophet David verified this by saying that, “The heavens narrate God’s story. Tell me, how do they narrate it? They have no voice, they did not acquire a mouth and there is no tongue in them; how do they narrate it then? Through their sight. Because when you see their beauty, their magnitude, their continuance of so many years, it is as if you listen and you are taught through their sight and thus, you should worship Him, Who created such a good and unusual body. The sky is quiet but its sight allows a cry louder than the trumpet’s, which edifies man through seeing and not through listening because by nature, the sense of vision is more reliable and explicit than the sense of hearing.”²⁵

“God did not have the need of any of His creations. Nevertheless, He created them all so that He would reveal His love for us, and thus proving how much He honours the human race. At the same time, He wishes that being guided by His creations, we will offer to Him the appropriate worship. How foolish would it be then, for someone to stop at the beauty of the creations and to stand on them, without raising the eyes of the mind towards the Creator?...”

“...Did you see the sky, do you admire its beauty, the variety of the stars, the towering glory? Do not stop at this point but extend your intellect towards their Creator. Does the sunlight amaze you and does it provoke your admiration when you consider its great benefit? When you see the sun rays illumine your face, do you admire the sun’s beauty? Do not stop at this point either but consider that if the creation is so wondrous and unusual and if

25 *Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία θ´, κεφ. β´, P.G.49, 105-106.*

it transcends every human intellect, then what can He be; the One Who created them with His word and command? Do think accordingly about the Earth.”²⁶

“Then, ask the one that says that everything was created and is maintained by itself. If the apparently small and insignificant human body ... is lost and destroyed when, often some abnormality or disease develops inside it; how is it possible that the vast world... remains unmarred for so many years, if it does not have the high Providence of God? ... Tell me how, not even one of the elements that constitute the universe, has not overrun its limits and destroyed everything else? Who put them together in the first place? Who bound them together? Who is it that harnessed them? Who is it that has been containing them all this time? What I am saying, would not be impossible if the universe was simple and of one kind. Nevertheless, when there is so much conflict between the elements, then who is foolish enough to claim that all these were united and remain united by themselves, without being put together by someone?”²⁷

Saint John of Damascus faithfully emulates Saint Gregory the Theologian²⁸, who in turn maintains that, creation itself leads to the knowledge of God, and he teaches the following: “Consistency itself, as well as the preservation and governing of the creation, teaches us that there is a God that created the universe. He still contains, maintains, preserves and, eternally, provides for it. Wherefore, how can it be that the opposite elements of nature, namely fire and water as well as air and earth, are bound harmoniously? Also, how do they remain interconnected if some almighty power has not reconciled them and that the same power preserves them together eternally?”

26 *Eis tήn Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία στ´, κεφ. ζ´, P.G.53, 60-61.

27 *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ι´, κεφ. β´, P.G.49, 113.

28 *Λόγος θεολογικός δεύτερος*, κεφ. 16.

“What is this power that put the celestial and the terrestrial in order, everything that flies in the air and that lives in water and mainly, everything that existed before; the sky, the Earth and the elements of fire and water? Who fused them and then separated them? What power set them in motion and still directs their eternal and unhindered movement? Can it possibly not be their Creator, Who ordered the destination of everything and according to Whom, everything moves and is directed?”

“Who is their Creator though? Can it not be Him, Who has fashioned and led them to existence? Certainly, we will not attribute this power to mere chance. Nevertheless, let us assume that everything was created automatically and out of plain coincidence. Whose work is the order of the cosmos? Even this, if it appears correct at all, let us attribute it to mere chance. Whose work is its maintenance and safeguarding, according to its predestination, and for which it was created in the first place? It goes without saying that it can be attributed to someone else and not to mere chance. Who else can this be but God?”²⁹

Also, the teachings of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite are characteristic. Among others, the cognisable structures were created. *“Wherefore in the creations, as in mirrors, we see their Mason and Creator. Through the essence of the entities, we understand and believe that God and their Creator, exists. This is so, because it is impossible for these created things to create and bring themselves into existence from non-being, as this transcends the conditions of their natural power. We should comprehend the goodness of the Creator, through the goodness of the creation. Also, we should know the wisdom and power of the Creator, through the wisdom and power of the creation. In general, we should see faith in na-*

29 *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α΄ (3) 3, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ. 64.*

ture and through our present perception, we should be informed of the future comprehensible riches that we will take delight in.”³⁰

Finally, Saint Maximus the Confessor asserts that “because of the beings, we believe in the existing God... They are reprehensible, everyone that was not taught about the determiner of all creations from the theory of beings, and all that specify the agent by nature; that is, power and divinity in specific. Nature then, cries out and thunders with her creations and somehow, it declares to all that can hear with their souls’ senses, her agent that is praised in trinity.”³¹

May the incredible and beautiful Creation be the reason to all that declare themselves non-believers or atheists, to seek their Creator. May they research responsibly, not only what is related to improving living standards and increasing their knowledge and income but mainly, what is related to their birth and predestination. May nature’s magnificence be the reason for them to understand that it is not right to deny God so carelessly or to declare ignorance of His existence. Nature cries out that it is created by someone more powerful than it. Let’s end this tactic of researching anything else rather than the burning issue of God’s existence. If we search with a humble heart and good intentions, it is certain that God will reveal Himself to us with plenty of evidence and very strong proof, which I will attempt to analyse in the following study.



30 *Ερμηνεία εις τας ιδ' ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', σελ. 76.

31 *Πρός Θαλάσσιον, Περί ἀποριῶν, ἐρώτησις ιγ'*, ΕΠΕ τόμος 14B, σελ. 94-96.

4. EVIDENCE OF CORRECTNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

As it has already been mentioned, the knowledge and certainty of the existence of God is innate in man. God Himself has given us the fervour of pursuing Him. Thus, with the condition that they make the most of the gifts or 'charismata' that God gave them, all man has the need to communicate with Him by thanking Him for his abundant gifts.

A paramount question remains to be answered, however. Who is the real God? Alternatively, as we meet various religious systems in the flow of history, which one of them is the correct one? Who are the ones that possess a sound faith and have the correct knowledge of God? After all, even today, we witness the existence of great religions that count millions, and even billions, of worshipers. Many common points exist between these religions but also, many diametrically opposite beliefs. Which one of them is the correct religion? Which one expresses the true God? What is the name we ought to give the Creator of the universe?

For centuries, Greeks have embraced Christianity. Nevertheless, it is not right to accept something without investigating it first; without trying to prove to ourselves that, what we accept, believe and obey, is real. After all, if we accept something as a local tradition only, it is certain that one day, our faith in this tradition will be shaken. Consequently, we will be unable to entice somebody that does not have real knowledge of God to our faith.

"Every attempt to explain or to understand the essence of Christianity, or of the faith and Christian life, stumbles upon

*difficulties from the first moment. It stumbles upon the renowned demand, which is typical of our times: 'proof'."*³²

What answer will we give to ourselves, to atheists, heathens, and even our fellow Greeks who, despite the baptism they received as infants, they now deny the Christian faith and the name 'Orthodox Christian'? How will we manage to convince them that it is us that have the true faith and not the followers of other religions? How will we explain to them that not all of us believe in the same God; that not all religions are the same? Today, in particular, an era during which, the Internet bombards people with a plethora of ideologies, philosophical and religious trends, how will we manage to raise the banner of truth, boldly, well proven and without fear?

After all, it is perfectly normal that our fellow man, and even ourselves, will ask the same question that the Hebrews asked our Lord when He came to reveal Himself to man and also, to sacrifice Himself for our salvation. *"What sign and what miracle, which proves Your mission, is it that You perform so that we will see and believe in You? What are the miraculous and supernatural works that You do? According to the Psalms, our fathers ate the manna when they were in the desert; 'and had rained manna upon them to eat'."*

Of course, the question was correct because it would not be logical to believe in any God without proof. Nevertheless, its manner and timing were wrong. Unfortunately, the Hebrews' hearts were corrupt, and they were more interested in tempting our Lord than to ask for proof of His divinity. After all, what further sign and miracle did they need to witness, after so many miraculous signs of His holy philanthropy, which they would have seen being performed by Jesus, Who healed every illness?

32 Ἀλεξάνδρου Σμέμαν, *Πιστεύω*, σελ. 38.

Our Lord's answer to the above question was clear to the all those, whose eyes and souls were open but completely unclear to the cunning Hebrews, who possibly went on to be even more confused rather than enlightened. *"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."* (John 6: 32-33)

On another occasion, when the Hebrews were asking for a sign from heaven, once more, our Lord gave them another vague answer by saying that the only high and supernatural proof they will receive would be His three-day Resurrection. (Matthew 12: 38-40)

Through these answers and also, generally through His life and teachings while on Earth, our Lord presented the proof we could be able to receive so that we would believe in Him. First, our Lord proves His divinity to us, through His resurrection and also, through His abundant and supernatural miracles. Second, it is proven through the banquet of the heavenly bread, or else, the participation in the sacramental and spiritual life of our Church and third, through the perfection of His evangelical teachings.

Jesus did not want to prove His divinity with arguments that were based solely on human logic, wisdom and intellect. He even refused to present a heavenly sign which would reveal the magnitude of His divinity to the human senses.

He preferred to prove His divinity through the miracles of His holy philanthropy towards the indisposed through the wondrous change and internal enlightenment that man feels when he learns His perfect teaching or, when he is mysteriously united with Him through sacramental life of our Church and mainly, through the participation in the Holy Eucharist; the communion of the heavenly Bread.

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul implemented in his Epistle to the Corinthians. Specifically, Saint Paul said that he

came to proclaim the Gospel not by using human wisdom as much or by perfecting human logic.

On the contrary, he would say that he had come to proclaim Christianity *"in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."* (1 Corinthians 2:4) Firstly through the proof of the Holy Spirit which had two functions. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit secretly enlightened and informed human souls that heard this holy and perfect teaching about its correctness. On the other hand, it sanctified and gave peace and serenity to anyone that wished to begin a spiritual life and wanted communion with the Holy Spirit. Second, Paul the Apostle proclaimed Christianity by proving that the holy power confirmed the evangelical teachings with the help of supernatural and wondrous works.

Just as the Apostle says in another one of his epistles, the one in which referred to the divinity of Jesus, *"and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 1:4) The Apostle Paul namely preached about the holiness of Jesus Christ which was proven to be far greater than any other, about the power of His miracles and the points which they made and about the blessings and holy gifts the faithful received from the communion of the Holy Spirit just as in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, Jesus provides three basic kinds of proof of His divinity; His perfect teachings, the various miracles that He and His disciples have performed until today and finally, the wondrous internal change that every faithful Christian receives with the participation in the Sacraments of our Church.

Next, I will attempt to analyse these forms of proof of our faith in detail and at the same time explain why Jesus and His disciples refused to prove His divinity with the help of human reasoning and logical proof. In lieu of this, Jesus preferred we

know Him not so much with our intellect or our senses, but instead with our faith.

5. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IS NOT PROVEN WITH LOGIC OR THROUGH THE SENSES

As it is mentioned above, Jesus and the Holy Apostles preached the Gospel by providing three basic kinds of proof of its divine inspiration: the perfect teachings of the Gospel, the various miracles that Jesus and His disciples performed and finally, the wondrous internal transformation and enlightenment that the faithful receive during their participation in the Sacraments of our Church.

With this kind of proof and means, both Jesus and the Holy Apostles captivated man into the infrastructure of our faith, leading them to knowledge of God. By providing this proof they encouraged their contemporaries to accept the Triune God and thus, to believe in Him up to a certain degree.

Nevertheless, what is quite striking and raises reasonable questions, is the fact that both Jesus and His disciples did not give any further proof to man so that they will accept Jesus as our God and the Saviour of humanity.

Why is it then that they did not provide something more concrete, something more apparent, and something that is more logically proven and accepted so that man would not have any doubt as to our Lord's divinity?

Why is it then that God does not simply appear to man just as, for instance, He is to appear at His Second Coming? Why is it that He will not introduce Himself to man, just as He will introduce Himself during eternity so that there will be no doubt about Him? And in that case, man will not hasten to worship and accept Him?

Allow me to explain what I mean. There are two commonly recognised ways of learning: intellect and the senses. With the help of thought, logic, human wisdom, scientific research, mathematical logic, rational argument and reasoned analysis, we can learn almost all things in our lives with precision. Intellect is the most concrete means towards knowledge and through this dynamic, man is able to learn and succeed a great deal in life.

A second way towards knowledge, and a solid one, is the use of the human senses. We do not need, for instance, to prove the existence of the sun with logical and scientific proof because, not only do we see it but we also enjoy many of its properties through feeling its warmth, etc. This kind of evidence might be needed for the knowledge of other planets or galaxies, the perception of which we do not possess.

It is particularly surprising then, why God did not wish to present Himself to man and thus prove His existence through the intellect and not through the senses.

In other words, it is impossible to prove the existence of God with the help of human thought and scientific proof, just as it is to see Him in His essence or even how we would be able to see Him during eternity.

As much as one might try, he will not be able to prove the existence of God or even life after death in a scientific way as it is believed and taught by our Church.

Due to the fact that God does not appear to man via the senses to be able to perceive His glory, in the same way, the use of knowledge to be able to perceive God will have to be dismissed as well.



6. THE CREATION'S ACTION OF LIBERTY

What is the justification then, that the existence of God is proven neither with logic nor the senses?

Despite the fact that there are many reasons for which God avoids human logic and the senses as the primary methods for man's knowledge of God, they are certainly ones that should be considered as highly important:

If God's existence could be proved with logical and scientific arguments, then everyone would be forced to accept and worship Him. Just as it is impossible for someone to claim that one plus one equals three, and not two because he would be considered insane, in the same way, we would not have the ability, or the right, to doubt the existence of God.

Something similar would happen, if the Creator of the universe appeared to man from time to time, in all His magnitude and in the same form that He would appear in His Second Coming. I do not think that it is possible that someone could see God Himself and then deny His existence, or refuse to worship Him.

Nevertheless, God never wished to limit or obliterate our freedom. Every way and method that would restrict free choice, free will, discretion and our intentions, is clearly dismissed. After all, we would not want to be saved under obligation or simply be controlled structures, deprived of choice.

A man's faith in God, his love, acceptance, worship, obedience and trust in Him, has to be a product of free will because only then, can it be of any value. Only then, can it be a virtue. After all, virtue is solely considered to be the result of man's free choice and personal toil.

In contrast with the senses and intellect, faith is the Creation's act of freedom. When we say that we believe in God, we attempt an affirmation that demands a choice, a decision, personal participation and desire. For this reason, the character of faith is moral and attributes fantastic value to this action of our hearts.

When faith results from the necessary conclusion of man's intellectual ability or senses, it does not have any moral value, it is not a virtue, and it is not the result of free choice or volition. If God was as visible as the sun, for instance, then our faith would have no value because it would not be based on our personal action but it would be based on infliction through the senses.

Indeed, when someone learns something, then he accepts it, whether he wants to or not. When he gains objective knowledge about something, this knowledge is independent of him; it enters his intellect regardless of his will, or any free choice. It is objective and I, the subject, only have the ability to accept it and familiarize myself with it.

God never wished this kind of love or faith; one that is based on compulsion, force or self-interest. So that man's freedom, which God Himself created and respects, is maintained, it is necessary that God appears to us, precisely as He has presented Himself, and thus introduces the way of faith as the principal way of knowing God. The Son of God did not appear in all His magnitude, or as the Almighty, but in human form. In this form, He was able to prove His divinity through His teachings and miracles and afterward, through what is experienced during the participation in the Sacrament and the mysteries of our Church.

A man is invited to believe that God Himself is hidden behind what he sees and then worship Him. With His limitless wisdom, He fully respects the gift of human freedom. A man is asked to investigate all the evidence that Jesus offers about His divinity and after he evaluates it, to love Him, to believe Him and to accept Him fully but at the same time, freely.

This is precisely the focal point that comes as an answer to whoever belittles the value of our faith; to whoever doubts Christianity because of the, according to them, “inadequate” logical evidence that proves it.

Of course, intellect is not entirely rejected. It is simply not isolated or regarded as absolute. After all, how is it possible that the gift of logic, which is a gift to man who is in turn made in the image of God, be considered as useless or unnecessary, during the familiarization, contact or communion with his Creator?

After all, Paul the Apostle himself, who disdained human wisdom and intellect as the only or ideal ways of knowing God, teaches us that we ought to use our intellect in the best possible way.

(1 Corinthians 12:20) Despite the fact that in his sermon, Holy Paul claimed that he did not teach with enticing words of man’s wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:4), he refused to provide the Hebrews with a strong sign (1 Corinthians 1:22) and the proof that they were asking for. He nevertheless preached with great wisdom, (1 Corinthians 2:6-8) the supernatural sermon of the Cross and the sacrifice of the Theanthropos (God-man).

Paul the Apostle asks from us to activate all the powers of our intellect, not so much as to prove His existence by mathematical calculations and analyses since we are weak and minimal in front of the all-powerful God, but mainly to purify our soul. Then, with the purified eyes of our souls, to face, know and feel the incomprehensible God; to believe that He is hiding behind each one of His creations and also, behind the Bread He offers to us with the mystery of the Eucharist.

He asks that we use our human ability for inquiry, not that the incomprehensible God will be contained in our minds but that through our investigation, to get to know, admire and accept all the truths of our faith and all these signs and miracles that He and His disciples performed.

He does not ask us to see God's essence with our weak eyes but to feel His Holy Grace, or His uncreated energy, with our whole existence and our whole being. Thereby through sacramental life be able to see the uncreated light of divinity with the eyes of our souls.

I think that everyone who disbelieves and mocks Christianity and doubts our faith under the pretext of the absence of logical argument or any visible sign or proof, is acting irresponsibly. This absence is not coincidental but aims to crown us and give value to our personal struggle.

Whoever mocks our faith, or asks for further proof, shows that he most likely does not wish to or feel like accepting Christ as our God and Savior. If their intentions were good and sincere, if they wanted to see things realistically, they would be content with what Jesus provides us. The signs that our Lord gives are more than enough for us to believe in Him, without crushing our freedom.

7. GOD DOES NOT IMPOSE PIETY ON MAN

Let us examine the particular views of Saint John Chrysostom on this matter. *"When then Christ shall come and all the angels with Him, and be manifested as God, and all things made subject unto Him; will not even the Greek believe? It is quite plain that he will also fall down and worship, and confess Him God, though his stubbornness exceed all reasoning."*

For who, at sight of heavens opened and Him coming upon the clouds, and all the congregation of the powers above spread around Him, and rivers of fire coming on, and all standing by and trembling, will not fall down before Him, and believe Him God?

Tell me, then; shall that adoration and knowledge be accounted unto the Greek for faith? No, on no account. And why not? Because this is not faith. For necessity hath done this, and the

evidence of the things seen, and it is not of choice, but by the vastness of the spectacle the powers of the mind are dragged along. It follows that by how much the more evident and overpowering the course of events, by so much is the part of faith abridged.

For this reason miracles are not done now. And that is the truth, hear what He saith unto Thomas 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' (John 20:29) Therefore, in proportion to the evidence wherewith the miracle is set forth is the reward of faith lessened. So that if now also miracles wrought, the same thing would ensue.

For that then we shall no longer know Him by faith, Paul hath shewn, saying, For now we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5: 7) As at that time, although thou believe, it shall not be imputed unto thee, because the thing is so palpable; so also now, supposing that such miracles were done as formerly.³³

Saint John Chrysostom is very clear indeed. Our Lord does not force our freedom and will so that we will accept and worship Him. He does not wish to impose Himself on us and for this reason; neither does He continually appear to us in all His magnificence. He does not perform impressive daily signs and miracles nor does He provide us with logical and rational proof of His existence.

An acceptance of this kind would have no value or merit on our behalf since it would not be the result of intention or free will, decision and choice, but as a product of force. The piety of this kind would not be a real virtue.

It is not surprising, says Saint John Chrysostom, that the light of Christ did not captivate all men; *for not by necessity and force, but by will and consent does God bring us to Himself.*³⁴

33 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία στ', κεφ. β' - γ', P.G.61, 51

34 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία ε', κεφ. δ', P.G.59, 58.

In a different sermon, Saint John Chrysostom asks³⁵, “why do you want to witness the spiritual mysteries and riches with your bodily eyes and not with the eyes of faith? Do you not understand that in this way, after you acquire the understanding and knowledge of all these spiritual mysteries, the only thing you will achieve will be to stop being faithful and thus, lose the reward of faith, which is a great virtue? Do you not understand that if you witness and understand the wished-for riches, you will not be faithful, virtuous and fair anymore, since your virtue will not result from your good intention and choice but its force on your senses?” This is why Saint John Chrysostom goes on to say that, *“it is for this that-hell-is threatened, but is not shown: for if it were shown, the same would again ensue.”*³⁶

Indeed, Christ assured us of the immortality of our soul and, at the same time, He proclaimed the existence of heaven and hell without giving proof about their existence. He did not do this solely because it is impossible for the human intellect to understand the character of hell and primarily, the beauty of heaven. It is true that the union with our Creator in eternity, the communion and partaking of His light and glory, are above human intellect. It is impossible for the human mind, heart or sense to understand the magnificence that God has prepared for the ones that believe in Him and love Him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The more in-depth reason that God did not provide us with physical evidence about heaven or hell is, once more, the support of our free will; man’s freedom of choice. Thus, what rational person would not accept to go through any daily torture if they had even partially previously tasted the indescribable happiness

35 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολὴν*, ὁμιλία κα΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.63,151.

36 *Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμιλία στ΄, κεφ. γ΄, P.G.61, 51.

of heaven? Who would not faithfully obey all the commands of the Scriptures if they had already experienced the magnitude of the divine gifts and renderings? Besides, who would not avoid every sin and malice if they became even the slightest familiar with the eternal hell; which is not only the torture of the body, but primarily of the soul, through the terrible guilt, sorrow and regret that would bring us the face-to-face encounter with God's love after our deaths?

Nevertheless, our Lord does not wish such obedience. He does not want that we worship and accept Him because He imposes Himself upon us as the all-powerful God, because he rewards us with incredible gifts or because we see the retribution before our eyes.

God wants us to love Him and our neighbour and to acquire virtues because it is the way of life we chose and it is what we wish.

He wants us to love Him for what He really is, because He is worthy, because He brought us to existence and life out of love only, because His love for humanity emerges in all His creations, because even when we abandoned Him, He showed us again how much He loves us, through His incarnation and sacrifice.

He also wants us to love Him through everything that He has taught us because the Gospel is a teaching of love; because His teaching is the most perfect thing we have seen and exists in this life.

Finally, He wants us to express our love for Him in practice, just like a mother shows her unconditional love to her child with a tight hug. Thus, He asks that we always embrace Him firmly through our participation in the mystery of the Eucharist and the remaining sacramental and spiritual life, so that we succeed an existential union with Him. In this way, having known Him through experience and having been unified empirically with Him,

every trace of arduous doubt about His existence will depart from us.

Of course, the absence of resounding proof of heaven and hell does not constitute their absence under any circumstances. We ought to believe firmly and not by force, in what our Lord says about them and in this way be encouraged to commit good deeds and avoid malice, for yet another reason.

8. THE PERFECTION OF THE GOSPEL IS THE BASIC PROOF OF THE CORRECTNESS OF OUR FAITH

So far, we have mentioned the ways that God does not wish to employ as the means of knowing Him. We explained that God did not want to prove His existence and to become known to man through the intellect or senses. Subsequently, we will refer to the ways that God chose to be employed by man as the means of knowing Him, and as the factors that prove the indisputable correctness of our faith.

As already mentioned, Jesus provides three basic kinds of proof for His divinity: the perfection of His teachings, the various miracles that He and His disciples have performed up until this very day, and finally, the miraculous internal transformation and spiritual experience that all faithful receive during the participation in the mysteries of our Church.

Thus, the first essential piece of evidence that proves the correctness of the faith of each Orthodox Christian is the perfection of the Christian teachings. Christ did not provide scientific evidence to assure man of His Divinity, but He gave them the most beautiful and perfect teachings. Christ gave us the Gospel, which is not based on human wisdom and rhetorical thought but divine and supernatural wisdom.

There are three admirable things about the Christian teachings. Initially, we are impressed with God's endless love towards man. God, Who is the infinite causeless causeⁱ since he is the beginning and has no creator, does not create man out of any need but out of immense love³⁷; to save him³⁸.

In fact, man was particularly honoured since he was made in his Creator's image. (Genesis 1:26) Thus, he received from Him all the natural gifts that differentiate him from the animals, so that he is in the image of God. In particular, man has been endowed with intellect, free will, conscience, the potential of immortality, creativity, the ability to love and everything else that makes him a person³⁹. As God is an entity; which means that He does not keep to Himself but He keeps communication of love with the other entities of the Holy Trinity; man is also an entity, in the same manner.⁴⁰

After the fall of man, God does not abandon His creation but carries the supernatural plan for his salvation. God could save man in any way. Instead, He chose the most painful way in order to show him how much He loves him which is the Incarnation of the Divine Logos and His sacrifice⁴¹.

The second, admirable point of the Christian teaching is the 'prospect', which is the purpose of man's life. Mankind is not merely invited to love his Creator or to become virtuous and moral, but by having received the great benefaction of being in his "Creator's image" and of having an individual personality, man

37 Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, *Λόγος κατηχητικός*, κεφ. ε', P.G.45, 21BC.

38 Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου, *Λόγος εἰς τὰ Θεοφάνεια...*, κεφ. θ', P.G. 36, 320.

39 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 13-14.

40 Θάνατος, Ἀνάστασις καὶ Αἰώνια ζωή, σελ. 33-34.

41 *Τὰ ἀσκητικά*, λόγος πα', σελ. 382.

is invited to make the most of these gifts, to imitate Christ, to become perfect and in this way, to reach very high, to accomplish the 'in his Creator's likeness'. In this way, to be United with God, not only existentially but to become a god by Grace and live with Him throughout eternity.

Man seeks for his Creator, with Whom he is already united in this life through prayer and sacramental life. He recognises God's great charity towards him, as is Theosis, the unity with his Saviour is a virtue and a gift of His philanthropy through humility.

Third, the moral teaching of the Gospel is the only perfect teaching of love. In fact, this teaching is associated with the same teaching and law that our Lord Himself had sown in the hearts of man during their creation⁴². It is the same with this innate teaching that man possessed from the first day of his life, and which helped him tell the difference between good and evil. Based on this inherent teaching, man behaved as a person, which means that he communicated and expressed love both towards his Creator and his fellow human beings. Thus, in the Gospel, man can find everything he ought to follow if he wants to be and remain a person, if he wishes to remain in the image of God, and if he wants to be a man of love.

Of course, the moral teachings of the Gospel is not limited to the virtue of love. As Paul the Apostle says, the "wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:7) of the Christian teachings is also based on the virtue of humility because of which, Jesus took up the cross and saved humanity; not through power but with humility.

Indeed, the humility that permeates the whole Gospel is the same virtue that ensures the authenticity and integrity of love. Real love cannot exist without humility. Because love means

42 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Eis τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας*, ὁμιλία ιβ', κεφ. γ', P.G.49 131.

sacrifice, the sacrifice of our self to somebody; the sacrifice of our will to the will of someone else.

Love and humility, these two comprehensive virtues, constitute the epicentre of Christian morality. These two are the sources of all the remaining virtues that distinguish the Divine and which, we are asked to acquire by imitating our Creator: peace, tolerance, forgiveness, benevolence, compassion, and much more.

Every man that studies this holy teaching carefully and meticulously cannot be anything but fascinated, and also feel this mystical knowledge of the Holy Spirit in his heart, and which urges him to believe in Christ and accept His teaching. It is impossible not to feel that solely this teaching gives the ability to feel elated, 'completes' his existence and reveals his destination. Only this teaching helps him sustain the correct path and that it is the only one that helps him remain a unified person.

It is true that *"the fundamental principles of Christian faith... about the world, existence, life and destiny... convey the pure Christian world theory. This theory, in turn, is superior to any other theory about life and the world, not only because it was revealed by the Theanthropos Jesus Christ but also because it responds adequately to the essential psychosomatic needs and the spiritual variants of the human personality."*⁴³

*"Within the framework of the world history, a man only finds complete fulfilment in the teachings of Jesus Christ because, strictly speaking, He was the only one that revealed to us God as a Father. Only through the teachings of Christianity does a man, who is redeemed through the sanctifying work of the Church, can become a real son of God and a co-heir of the Kingdom of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ."*⁴⁴

43 Μάρκου Σιώτου, *Χριστιανική πίστις καί σύγχρονος έπιστημονική έρευνα*, σελ. 18-19.

44 "Ενθ' άνωτ. σελ. 23-24.

“Even the enemies of Christianity have recognised the correctness and superiority of Christian morality and have confessed its beneficial impact on human society. Everyone accepts, including the atheists, that a teaching superior to the Sermon on the Mount was, and will never again be, heard.”⁴⁵

9. RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS THAT ARE OPPOSITE TO ORTHODOXY

It is beyond a shadow of doubt that no other teaching of religious or philosophical body meet the prerequisites above. It is quite surprising indeed that the baptised Orthodox Christians end up comparing, and even equate Christianity with other religious currents or teachings.

It is also surprising to see that there is an attempt to find similarities in the so-called Eastern religions or philosophies such as Yoga and meditation, among other things, in which there is no real love, humility, a personal God or the appropriate communication with Him.

“In Eastern movements there is no love. One may come across the practises of causing no harm to others, doing no wrong, or being fair and just, however one will not encounter people who love to the point of sacrifice, the ultimate offer for the salvation of others.”⁴⁶

“Regarding the Buddhist belief, love and mercy do not lead to ‘rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,’ (Romans 12:15) because this type of behaviour is regarded to lead

45 Δημητρίου Ι. Μαγκριώτη, *Πίστις καί Ἐπιστήμη*, σελ. 46.

46 Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου... Ἱερόθεου, *Καιρός τοῦ ποιῆσαι*, σελ. 62.

to 'attachment' and is condemnable in that it does not facilitate the exit from the circle of rebirth (Saṃsāra)."⁴⁷

For them "there is no the element of accountability with regard to his fellow man. Nor is there a life of virtue as a gateway to God's love and to their fellow man. Nothing in the person is of substance, basically all of his activities, any feeling of community and love, are deemed as negative which augment the thirst for life. Man has to become liberated from every activity because otherwise it creates a 'build-up' (karma) which forces an individual to have to return to this life (reincarnation)... In this way the ideal lifestyle for a Buddhist is not action, but inaction. It is not responsibility, but a non-participation or detachment from the society around them."⁴⁸

Additionally, "Buddhism consists of a system of self-salvation. Man is asked to call for God within himself, basically 'deifying' himself. This act of man identifying with God, or even the act of identifying God with the world is incompatible with the belief in one God Who is the Creator and Savior of man and the world."⁴⁹

"Buddhists do not believe in God, but instead in man. Every moment of human existence identifies with the Absolute, the Unique, the 'without birth and without death'."⁵⁰

"The only God is one's 'self' and there is no other God besides that one. That is why whoever does not deify himself is considered godless. The Divine Consciousness and the Divine Presence

47 Μοναχοῦ Ἀρσενίου Βλियाγκόφτν, Βουδδισμός- Ἡ σωτηρία διὰ τοῦ κενοῦ, σελ. 179.

48 Ἀντωνίου Ἀλεβιζοπούλου, Βουδδιστικές αἱρέσεις στό φῶς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, σελ. 22-23.

49 Ἔνθ. ἄνωτ. σελ. 81.

50 Μοναχοῦ Ἀρσενίου Βλियाγκόφτν, ἔνθ' ἄνωτ., σελ. 177.

as our 'self'" ⁵¹ characteristically teaches another eastern religious-philosophical Movement.

In contrast to the Christian way of deification by grace, followers of these type of eastern philosophical trends profess 'self-deification' or 'self-godliness.' Salvation via the Theanthropou (God-man) Christ is altered into an egocentric self-salvation.

10. THE PERFECT TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HIS MIRACLES

I have already mentioned that the first, most important kind of proof of the correctness of the faith of every Orthodox Christian, and of our Lord's Divinity, is the perfection of His teachings. The second kind of evidence as to the accuracy of our faith, are the various miracles that Jesus performed, as well as the ones performed by His disciples leading up to current times. The third is the miraculous internal transformation and spiritual experience that every faithful Christian receives during his participation in the mysteries of our Church.

Before analysing the second kind of proof, I would like to refer to the view of our Church, through the successive sermons of Saint John Chrysostom. According to Saint John Chrysostom, although miracles provide definite proof of our Lord's Divinity, they possess a secondary place in the value of the faith of every Christian. Christians accept Jesus as their God and Saviour, not so much because He performed an abundance of signs and miracles, but mainly because of His perfect teachings. The Christian teaching, the only real teaching of love, is the one that enthralles the faithful Christians, the one that leads to knowledge of God and unites them with its genuine exponent; our Lord Jesus Christ.

51 Ἀντωνίου Ἀλεβιζοπούλου, *Διαλογισμός ἡ προσευχή*., σελ. 108.

Indeed, according to Saint John Chrysostom, *“the beloved Son of God came to Earth because of His love towards man and He lived and ate with them, just like they did. In this way, having abolished the illusion of polytheism, and having proclaimed the true knowledge of God, He would teach the kind of love that man ought to share.”*⁵² *“Jesus gave us the chance to see His power from His numerous miracles and to be taught of His magnitude from His teachings.”*⁵³ *“Thus, let us show conduct that is worthy of this great honour to us, and let us not be enchanted by earthly possessions. After all, this is precisely why our Lord brought us the divine teaching from above; to lead our mind and thoughts towards the sky, so that we will imitate our Teacher, according to our strength.”*⁵⁴

St. John Chrysostom went on to refer to some important things. *“Of the men of that time some clung to their error, others acknowledged the truth, while of these last, although some retained it for a little while since they did not completely accept it, later abandoned it. Alluding to these, Christ compared them to seeds not deeply sown, but having their roots upon the surface of the earth which He said would quickly perish.”*

“Of these men, the Evangelist has pointed out to us, ‘When He was in Jerusalem, at the Passover, in the feast, many believed in Him, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them.’ (John 2: 23-24) For they were the more perfect among His disciples, who came to Him not only because of His miracles, but through His teaching also. His miracles attracted the more naive and immature, but His prophecies and doctrines attracted the more logical.”

52 *Περί τελείας αγάπης*, κεφ. α´, P.G.56, 280.

53 *Υπόμνημα εις τόν αγιον Ματθαϊον...*, όμιλία μα´, κεφ. α´, P.G.57.

54 *Υπόμνημα εις τόν αγιον Ιωάννην...*, όμιλία ιε´, κεφ. γ´, P.G.59, 101

“And so they who were taken by His teaching were more steadfast than those attracted by His miracles. And Christ also called them ‘blessed,’ saying, ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’ (John 20: 29) But that these here mentioned were not real disciples, the following passage shows, for it saith, ‘Jesus did not commit Himself unto them.’”⁵⁵

In a different homily, the Saint says characteristically, *“Great multitudes followed Him, beholding ‘the miracles which He did.’ (John 6:2) What miracles? Why doth he not mention them specifically? Because this Evangelist most of all was desirous of employing the greater part of his book on the discourses and sermons [of Christ]. Observe, for instance, how for a whole year, or rather how even now at the feast of the Passover, he hath given us no more information on the head of miracles, than merely that He healed the paralytic and the nobleman’s son. Because he was not anxious to enumerate them all, (that would have been impossible,) but of many and great to record a few.”*

“A great multitude of people followed Him beholding the miracles that He did. Those who followed Jesus because of His miracles did not have a very wise state of mind; for despite having enjoyed such teaching, they still were more attracted by the miracles, [which was a sign of naivety]. For ‘miracles’, it saith, ‘are not for believers, but for unbelievers.’ (1 Corinthians 14:22) The people described by Matthew acted not in this way, but how? They all, he saith ‘were astonished at His doctrine, because He taught as one having authority’.”⁵⁶ (Matthew 7: 28-29)

At different times, Saint Chrysostom says that *“there is nothing clearer, nothing simpler than the truth, if we deal not perversely; just as (on the other hand) if we deal perversely, nothing is [more difficult to enable comprehension of the truth]. For behold, the*

55 Ἐνθ' ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία κδ', κεφ. α', P.G.59, 143.

56 Ἐνθ' ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία μβ', κεφ. α', P.G.59, 239.

Scribes and Pharisees, who seemed forsooth to be wiser than other men, being ever with Christ for the sake of plotting against Him, and beholding His miracles, and reading the Scriptures, were nothing profited, but were even harmed."

*"While the officers, who could not claim one of these privileges, were subdued by one single sermon, and they who had gone forth to bind Him, came back bound themselves by wonder. We must not only marvel at their understanding, that they needed not signs, but were taken by the teaching alone; (for they said not, 'Never man spake thus:'); we must not, I say merely marvel at their understanding, but also at their boldness, that they spake thus to those that had sent them, to the Pharisees, to His enemies, to men who were doing all with a view to gratify their enmity."*⁵⁷

Even in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, our Lord offers similar messages. In the specific aforementioned parable, Abraham appears to support that whoever wants to be faithful, has to content himself with the Holy Scriptures and not demand for a deceased man to be resurrected to inform him about heaven and hell. According to Saint John Chrysostom, our Lord teaches us that we should consider the Gospel more reliable than the greatest miracle through Abraham's words.⁵⁸

Additionally, in the case of the Official that was asking for his child to be healed (John 4:47), our Lord rebuked him because the Official did not believe in Him as much as he had to without having the need to see the miracle he wanted carried out. Here, our Lord wants to *"persuade us to give heed to Him, not by reason of His miracles, but of His teaching. For miracles are not for the faithful, but for the unbelieving and the spiritually [naöve]."*⁵⁹ Indeed, *"the believer hath no need to see a sign, but requires only*

57 Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. ὁμιλία νβ', κεφ. α', P.G.59, 287.

58 Εἰς τὸν πτωχόν Λάζαρον, λόγος δ', κεφ. γ', P.G.48, 1011.

59 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία λε', κεφ. β', P.G.59. 201.

teaching and catechizing.”⁶⁰ “If thou art faithful, as thou oughtest be, and lovest Christ as thou oughtest love Him, thou hast no need of signs, they are given to the unbelievers.”⁶¹

Let us love Jesus then, because He, too, loved us and taught us how to love. Let us not have any doubt about His divinity; not because he performed and still performs miracles and shows us signs but because, in contrast to all those men that fabricated their own inferior, human, religious and moral teachings, He is the real Theanthropos, who gave us the most perfect teaching humanity could have.

Thus, let us understand that if at different times during our lives, we do not accept Jesus as our Saviour and God; it is not because there is no proof or sign of His divinity but rather because His teachings do not suit our desires. It is because we do not want to embrace the teaching of real love and sincere humility; because we do not wish to become virtuous human beings but prefer to remain reversed and reposed in our ego.

11. THE MIRACLES OF JESUS AS PROOF OF HIS DIVINITY

Parallel to His supernatural teachings, Jesus performed numerous miracles during His presence on Earth. At times the Evangelists, referred to these miracles with general expressions like *“Great crowds came to Him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and He healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the*

60 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία λστ', κεφ. β', P.G.61, 307.

61 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην., ὁμιλία κδ', κεφ. α, P.G.59, 144.

mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing.” (Matthew 15:30-31)

On many occasions, the evangelists referred to specific miracles of Jesus more analytically. Based on their narratives, our Lord performed miracles that proved His creative power, such as the satiation of the thousand men from a few loaves of bread and fish. These were miracles that presented His authority over nature, such as the calming of the storm, the withering of the fig tree, the healings of chronic, incurable or even deadly diseases, as well as the healings of the demon-possessed. Of course, there were more important miracles, like the resurrection of the deceased, such as Lazarus. While at the climax of our Lord’s wondrous acts were the miracles He performed on His body, such as His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and then, His Resurrection.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, Jesus *“neither in the teaching by words does He continue always, nor in the wonderful working of signs, but He does now one now the other, variously working the salvation of them that were waiting upon Him and following Him, so as by the miracles to appear, in what He said, a Teacher worthy of belief, and by the teaching of His word to increase the profit from the miracles; and this was to lead them by the hand to the knowledge of God. ...For the healing of these men’s infirmity was to others a foundation for the knowledge of God.”*⁶²

*“Do you see,” says Saint John Chrysostom, “that it was especially necessary to work the miracles at times when men were present of honest minds, and who would carefully give heed to what was done? For these would more readily believe, and attend more exactly to the circumstances.”*⁶³

Indeed, with His Word, Jesus shows that one of the most important reasons for performing His miracles is to prove His

62 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον... ὁμιλία ξβ´ κεφ. α´, P.G.58,595.

63 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία κγ´, κεφ. α, P.G.59, 139.

divinity. For instance, by healing the paralytic, as Saint John Chrysostom⁶⁴ goes on to say, Jesus offers much proof of His power, authority, and His divine nature. Thus, in the case of the paralytic, from the beginning Jesus presents the Hebrews with their blasphemous thoughts, which in turn reveal His divinity because only God can understand the depth of our hearts.

Apart from the expression of His love and philanthropy for man, our Lord's miracles also aimed to demonstrate His divine power and authority to man. Through His various miracles, our Lord did not present Himself as a mere man or as a prophet, but as the All-Mighty and most merciful God. In this way, man's respect, faith and trust were awakened towards Jesus and in connection to His sermons. Trust, of course, was the most important factor for the acceptance of the holy truth; the teaching of the Gospel.

Consequently, our Lord's miracles were directly aiming to attract man into the evangelical truth and salvation, while the ulterior purpose was God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ. For this reason, miracles are a crucial part the salvation of all life and for all actions taken by our Lord. They form one of the foundations of Christian faith. The purpose of miracles was identical with the one of His incarnation and teachings. His teachings and miracles are so closely linked, by the seamless chiton of our Lord, which cannot be divided without being entirely destroyed.

In his sermons, Paul the Apostle the preacher of the nations, refers to the divinity of Jesus, *"the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."* (Romans 1:4) Thus, the apostle preached about Jesus, Whose divinity was also proven by the power of the miracles that He performed, the sanctifying and the holy gifts that the faithful re-

64 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία κθ', κεφ. α'-β', P.G.57, 357-360.

ceived by the transmission of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of Jesus since *“He first and He alone raised Himself.”*⁶⁵

Of course, the miracles of our Lord did not come to an end with His Resurrection. Also, as Paul the Apostle used to say, His sermons were *“in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”* (1 Corinthians 2:4) In other words, they were proof of the divine information of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the audience, of the wonderful teachings of the Gospel, as well as evidence of the divine power, which verified the teachings through Its supernatural and marvelous works. *“For who, tell me, after he had seen dead men rising to life and devils cast out, could have helped admitting it?”*⁶⁶

Consequently, miracles, as method of proving and strengthening the evangelical teachings, continued to be performed by the disciples of our Lord, the Holy Apostles, as well as by the followers of the Holy Apostles, who were the successors of either their priesthood or their saintliness.

12. THE MIRACLES OF THE HOLY APOSTLES ARE PROOF OF THE DIVINITY OF JESUS

The crucifixion of Jesus was an excuse for all those that doubted Him to deny His divinity completely; while for all those that had never met Him to be more hesitant in accepting Him as the God and Saviour of the universe.

Consequently, Saint John Chrysostom goes on to say, since *“the crucifixion of Jesus tempted a lot of people, greater miracles*

65 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.60, 397.

66 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία στ΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.61, 49.

were necessary afterwards.”⁶⁷ The work of the Holy Apostles was very demanding indeed. They had to proclaim a new teaching about the true God to the whole world and at the same time they had to face numerous obstacles all of which they had to surmount.

Initially, the Apostles proclaimed faith to a man that not only was put to death but was also executed in the most dishonourable way for that era. Not only did man have to accept that Jesus indeed rose from the dead, a fact that was unheard of and that surpasses every natural law, but also that He was God, as He resurrected Himself.

Additionally, the ethical teachings of Jesus were not the most attractive; quite the contrary, as it taught that anyone who wished to become Christian would have to follow their Teacher's example and be crucified too! Indeed, Jesus taught that whoever wanted to be His disciple and a man of love, they would have to follow the path of true love, which entails the sacrifice of their self and will; and thus to the crucifixion of their 'self'.

The above teaching of love and sacrifice could appear difficult, tedious and inaccessible to any person, especially to those of that era who, according to Saint John Chrysostom, were quite immature spiritually as they were idolaters that *“had been brought up in luxury and drunkenness, and in great wickedness.”*⁶⁸ *“Their way of thinking was quite weak spiritually, they were not perceptive and they felt fear and astonishment for all material things. On the contrary, they did not have any knowledge of spiritual gifts; they did not exactly know what spiritual grace was since it is only with faith that it can be understood.”*⁶⁹

67 Ὅτι οὐκ ἀκίνδυνον... καὶ τίνος ἐνεκεν οἱ Πράξεις..., κεφ. στ´, P.G.51, 105.

68 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία στ´, κεφ. β´, P.G.61, 50.

69 Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Πεντηκοστήν, ὁμιλία α´, κεφ. δ´, P.G.50, 459.

Finally, an obstacle that was no less important and had to be overcome was the prosecutions that the idolaters and Hebrews subjected the Christians to, which even led to death penalties with agonising deaths. All these, in combination with the inadequate level of education of the Apostles, as well as their lower social status, created insuperable obstacles to the dissemination of the evangelical teachings.

Nevertheless, the Holy Apostles fascinated the nations, prevailing over the wise and the influential of the time. Their ally towards the proof of the divinity and the resurrection of Jesus, as well as the evidence of the fact that His teachings were God-inspired, were the miracles that they continuously performed. Because of the preaching difficulties mentioned above, the miracles of the Holy Apostles had to be greater, even than the ones that Jesus had performed previously. After all, even our Lord Himself had prophesied that His disciples would not only perform the miracles He did, but perform even greater feats. (John 14:12)

Indeed, for the spiritually immature people of that time to be persuaded about the divinity and resurrection of Jesus, and to believe in His teaching and the grace of the Holy Spirit, they would receive some supernatural but also, tangible gift during their baptism. During their baptism, apart from the invisible gifts of the Holy Spirit, some would receive the supernatural gift of the ability to speak foreign languages (Acts 19:6), to prophesize or perform miracles, (1 Corinthians 12: 8-10). This proof was the visible evidence of the effect of the holy grace; the grace of the Holy Spirit⁷⁰.

These tangible and visible signs of the grace of the Holy Spirit confirmed the invisible and non-tangible gifts of the Holy Spirit that were received by all that were baptised. The signs of grace

70 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς*, ὁμίλια κθ', κεφ. α', P.G.61, 239.

include the remission of their sins or their adoption; the existential union with their Creator and Father God in a divine-human body. Indeed, the remission of sins is not visible to the bodily eyes, just like the soul is not visible to the physical eyes.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, the above miracles took place during the baptism of the first Christians since they *“would not believe in God for the invisible actions of the Holy Spirit unless they received some guarantee or proof.”*⁷¹

Also, the miracles performed by the Holy Apostles were greater than the ones performed by our Lord. As the Saint himself goes on to say, in contrast to Jesus, the Holy Apostles performed miracles even with their shadow (Acts 5:15). At different times, they would perform miracles without giving a specific command, as Jesus had done, but instead by just mentioning the name of their Teacher.⁷²

The Saint goes on to say that all the miracles of the Holy Apostles *“prove the resurrection of our Lord Jesus in the best way.... Through them, we have clear and indisputable proof of the resurrection. For you did not see the resurrected Jesus with your bodily eyes but you see Him resurrected with the eyes of faith. You did not see Him resurrected with your eyes but with these miracles, you will see Him resurrected. Because the demonstration of miracles leads to vision, which takes place through faith. Consequently, the fact that miracles were performed in the name of our Lord was greater and clearer proof of His resurrection and divinity, rather than Jesus revealing Himself resurrected.”*

“...What would we say, then, to those that do not believe in the resurrection of Christ? That if He had not risen from the dead, how would even greater miracles be performed in His name? Because no man performed greater miracles after his death... If Christ

71 *Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Πεντηκοστήν, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.51, 108.*

72 *Ὅτι οὐκ ἀκίνδυνον... καὶ τίνος ἔνεκεν οἱ Πράξεις..., κεφ. ζ΄, P.G.51, 108.*

died and did not rise from the dead, then His miracles ought to have stopped and be wiped out completely. However, not only were they not wiped out but instead they became more splendid and even more famous. For, if Christ had not risen from the dead, then others would not have performed miracles in His name. For the reason that the same power would perform miracles before and after the crucifixion. Thus, He would first perform miracles Himself then afterwards through His disciples...”

“...If, then, Jesus had not risen from the dead, in what sense did His disciples, who abandoned Him when they were faced with imminent dangers when He was alive, were subjected to innumerable dangers after His death?”⁷³

Of course, as Saint John Chrysostom goes on to say in a different sermon, if someone disbelieves the miracles that the Holy Apostles performed, then he automatically admits to an even greater miracle: the fact that they were able to successfully spread the Gospel and had attracted so many nations to the Christian faith without the help of miracles.⁷⁴ *“If someone that disagrees with us by saying that the Apostles did not perform miracles, he proves their power and God’s Grace to a greater degree, as they attracted so many people to devotion towards God without miracles. Because this is the greatest sign and paradoxical miracle; when a group of only twelve men who were poor, wretched, despised, illiterate, simple, insignificant, had attracted towards themselves, so many cities, crowds, nations, kings, tyrants, philosophers, orators and the whole Earth in general, without miracles.”⁷⁵*

73 Ἐνθ’ ἀνωτ. κεφ. στ’ -ν’, P.G.51, 105-109.

74 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία στ’, κεφ.β’, P.G.61, 50.

75 Ὅτι οὐκ ἀκίνδυνον... καὶ τίνος ἔνεκεν οἱ Πράξεις..., κεφ. ζ’, P.G.51, 108

When the Church of Jesus was gradually established, those wondrous gifts were no longer given to the ones that were baptised and the miracles performed by the successors of the Holy Apostles were significantly reduced. All of the above happened for specific reasons, of which I will refer to further along, without the complete disappearance of miracles from the life of our Church so that the weaker faith of some of our brothers could be fortified. Indeed, the miracles that the Saints of our Church performed, and continue to perform, are countless.

13. MIRACLES AS PROOF OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

After the Apostolic era, when the Church of Christ manifested, the wondrous gifts given to anyone baptised had stopped and were restricted to the miracles that were only performed by the successors of the Holy Apostles. The miracles were reduced due to the fact that many of the reasons in which had previously made them necessary no longer existed. Certainly the miracles did not completely disappear from the ages and from the eminent history of our Church. Despite the fact that miracles were significantly reduced, they were still numerous, this was to support the Christian faith in Jesus but primarily for the sake of supporting those spiritually weaker brothers of ours.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, the miracles during the baptisms of the faithful during the Apostolic era *“were usefully wrought; so now they are no longer so wrought.”*⁷⁶ *“What is the reason, then, that this gift ceased to be given to people? Not because God does not honour us but, on the contrary, because He intensely honours us. I do not need any miracles. Why should I?*

76 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία στ', κεφ.β', P.G.61, 50.

This is because I have learnt to believe in the Lord without being given any signs; only the ungodly person has the need for miracles. As for me, who does believe, I do not need proof or miracles. You see, the fact that our Lord ceased to perform such miracles is proof, not that He does not honour us but that He does. He has done so because He wants to prove our faith in Him, that we believe in Him without asking for any guarantee or miracle.”⁷⁷

Thus, as Saint John Chrysostom argues, by believing without the need of the many and grand miracles that took place during the Apostolic era, you provide “*great indication of your high birth, and of your love, that you should believe God without pledges. And in fact this and one other thing, were the reasons why God made miracles to cease.*”⁷⁸

Indeed, although the amount of times that God grants or fulfils our requests, many of which are granted before we even ask for them, are not a few, in order to prove His omnipotence and thus strengthen our faith, it is not right to express an overbearing demand for God to perform a miracle for us as the same Saint stresses. When we seek for proof, it reveals that we either want to test His⁷⁹ power or we do not trust in His divine Providence.

Saint John Chrysostom says in a different homily that none of the above actions are correct, he continues by saying that we should not “*wait for miracles, nor seek pledges of the Power of God. I see many persons even now become more pious when God assists them during the sufferings of a child or the sickness of a wife. As a matter of fact they ought to steadily be pious and devout even if they do not obtain God’s help and should remain steady in thanking and glorifying God. As this is what attributes*

77 *Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Πεντηκοστήν*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.50,459-460.

78 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον...*, ὁμιλία λβ΄ κεφ. ζ΄, P.G.57, 386.

79 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην...*, ὁμιλία κδ΄, κεφ. α΄, P.G.59, 143-144.

to a grateful servant, a faithful being who feels such affection and loves their Master as they ought to.”⁸⁰

Of course, the same Saint goes on to say, “*God did not miss out any generation in working wonders and awakening the more materialistic through the marvels. Of course, the more elevated person of sound thinking will have no need for signs: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and have come to believe.’ (John 20:29) But since His care is not only for these people but also for the more materialistic, he does not cease working wonders in almost every generation.*”⁸¹

Even currently, miracles are the work of the divine philanthropy so that everyone’s faith is strengthened, but especially the faith of man that is not so strong spiritually. When human wisdom and science reach their limits, when the finite of human strength reveals itself, it is then that man’s need appears to be requested from our All-Powerful God to fulfil the supernatural, the impossible, the improbable: that need is a miracle. By realising his powerlessness, man is humbled and hopes for God’s help.

Indeed, countless are the miracles that throughout the centuries have been, and continue to be, performed by God, the Theotokos (the Holy Virgin Mary) and the Saints of our Church. If one visits a sacred place such as the church of Virgin Mary of Tinos, the church of Saint Nektarios of Aigina or Chania, the church of Saint Rafael of Mytilene, and many more, he will see an abundance of offerings that refer to a specific miracle. Even if only one of all these miracles is true, it is enough to prove the existence of God. It is also enough to prove the existence of His select souls, His Saints, through the intervention of whom these miracles are performed.

80 “Ενθ’ ἄνωπ. ὁμιλία λε’, κεφ. γ’, P.G.59, 202.

81 ‘Ομιλία εἰς τὸν ρι’ ψαλμόν, κεφ. δ’, P.G.55, 285.

Unfortunately, today man is willing to research and learn about almost anything, except for what is related to the more important existential dilemmas: the case of the existence of God, the question of the purpose of man's life and the question of life after death.

Despite the fact that God and His Saints never stop reminding us of their providence and love towards us through the many miracles and supernatural actions that they perform every day, a lot of men insist stubbornly on remaining insensitive or even faithless towards everything that is related to God and eternity. Despite the fact that they witness vivid miracles in our Church, which have even been verified by scientists, they refuse to thank and worship the real God. They expel miracles from their life, they often take a sarcastic stance towards them, and they are deliberately faithless and approach them with great irresponsibility, shutting the eyes of their soul, just like the Hebrews deluded themselves when witnessing the miracles of Christ. (Matthew 6: 13-15) They refuse to research whatever relates to our Orthodox faith, obviously fearing that they may face the obligation to abide by the commandments of the Bible; something that they scorn, avoid and even fear.

Of course, there are some that by wishing to cause confusion support that miracles do happen within the remaining, so-called 'natural' religions, but that they happen because of a man's faith in his own power and not because of faith and prayer to the all-powerful God.

Concerning the first matter, I would like to answer that, real miracles do not happen in different religions. Faith in our own Triune God and His perfect teachings disproves the existence of any other God, as well as the correctness of the remaining religious trends. Thus, in the various religions that have a completely erroneous perception about God, it is impossible for real miracles or divine intervention to take place. Only to the heterodox or the

followers of other religions that happened to invoke true God, can real miracles happen so that our Lord leads them to know Him, to a correct faith and the limits of the Orthodox Church.

In different religions, the miracles that happen are not related to the divine philanthropy but they are “*deceptive, and miracles of the imagination,*”⁸² that derive from the co-operation with the powers of the unclean spirits. When referring to these miracles, Jesus (Matthew 24:24) and the Holy Apostles (Acts 8:9-11) say that the purpose of those performing them is not love but self-interest and the act of misleading of their fellow man.

Concerning the second argument, I would like to point out that with this rationale man would be able to continually perform miracles themselves based solely on the faith in themselves. Man would be able to do this namely and solely because of their personal power, something that is completely unproven and unsupported. Thus, it is foolish for someone to think that they can get rid of cancer only because they simply believe they can. On the contrary, on the one hand, miracles comprise the fruit of human faith and prayer to God and on the other hand, divine love, philanthropy and omnipotence. The above arguments are primarily found in the circles of the eastern religious trends, where the self-theosis or self-centred self-salvation belief, is taught.

Concerning the false, deceptive or demonic miracles, I will briefly go on to refer to when I mentioned the false and deluded spiritual, religious experiences. It is certainly delightful that many successful theologians with their special, scientific research have analysed and religiously castigated these multifarious, false experiences, including the deceptive and deluded philosophical and religious miracles that are outside God-inspired Orthodoxy.

82 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', σελ. 390.

14. CHRISTIANITY IS AN EXPERIENCE OF GOD

As it is already mentioned, the correctness of our Christian faith is mainly proven by the perfect teachings of Jesus, as well as the miracles that He and His disciples have performed up until today. Of course, there is also a third, equally important kind of proof towards the validity of our faith. This proof does not usually precede but follows our acceptance of the divinity of Jesus. Thus, first we believe and accept Jesus as our God and Savior and then we receive specific proof from Him that verifies His divinity which confirms and seals our faith. *“The priority of faith before experience in the first stages of the spiritual healing of man”*⁸³ is uncontested.

The evidence that I am referring to consists of the experiential proof and the experiences, which are received by everyone who is faithful during their participation in the mysteries of the Church. I mean the kind of proof that creates the admirable internal transformation in the soul of every baptised Orthodox Christian.

Jesus referred to this kind of proof in His answer to a relevant question put by the Hebrews: *“What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee?”* And the Lord answered: *“My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto this world.”* (John 6:33-35)

Jesus was obviously talking about His Body and Blood that the faithful always receive during the sacrament of the Eucharist. The divine gifts that every faithful Christian receives when

83 Άλεξίου Καρακαλλινού, *Έν ειρήνι του Κυρίου δεηθώμεν*, σελ. 165.

participating in this sacrament are undoubtedly the greatest proof of the divinity of Jesus.

Even Paul the Apostle said that his sermon was given “*in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*”

(1 Corinthians 2:4) and referred to the divinity of Jesus as “*the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness.*” (Romans 1:4)

Namely, the Apostle taught about the true God. This teaching was confirmed to the audience not only through the proof that was provided by the various powers, and the miracles that accompanied it but also, through the wondrous energy and mystical communication of the Holy Spirit that captivated the hearts of the listeners of this wonderful teaching.

The Apostle also taught about faith in Jesus; the divinity of Whom was proven, among others, by the sanctification and the holy gifts that the faithful receive during their participation in the sacraments of the Church; with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit which means “*according to the Spirit of Holiness.*” As Saint Chrysostom characteristically says,⁸⁴ only God could give such gifts, which the faithful received after their baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity; only God could sanctify and truly endow ordinary people.

Of course, to be able to understand the specific, most basic element of proof of our faith, we will have to briefly analyse the dogmatic position of our Church which refers to distinguishing between the essence and actions of God, as well as the predestination of man.

Thus, the Orthodox theology teaches that God is not only essence but energy too. In the teachings of the holy Fathers, there

84 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμλία α΄, κεφ.β΄, P.G.60, 397.

is clear distinction between God's essence and energy. They teach that the essence of God is one thing and His energy is another.

On the one hand, the essence of God is invisible, unapproachable and indescribable. Consequently, man cannot see, approach or unify with God's essence.

On the other hand, the energy of God is visible, approachable and apparent to man. The uncreated energies, or the ones that are not edifices or creations, but instead are holy energies, are those through which, God is united with man.

Indeed, according to the Holy Fathers, our Triune God and Creator is actuated by boundless, holy love for His children. Due to this loving disposition and His boundless love towards His children, God goes out of Himself and asks to unify with them through His energies, which are holy and uncreated. They are also God but without constituting His essence; they are God, and this is why they lead man to Theosis.

God instilled a similar yearning in man. Thus, the soul of man, which is created in God's "*image and likeness*," is possessed by a divine Eros; an impulse of eros and a loving power towards his Creator, a divine thirst for union with Him, which is what the theologians of our Church call *Theosis*. If man did not have the image of God in him, he would not be able to seek its prototype. Each one of us is the image of God, and God is the prototype. The image (man) seeks the prototype and only when he finds it does he rest in it.

Of course, when we talk about a union between God and man, we do not mean that we are united with God's essence because we would in this way become gods in essence as well. Such interpretations are supported by eastern religions, according to which, God is not a personal being but a vague power and energy that is dispersed in the world, men, animals and all remaining things.

According to the Orthodox Christian theology, man can commune with God and is unified with Him through His divine acts

without becoming identical with His essence. Nevertheless, the relationship between God and man is not external or ethical; in other words, man is not united with God with an external or emotional way. In contrast, he can reach a personal, actual, existential and ontological union with his Creator. Because of the existence of His uncreated, although approachable and communicable acts, the Triune God is not a God that is self-contained, turned into Himself and withdrawn from His children.

Thus, a Christian is not Christian because he can simply talk about God. He is a Christian due to the fact that he can succeed a union with his Creator and Father because he receives the experience of His grace and the view of His glory.

Thus, according to the Orthodox Christian teachings, the basic purpose of each Christian's life is *Theosis*. The faithful does not simply struggle to become a virtuous man but, through his virtuous behaviour that complies with the Scriptures in order, to succeed in being united with God, not only in this life but in the next one too.

A Christian does not merely passively participate in the ecclesiastical Services. In contrast, each Orthodox Christian's faith in God, and his participation within the boundaries of the Church, present him with the possibility of becoming a god by grace and thus of succeeding the greatest endeavor of his existence. The existential thirst that each man has within him is the thirst for the absolute.

In this context, the Orthodox Christian faith and anthropology are regarded as pioneering and incomparably superior to other ideologies, anthropological or religious, as they offer the absolute to man; they raise him so much as to make him a god.

This existential union between man and God takes place mainly through the mysteries (sacraments), of our Church. They are called mysteries because through them in a precise, non-visible and mysterious way, man is united with God. Consequently,

through baptism but mainly through the continued participation of the mysteries of our Church (i.e. confession and the Holy Eucharist): the faithful reach *Theosis (deification)*, and are thus secretly united with God into a divine-human body; the body of Church. Christ makes us members of His Body and in this way He revives us, He redeems us, He sanctifies us and He gives us Grace and *Theosis*.

Christians are not followers of Christ; they are members of His Divine Body, members of His Church. The precise work of our Church is this: to sanctify us by uniting us with the Divine God. For this reason, in the Creed we confess faith “*in one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*,” the Church is a source of true sanctification and a workshop of man’s *Theosis*.

It is natural that depending on the degree that a Christian takes conscious part in the mysteries of our Church, he is simultaneously cleansed from his passions and he experiences the extent of the communion of God’s Grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Depending on his disposition and struggle, the faithful person is united with God. He receives the true experience of God; real communion, a participation in the Divine Grace and the uncreated energy of God, which eliminates every doubt about the correctness of his faith.

A Christian, the “*spiritual*” man (1 Corinthians 2:15), receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit through his spiritual life. According to Paul the Apostle, these are “*love, joy, peace, tolerance, gentleness, goodness and faith*.” (Galatians 5: 22)

God is love, joy and peace and as man is united privately with Him, he, too, is filled with real, and not illusory, love, joy and peace.



15. THE EXPERIENCES OF GOD'S GRACE

Based on all of the above, it is believed that the third proof for the existence of the Triune God, and more generally of the correctness of our faith, is perhaps the most important. Indeed, the vivid contact, the powerful experience and the genuine communion that a Christian acquires through God throughout his participation in the esoteric life of our Church confirms and seals our faith in Him and at the same time, it eliminates every trace of doubt and controversy.

Our Lord always keeps His promises and, after we invite Him in the right manner, He approaches us and becomes known to us, not as an ideology but as an experience. The faithful Christian not only knows God externally, emotionally, ideologically and theoretically; the faithful Christian is united with God existentially. A Christian feels and sees God with the eyes of his soul as God presents Himself to him and manifests Himself in his heart. To the Saints of our Church, He certainly becomes visible through various ways, including the physical eyes.

Indeed, our Lord promised that, whoever cleanses their heart from passions and sins, will see God empirically. "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*" (Matthew 5: 8) said our Lord, as He will appear to them Himself. "*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved by my father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him...*" (John 14: 21-23)

Let us see, how the experience of the union with God described in simple words by my venerable elder; the Archimandrite Giorgios Kapsanis.

“What are the experiences of grace that a Christian can receive so that faith and Christian life will not be something intellectual or external for him but instead, a true and spiritual sense of God, communion with God, familiarity with God, in which, the whole man participates?”

“First, there is some internal information that through faith in God, one will find the real meaning of his life. He feels that his faith in Christ is a faith that gives him internal rest, which gives meaning to his life and guides him and which is a powerful light that shines on him. When he thus feels this Christian faith in him, he has begun living in the grace of God. God is not something external to him.”

“Man receives another experience of the grace of God when in his heart, he hears God’s invitation for him to repent his dark and sinful deeds, to return to the Christian life, to confess, to enter God’s way. This voice of God that he hears inside him is a first experience of the grace of God. All the years that he used to live away from God, he could not understand anything.”

“He begins to repent; he confesses for the first time in his life to his Spiritual father. After his confession, he feels great peace and happiness, one that he had never experienced before in his life. And then he says: ‘I am relieved.’ This relief is the visitation of the Holy Grace to a soul that has just repented and which God wants to console. The tears of the Christian that has just repented when he prays and asks God for forgiveness or when he confesses are tears of repent. These tears are very comforting. They bring a lot of peace to the man’s soul. And this is when a man feels that all these are a gift and the experience of the Divine Grace.”

“The deeper someone repents and comes to God with greater love and prays with divine Eros, the more these tears of repentance become tears of joy, tears of love and divine Eros. These tears, which are superior to the tears of repentance, are a superior visitation and experience of God’s grace.”

“We come to receive the Body and Blood of Christ by being repentant, having confessed our sins, with fasting and spiritual preparation. What do we feel after the Holy Communion? Deep peace in our soul and spiritual happiness. This, too, is an experience and visitation of the Grace of God.”

“At other times again, during prayer, divine worship, or the Holy Liturgy, we feel inexpressible happiness. This, too, is a visitation of the Divine Grace and an experience of God.”

“Nevertheless, there are further and superior experiences of God. The superior experience of God is, seeing the uncreated Light. The disciples of our Lord saw this Light on the Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Christ beaming like the sun with a celestial and divine light, which was not a material or created light, as is the sun and all the other created lights. It was the Uncreated Light, or the Light of God; the Light of the Holy Trinity.”

“The ones that are cleansed from their passions and sins, and pray with true and pure prayer, are blessed with this great experience: seeing the Light of God, even in this life. This is the Light that will shine in the eternal life. And not only can they see it, even now, but they can be seen in this Light too; because this Light encompasses the Saints. We do not see it, but the ones that are pure of heart, and the Holy Saints, can see it. The halo, which is portrayed encompassing the faces of the Saints, is the Light of the Holy Trinity that has enlightened and sanctified them.”⁸⁵

“Experiences of Theosis are proportional to the purity of man. The more someone is cleansed from their passions, the higher the experience he will receive from God: he sees God just as it was written: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ (Mathew 5:8) When a man starts to repent, to confess, and to cry for his sin, he receives the first experiences of God’s Grace. Such experiences are first and foremost tears of repentance, which bring

85 Ἐμπειρίες τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ, σελ. 14-17.

inexpressible joy to the psyche, and then the deep peace which follows this... Afterwards, we proceed to higher stages by divine illumination in which the nous (mind) is illuminated and sees things, the world, and man with another grace. Then the Christian loves God more and new and different tears come, more intense ones, which are tears of love for God, tears of divine eros."

"... Afterwards, man acquires dispassion: a life without deceitful passions and sinful weaknesses. Then he is peaceful and undisturbed from every external assault, having been delivered from pride, hatred, spitefulness, and desires of the flesh..."

"...Of course, when he has been thoroughly cleansed and has offered himself entirely to God, then he also receives the greatest experience of divine Grace available to man, which, according to the holy Fathers, is the vision of the uncreated light of God. Those who are very advanced in Theosis see this light."⁸⁶

"The sanctified Christian, the new man, can participate, even from this life, in the glory and the Uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity, and can pre-taste the beatitude of the Kingdom of Heaven."⁸⁷

"The enlightened man by the divine and uncreated Light enjoys many divine and supernatural gifts. The effects of enlightenment by the Light are not only moral but are mainly existential. The presence of the Divine Light becomes a source of supernatural spiritual gifts."⁸⁸

"I will attempt to say, by way of consolation, that none of us can realise being in the darkness unless he accepts some enlightenment from the Divine Light. Also, that every monk and every Christian that has achieved a life of repentance begins to see some of the Uncreated Light. The more he cleanses himself from

86 Ἡ θείωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, σελ. 53-54.

87 Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς διδάσκαλος τῆς θεώσεως, σελ. 32.

88 Ὁ Ὅσιος Γρηγόριος, τεύχος 25, σελ. 50

passions with the tears of repentance, humbles himself with true obedience and is united with Christ through the Holy Mysteries and prayer, the more he will be receiving superior experiences of the Holy Grace; even the one of the Uncreated Light ⁸⁹.”

16. GOD BECAME MAN SO AS TO MAKE MAN A GOD

God became Man to make man a god. Christ humbled Himself, He acquired human nature and suffered for us so that we can achieve *Theosis*, so that we can become gods by grace and so that we can be united with God existentially.

Of course, it is very difficult for someone to describe something that somebody else has never known. It is very difficult for someone to attempt to describe, in simple terms, what is honey to someone that has never tasted it. It is even more difficult for someone to try and describe with human words this experience of union with God; the experience of the uncreated Grace of God that is experienced by faithful Orthodox Christians.

Just as Saint Neilos the Ascetic refers to the ones that disbelieve the various spiritual experiences of the Grace of God, “*for how can you explain the value of health to people who have never enjoyed it, but have been sickly from birth?*”⁹⁰ These men in particular, according to Saint Simeon the new Theologian, disbelieve when they hear about the energies and grace of the Holy Spirit that is possessed by the ones that have truly reached *Theosis* and grace, by mistakenly judging their neighbour’s spiritual level, while guided by their own spiritual level.⁹¹

89 Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς διδάσκαλος τῆς θεώσεως, σελ. 100.

90 Φιλοκαλία, τόμος α΄, σελ. 195.

91 Sources Chretiennes, 51, σελ. 66.

Of course, a true Christian does not usually withhold the experiences from his spiritual life, which are the experiences of communion with God, because these are not something fake or figments of human imagination. All the more so, they are not results of simple human artifice or demonic influence.

Moreover, even if he wants to do something like that, this real Christian and 'spiritual' individual, (1Corinthians 2:15) is a light that shines because he is filled with the uncreated light of divinity; he is filled with the light of the divine graces. This is precisely what Christ implements when He says "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Mathew 5:16)

Thus, apart from the experiences of the grace of God that I have already mentioned, I would like to simply describe a few more which, I repeat, come to seal the correctness of faith in every Christian and at the same time, to disperse any doubt in him.

As Saint Mark, the Ascetic, says, "*The grace of the Spirit is one and unchanging, but energizes in each one of us as He wills.*"⁹² Initially, then, through his participation in the holy mysteries, confession and the Holy Eucharist and also, through everyday prayer, man receives a supernatural power. The faithful Christian, through his union with God and with his spiritual and esoteric life, ceases to be a simple and powerless man but is transformed into a superior man instead.

The basic signs of this superiority are the ones that we have already referred to as gifts of the Holy Spirit. God, according to Saint Paul (Galatians 5:22), is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness and goodness. And as man is united with Him both esoterically and existentially, he, too, is filled with real and not seeming, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness and goodness. But is there anything more beautiful than a truly free man, al-

92 Φιλοκαλία, τόμος α', σελ.116.

ways calm and composed, always happy and gracious? Besides, what greater fruit of the Holy Spirit can exist than all of the gifts mentioned above?

Thus, the '*spiritual*' man is not the weak and unredeemed man anymore, but the regenerated and restored man, the transformed and healed man, who sheds, as far as possible, every weakness and human desire. The faithful Christian is this gracious man that, not so much by his will and effort but mainly with the help of the grace of God, resists with valour and stands up against every attack of obsession. As a gift from the Holy Spirit, the faithful Christian experiences the power of not succumbing to these desires in which he formerly considered impossible not to. This is the way that the faithful Christian experiences his relationship with God and the Church; as a transformation through Christ and a real psychotherapy.

Nevertheless, to be more specific, a Christian loves the people that he could not love before, manages to forgive all those that harmed him, can do good to the ones that they considered irreconcilable enemies, and prays for all people; even for those that are not considered to be the best.

The faithful Christian does not get overwhelmed with difficulties during a long married life, he is not overwhelmed by illnesses or more general hardships and sorrows of life, he does not collapse because of family and work problems, he does not suffer from, so called, psychological problems and is not impelled towards despair or suicide.

A Christian has the power not to succumb to addictions which for many are unconquerable; they are slaves to their addiction.

A '*spiritual*' man does not fear death, not because of insensitivity or selfishness, but because of the power, the certainty, the faith and hope that the resurrected Jesus gives him.

Finally, the faithful Christian becomes impassive and weary towards everything that is evil. In this way, he manages rarely to

be angered, never be saddened and never grouch or complain. On the contrary, he is always calm, happy and friendly with everyone; he is full of love and serenity. These two virtues are the greatest proof of the presence of the Divine Grace in him. Of course, all of the above are not his personal achievements but gifts of the Grace of God, which render him godly and a superior man.

There are significant characteristic occasions when a Christian experiences this supernatural gift from God which are, among others, the following: firstly, there is an indescribable relief and internal rest that one feels during the sacrament of confession. On many occasions, especially when someone has accumulated many great burdens because of his sins, after confession he feels that he literally no longer walks on the Earth; that he is indescribably ethereal. It is certain that he does not acquire these emotions through a simple discussion with the spiritual father, as virtuous or educated the latter might be, but through the sacramental union with God Himself. It is through humility, apology and the total assigning of his life to God, the spiritual father being the vessel to do so.

What is also characteristic, is the profound happiness and euphoria that the faithful feels after his participation in the Holy Eucharist or after laborious and long, heartfelt prayer. Also there are the tears of happiness that flow for many hours in the eyes of these faithful Christians that come fervently, and not conventionally, to the Chalice of life. This, too, is a characteristic sign of the manifestation of the Grace of God; a sign of God's touching the hearts of the faithful after Holy Communion or after heartfelt prayer.

Also, there are the soul-stirring testimonies of people who are baptised as adults; experiences which an infant cannot express. These people feel the communion with God very vividly, even more than those that take part in confession or the Holy Eucharist. This is not because the mystery of baptism is superior to the

former two, but because when one is baptized as an adult, the preparation and repentance is usually far more profound than the preparation and repentance prior to partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

The mystery of Baptism is the only mystery that requires the confession of faith in the Holy Trinity; because this mystery binds us to the Body of Christ. In addition, due to the fact that up until that point he is considered spiritually dead, no spiritual work or achievement is demanded of him, as is the case with confession and the Holy Eucharist. Thus, because of his sincere confession of his faith and his desire to be born again in Christ, and not through his deeds, the baptised man accepts the absolute cleansing and remission of sins, solely as a gift from God. In this way, with God's Grace, he is completely cleansed and he becomes greatly receptive to the communion of the uncreated energy; of the uncreated light of the Triune God. Unfortunately, I repeat, this is a rare occurrence in the mysteries of confession or the Holy Eucharist because of our incomplete preparation.

For these reasons, and on certain occasions, the ones that are being baptised experience this abundant communion with the uncreated light of God. Not simply as an indescribable feeling, not only as an amazing internal source of knowledge and a wondrous connection with God, or as a view of God with the eyes of the soul but also, as an awareness; as the view of the uncreated light, even with the physical eye.

Even monastic life, the total and lifelong dedication of young people, is something that proves in the best way that with the grace and help of God, a man can even surpass his nature. After all, what better way to show the rejection of a life in the modern world than through the indigence and celibacy that monks are able to achieve?

The man that has experienced such signs of the Grace of God does not look for further kinds of proof. He simply strives to have

the greatest experiences possible, the ones that fill and stir his soul, and to continually have in mind what Saint Symeon the new Theologian says, “A chief precondition for seeing God in the next life is to see Him clearly with the eyes of his soul in this life.”

17. APART FROM ORTHODOXY, THERE ARE NO TRUE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

According to what is usually claimed, are there real spiritual experiences or miracles in other religions, denominations or spiritual groups aside from the Orthodox Church? Let us investigate in this chapter what Archimandrite George Kapsanis and the Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktos, two of the most eminent contemporary theologians of our Church, have to say.

Father George, and my Elder, the Abbott of the Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios on Mount Athos, says the following in a series of his theological research. *“False experiences of God are encountered by men who think that on their own, with their own personal power, in denominations, groups and religious gatherings outside of the Church, can receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then they gather some new ‘prophet’ who pretends to be the leader, and these men think that they receive the visitation and grace of God.*

“In 1966, I happened to attend a meeting of Pentecostals in America. Their “church” was like a classroom in a school. First, an organ began to play some type of soft, soothing music, which as it progressed, the music became more intense, deafening and frantic in nature so as to provoke excitement. Once the music came to an end, the lecturing pastor calmly began to preach, increasing the intensity of his voice and yelling similar to the progression of the previously played music. In the end, he too provoked an air of hysteria. All the followers in the audience were in a state

of submission and hysteria. They began to shout, abruptly stand up and flail their arms while making inarticulate cries. I then felt that the Lord's Holy Spirit, which is full of peace and not of agitation, was not present in that environment. The Holy Spirit is not acquired through artificial or psychologically forced methods. I also felt sorry for the children who were there with their parents and would later suffer the consequences of the group neurosis."

"A young man, who became a monk at Mount Athos (Agion Oros) and had first practised Hindu yoga, had described to me the experiences that they tried to attain through yoga. (One must first be aware of the fact that approximately 500 Hindu sects exist in Greece alone.) When the desire was to see 'light', they would rub their eyes with force so as to see light spots. Likewise, when the desire was to hear unusual sounds, they would apply certain pressure techniques to their ears so as to create those sounds."

"Heretics attribute similar psychological experiences, which are attained artificially, as something from the Holy Spirit."

"The experiences of heretic gatherings, however, are not just psychological. They are at times demonic as well. Satan exploits one's quest for such experiences and provides them with some omens which are not from God but specifically his own. Those who actively participate in such means do not realise that they are victims of Satan. They truly believe that these omens are heaven-sent and of the Holy Spirit. Satan goes even further in some to allow them some prophetic abilities, much like those of a 'medium' or psychic. The Lord has forewarned us, however, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24 : 24) Not only will they perform simple miracles, but huge miracles and miraculous, tremendous feats. Just as when the Anti-Christ appears, he will not perform evil actions. He will conduct acts of charity; he will cure the ill and perform other miracles so that he may mislead people, including those who are

devoted to God, into believing that he is the saviour who has come and to coerce people into following him."

"This is why we must be wary. Not everyone who is able to prophesise or do miraculous deeds is gifted by God. As our Lord again says, 'Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, drove out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name, didn't we?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice evil!'" (Matthew 7 : 22-23)

"I have met numerous young adults who had been drawn in by occult and Pentecostal sects. Upon their return to the [Orthodox] Church, they confessed that some of their experiences while members of those sects, were demonic. For example, one former Pentecostal member admitted that during his attendance at gatherings, when a 'prophet' admitted to feeling demonic agitation while he prophesised. When that 'prophet' attempted to say the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner," he would begin to babble and was choked by his words, unable to speak or utter the prayer. "

*"Since Satan is able to transform himself into an angel of light, we must be wary in the experiences we are exposed to. Apostle John advises us, "Beloved friends, Dear friends, stop believing every spirit. Instead, test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."(1 John 4 : 1) People are not as gifted as Apostle Paul to be able to distinguish between spirits (1 Corinthians 12 :10) or even recognise if spirits are from God or from Satan. This is a gift which Spiritual Advisers of the Orthodox Church possess. This is why we should go directly to our Spiritual Advisors when we encounter such problems so that then he may be able to decipher and find the origin of each experience we encounter ."*⁹³

93 *Εμπειρίες τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ, σελ.22-25.*

“Today, young people seek experiences. They are not content with a materialistic life; nor with the rationalistic society that we, the adults in their lives, hand down to them. Our children, being icons of God, “called to be gods,” seek something beyond the logical forms of the materialistic philosophy and atheistic education we offer to them. They seek experiences of true life. And, certainly, it is not sufficient for them to be told about God. They desire experience of Him, of His light, of His Grace. Many of them search in vain, resorting to many cheap substitutes to find something outside or beyond logic because they do not know that the Church has both the ability to comfort them and the experience they thirst for. Others are led to Oriental mysticisms such as yoga; yet others to occultism or gnosticism, and finally, unfortunately, even to outright Satanism.”⁹⁴

“Today, many, especially young men, turn to the occult, ethic-ascetic religions and eastern philosophies (yoga, occultism, etc.) as a reaction to the technical culture but also, to satisfy a deep psychological need and to say that they see a light. This light, though, as it is ascertained, if it is not demonic (which is typical with the ones that do not practise correctly), it is the product of human imagination and because of this reason, it does not bring man into communion with the Uncreated Divine Light of the Holy Trinity. In this way, a man undergoes some moral change and an intense relaxation of stress but more importantly, he does not exit the closed circuit of the self-centred life to meet God. Not only does he not open himself to God in the end but instead, he becomes more reserved, having the false reassurance of a moralistic introversion and self-sufficiency.”⁹⁵

“The God-seeing Fathers clarify that every visible light is not the Uncreated Light. There are more lights; which should not be

94 *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ. 70.

95 *Ἀκολουθία... Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ*, σελ. 9-10.

*confused with this one. There is the light of the nous [mind] and the demonic light. The distinction between these lights is particularly necessary today, when various 'spiritualities' of mainly eastern origin, profess supra-rational experiences that, if they are not demonic, they are products of the mind and the results of man-made practices. The contemporary man that is tormented within a rationalistic and deterministic imprisonment and that ignores or does not wish to know the Uncreated Light of Christ because of his self-sufficiency, ends up there to find an outlet for his spiritual deadlock. It could be said that in the eastern spiritualities, man is in dialogue with his self. In the Christian Orthodox practice, though, a man goes into his inner man to encounter, to converse and to be united with God."*⁹⁶

The Metropolitan Hierotheos adds that: *"During the chanting of 'Hare Krishna', various things happen that are not only abnormal but also, they border on demonism, if not complete demonism... All that happen during this chanting such as sweating, shuddering, vocal paralysis, tremors, body weakness, ecstatic cries and hypnotic states indicate the existence of demonic power. Contemporary Spiritual Fathers teach that the ones that were involved in these movements, even in the case of their return to the Orthodoxy, face the demand of total repentance and plenty of tears. If there is no continuous repentance, during their whole life, then their transit from the Eastern religions leaves a remnant and as a result, their 'spiritual' life is not developed properly."*⁹⁷



96 Περιοδικό 'Ο ὁσιος Γρηγόριος, τεύχος 25, σελ. 57-59.

97 Καιρός τοῦ ποιῆσαι, σελ. 58-59.



CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND INTELLECT

1. THE MEANING OF FAITH

What do we mean by the term faith? What exactly is this term, in which our Lord gave so great value? Before we examine the theological meaning of the term, I would like to refer to some truths that relate to the most general meaning of faith.

When talking to some people about various matters which are impossible to know and explore with their senses or their intellect alone. When we tell them that in order to understand these matters they have to have faith; they smile and ask with some irony, *“How can I believe in things that not only I cannot see but also, I cannot touch? Is faith, particularly nowadays, equal to the human intellect?”*

Without any intention to underestimate the value of science and reason, I think that the ones that believe so, ask for nothing less than to grasp the invisible and spiritual world with their hands and to count with weights and measures what is mate-

rially inconceivable. They demand to know the spiritual world that is beyond the visible particularly through the meager means we possess, and even as some scientists admit, with our crude senses and abilities.

Nevertheless, to understand that indeed, faith is equal to human intellect, let us see what faith is in general; what its meaning is in our everyday life, and if it is necessary to all of us.

It is known, that there are two ways of acquiring knowledge; the first is the immediate way. Thus, I acquire knowledge about something through my personal experience and perception because I see it, I touch it, and I scrutinize it. In this way, through the efforts of my spiritual powers, I acquire confidence and certainty about something. In this case then, we don't use the word 'believe' anymore but the word 'know'.

The other way of acquiring knowledge is the indirect way. For instance, let's say that an event had taken place many years ago, somewhere far away from us, or we were absent from this specific place when it happened. In what way will we acquire knowledge about this event or the certainty that it happened? Certainly, the only means of verifying such event is if we trust or believe the words and the proof of an eyewitness or a reliable witness, such as a historian, researcher or journalist, for instance.

Consequently, faith can be considered to be the personal reliance on somebody, but which is based on his trustworthiness; the knowledge of the moral standards and character of the man we trust. This faith does not necessarily indicate thoughtlessness or blind credulity.

Faith can also be considered to be an unverified persuasion, a certainty about the existence of an unknown, transcendent reality that is imperceptible through the senses, and which is not necessarily a superstition, unreasonableness or gullibility towards subjective fantasies and generally, towards something more arbitrary or random.

Of course, there is a difference between faith and knowledge. Nevertheless, this difference is not based on the fact that we acquire lesser certainty through faith while we acquire greater certainty through knowledge. The only difference is between the ways through which, this certainty is acquired. Thus, whereas with knowledge, we acquire this certainty on our own and through our personal understanding, with faith, this certainty is given to us by the trustworthy testimony of somebody else. Consequently, if the person we believe; such as a friend, a doctor, a scientist, a teacher or a historian; is completely trustworthy, then our faith becomes safe and certain and it is equally stable and unshakeable, as when we acquire this knowledge through our personal understanding.

Considering the above, it follows that faith is a certainty, which is based on trustworthiness and also that faith differs from knowledge only in the way in which this certainty is acquired but not in its content.

Let us be more specific though. There is a vast amount of knowledge, which we do not acquire through our personal understanding but indirectly, through faith. We could say that we learn about most things through faith.

To begin, almost all the events of our everyday life are based on faith. Through the faith in the lecture of a teacher, the student acquires knowledge about various things. Through faith a child accepts the guidance of his parents. Through faith in his doctor, the patient accepts a medicine without the fear that the doctor will harm him. Through faith in the scientific achievements, we travel by plane without fearing that we will die. Through faith in the validity of the notary, contracts and other public or private documents, we buy, sell, inherit, lease, work and do everything else in our everyday lives. Without faith, organised employment and commerce could not exist.

Even agriculture, the most simple and standard of work, is based on faith⁹⁸. The farmer is subjected to much toil, believing that with the help of the right weather conditions, the land will respond positively to his sacrifices⁹⁹ and will reward him in the future¹⁰⁰.

Moreover, even science could not exist if we did not believe in the reliability of nature and its laws. Faith forms the basic source of our knowledge, not only in our everyday life but also in our scientific and philosophical knowledge. Have we ever queried, for instance, how much of our historical and geographical knowledge is based on faith? Even in Mathematics, the so-called ‘axioms’ are nothing but unproven sentences. Certainly, we accept these sentences through faith because, without them, the science of Mathematics would not be able to support its structure.

After all, the scientists of every generation are basing their observations and conclusions on the observations and the conclusions of the previous ones. With faith in data, they usually move towards the research of other, unknown fields of science. *“This faith in the value of the scientific data towards new scientific achievements forms the most important factor for the continuous development of the science.”*¹⁰¹

Thus, even in those who allegedly reject faith and do not want to know anything else other than the term ‘science’, faith exists and, have no doubt, there is at least a tiny grain of credulity.

98 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, Ἑκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Δ΄ (11) 84, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ.450.

99 Ἀγίου Κυρίλλου Ἱεροσολύμων, Κατήχησις Ε΄ φωτιζομένων, κεφ. γ΄, P.G.33, 508BC.

100 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Περί τῆς τῶν νεκρῶν ἀναστάσεως, κεφ. ε΄, P.G.50, 425.

101 Μάρκου Σιώτου, Χριστιανική πίστις καί σύγχρονος ἐπιστημονική ἐρευνα, σελ. 42.

As for the atheist philosophical trends; aren't they based on the faith that God does not exist? When did they succeed in proving this view scientifically and we were not informed?

Faith, then, forms one of the most urgent and vital needs of the human spirit. As it exists in all the moments of our lives, we will have to yield to it or rather, by thinking reasonably, to give it a relevant place in our spiritual life.

2. THE TRANSIENT, INCOMPLETE SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

If faith is necessary for our daily life, even in science or philosophy, it is obvious that it is even more

necessary for our knowledge and relationship with the real God; for the acceptance, from our part, of the Triune God and our Creator.¹⁰²

Despite the very important, contemporary scientific achievements, man stands with great awe, puzzlement, humility, and sometimes ignorance, in front of the nature that accommodates him.

Also, man declares even greater ignorance towards the spiritual and transcendental mysteries; the ones that surpass the senses, the intellect and perceptive ability, and relate to matters that are not so much of the visual and sensual world but the invisible and supernatural one. They are matters that are mostly related to God, eternity and sometimes, his personal composition too, as he cannot explain with accuracy what is the human soul, and mainly, he cannot prove if it is mortal or immortal.

102 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην...*, ὁμιλία κε' κεφ.β', P.G.59, 149.

It is indeed overwhelming that the soul itself, without being able to 'scientifically' prove so many truths that relate to its essence, places this very important existential question: "do I exist, and for how long?"

Of course, our God and Creator does not want to deprive His children of the knowledge of Truth. On the contrary, according to Saint Gregorios of Nyssa, God *"did not create man because somehow He needed to but because of exceeding love, as neither the divine light should have remained invisible, nor His glory unknown."*¹⁰³ According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, *"God, full beyond fullness, brought creatures into being not because He had need of anything, but so that they might participate in Him in proportion to their capacity and that He Himself might rejoice in His works, through seeing them joyful and ever filled to overflowing with His inexhaustible gifts."*¹⁰⁴

However, in this life, according to Saint Paul the Apostle, men *"walk by faith, not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7). In other words, we see and know Christ and our Father with the eyes of our faith and not His exact physical form.

At other times, the Holy Apostle Paul is even more specific, *"But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away... For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."* (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Therefore, the Apostle says that when perfection comes in eternity, and we are given perfect knowledge, then we will stop having the imperfect and insufficient knowledge we have today. In this life then, we see the holy mysteries as if in a mirror; hazy and so imperfectly, that we are left with many riddles we cannot explain.

103 Λόγος κατηχητικός, κεφ. ε', P.G.45, 21BC.

104 Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης, έκστ. γ', κεφ. 46, ΕΠΕ τόμος 14, σελ. 282.

In eternity, though, we will see these transcendental mysteries overtly and clearly because we will have personal experience face-to-face, thus direct, clear and non-hidden knowledge. Now, we only know a part of the Truth. Then, we will not know only a part of it, but many more mysteries.

Saint John Chrysostom stresses that then, we will receive much more accurate knowledge of God, the creation of the world, the kingdom of heaven and other similar and holy mysteries, as we *“shall know many of the things that are now secret, and shall enjoy that most blessed society and wisdom.”*¹⁰⁵ *“When the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom are thrown open and man is finally permitted to gaze upon the King Himself, no longer hidden or partially, or by means of a mirror, but face to face. No longer by means of faith, but by means of sight.”*¹⁰⁶ *“In this way, you see”,* the level of understanding God *“is so far away from the former just as a child is from a man who has reached maturity.”*¹⁰⁷

Saint John Climacus, says that, *“we will never cease, not only in this life but also in the future life, to receive and add the light of knowledge to the light... knowledge to already existing knowledge.”*¹⁰⁸

Even the Lord's disciples, in contrast to contemporary and simple faithful people, received as a gift from Christ, their Teacher, the knowledge of many of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven from this life (Matthew 13: 11). They awaited their transition to the eternal life to receive a more perfect and complete knowledge. This is precisely what Jesus declared to them by saying

105 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμίλια λδ', κεφ.β', P.G.61, 287.

106 Πρὸς Θεόδωρον ἐκπεσόντα Α', κεφ.ια', P.G.47, 277-308.

107 Εἰς τὸν ριβ' ψαλμόν, κεφ.β', P.G.55, 302

108 Κλίμαξ, λόγος ΚΣΤ' Β', §38, P.G.88, 1068B.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” (John 16:12)

From the above sayings, Saint Basil the Great states, *“we learn that according to the God-inspired Scriptures, knowledge is vast. Nevertheless, the holy mysteries are quite inaccessible to human nature during this life. Despite the fact that every man that progresses throughout this life learns increasingly more things, this knowledge of his is always comparatively deficient in value when compared to the overall whole of knowledge, until perfection comes and the imperfect and partial is repealed.... Even if it is Paul or Peter, he accepts one part of the truth, waiting for the perfect future knowledge.”*¹⁰⁹

Indeed, the holy Elder goes on, *“the experience and the exact knowledge of the Holy Spirit has been set aside for us, for eternity. Then, after having overcome seeing the Truth in part, mysteriously and through a mirror, we will be blessed to see it face to face.”*¹¹⁰

3. FAITH: THE KNOWLEDGE BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

Faith comes to replace this lack of knowledge of God and the esoteric spiritual mysteries in our earthly life. Faith temporarily covers the gap between holy and human nature and intellect.

Of course, one would wonder, why is it that God does not introduce Himself to man in this life, with more rational proof or emphatic appearances so that they have absolutely no doubt as to His existence. Thereby one would worship and accept Him immediately without haste.

109 *Περί πίστεως*, κεφ.β' - γ', P.G.31, 1681-1684.

110 *Περί τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος*, κεφ.ζ', P.G.29, 669.

I repeat, once more, that for reasons that have to do with respect and preservation of human freedom, our Lord avoided using the two basic ways of obtaining knowledge: logic and the senses. He chose faith as the way of knowing Him. Protecting our freedom, that the Lord Himself gave us, is the basic reason our Creator does not appear to us with ways that will undermine our freedom or with ways that will force us to accept Him and worship Him.

Faith and obedience that is derived from the forced conclusion through the intellectual ability of man, or are forced through the senses, would have no moral value; they would not be virtues and obtained as the result of the free choice by man, but of violent coercion.

Let us see then, what we mean by the term ‘faith’ when we refer to our relationship with God. What is the theological meaning of the term?

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” (Hebrews 11:1) says the Apostle Paul. Faith is an examination, in other words it is proof or certainty of things that are not visible to the physical eyes. Faith, though, brings such information and such certainty to the faithful, as if he had definitely seen and perceived them with his bodily senses.

Faith is, at the same time, the living or real existence of what we hope to receive and to experience and to know. Despite the fact that they are not currently a tangible part of us yet, faith makes them clear and palpable as if they existed already.¹¹¹

With faith then, we accomplish two things. Firstly, we believe that certain things exist, that they are real and that they happened. These are things which we cannot perceive with our senses or prove scientifically but still know of their existence. Secondly,

111 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Eis tίν Γένεσιν*, Λόγος θ´, κεφ. γ´, chapter 3, P.G.54, 626.

we believe that although they may not be completed yet, we will receive things that do not presently exist in front of us.

We believe, for instance, that the Triune God exists and that Christ performed miracles and was resurrected. We believe that the resurrection of the dead will happen and that the righteous will rejoice eternally.

Faith is a mental state, a temporary conviction and a certainty about the existence of events or the correctness of an opinion or belief. All of which, the existence or truth we cannot examine with our immediate observation or prove with the usual dialectic methods.¹¹²

Faith is this dynamic which provides us with all the knowledge relating to the spiritual, invisible and transcendental mysteries of our theology. For the faithful, what is not physically visible is still definitely certain. The faithful are so well-informed and they have comprehended them so well, that it is as if they have seen and validated them with their own eyes¹¹³. Things that are internally wished for and intangible are deemed to be in existence and present, while the invisible things and things not able to be seen by the naked eye are seen, and are in direct contact and communion with the faithful man. *“because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:18)

Indeed, by waiting and firmly believing in the future glory that will be revealed to Christians (Romans, 7: 18), and by showing absolute trust in the words of his Creator, the faithful Christian

112 Ἀθανασίου Δελφκωστοπούλου, *Ἡ πίστις τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων*, σελ. 21.

113 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Εἰς τό ἀποστολικόν ρητόν...*, κεφ. α΄, P.G.56, 272.

strives with great self-denial ¹¹⁴to accumulate riches that are not of this world but riches of the heavenly kingdom instead. (Matthew 6: 19-20)

4. THE CREDIBILITY OF JESUS

The knowledge of God within the meaning of faith is certainly not a scientifically cognitive energy; the God of Christian revelation is neither the object of science nor the result of the usual dialectic methods.

Instead, the knowledge of God through faith and His supernatural mysteries depends on the credibility of Jesus. Thus, through faith, trust and obedience to Jesus, man receives knowledge of the transcendental without the risk or constraint of his free will.

This knowledge does not call for a reduction of the knowledge that is based on research and science; quite the contrary. The knowledge that is provided by faith, even though it is not tactile or 'tangible', is nevertheless one of the greatest forms which we could receive.

Thus, to receive this spiritual knowledge, man is simply invited to accept the credibility of Jesus; to assent to Him willingly, to recognise Him as his Creator, to accept his absolute dependence on Him, to have complete trust in His kindness, justice, words, commandments and promises.

In other words, he has to fully accept the Holy Revelation, which is everything that the Theanthropos Jesus revealed to man, chiefly during His first coming, and which is relevant to the secrets of the nature of Jesus, the content of the divine will and eternal life.

114 Άγίου Κυρίλλου Ίεροσολύμων, *Κατήχησις Ε΄ φωτιζομένων*, κεφ. δ΄, P.G. 33, 509A.

Indeed, as the Apostle Paul says, God *'left not Himself without witness'*. That is, He did not abandon man, leaving them in complete ignorance. God Himself, *"revealed Himself to us, both with the nature and works of His Creation and also, with the internal testimony of our soul. Even through the law that He gave us, and His Son that He sent to us. We receive as much knowledge as our nature can hold; as much as our small mind can handle. As much as we need for our religious education and training. And as much as God offers to us with His Holy Revelation."*¹¹⁵

God reveals Himself to man and man accepts the Holy Revelation. This is exactly what faith is. Saint John Chrysostom says, [Faith is] *"When we believe in the power of the One that promises.... When we believe and accept what we do not see, simply by turning our thought towards the reliability of Him that gave us the promise."*¹¹⁶

Christian faith is certainly not, as some think, blind and uncontrolled, as it does not forbid examining before believing the One in Whom we should believe in. While Jesus asks for our faith, at the same time, He does not overlook giving us unassailable tokens of His supernatural personality and His holy mission on Earth.

For all the reasons that are mentioned in the previous chapters, man is invited to accept the credibility of Jesus and to believe in Him. He is invited to trust Him, to shake off the foolish and spiteful disbelief that is identical with the disbelief of the Hebrews, who doubted the credibility of Jesus when they said *"Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true."* (John 8:13)

Nevertheless, Christ told them that His words, in which He named Himself God, were true because He had the credibility of His Father, the Holy Scriptures, John the Baptist and chiefly

115 Ά. Φραγκοπούλου, *Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος χριστιανική πίστις μας*, σελ. 40.

116 *Eis tήn Gένεσιν, ὁμιλία λστ΄, κεφ.ε΄, P.G.53, 359.*

His works¹¹⁷. “*Though ye believe not me, believe the works*” (John 10:38), or else, believe in My holy life, My perfect teachings and mainly in My miraculous energies, which are filled with love and philanthropy.

Today, just like then, Jesus addresses each man personally, so that at the same time, despite the fact that it is rooted in the common faith, everyone’s faith will be unique. The Creator Himself undertakes the initiative for the development of the relationship of faith and trust in the creation. God reveals Himself to man, and man accepts this revelation; he responds to it and says ‘yes’ to God.

This answer, or this ‘yes’, is a man’s faith and trust in God. Faith is the response to the presence and request of his Creator. It is the personal encounter with Christ, the acceptance, not of this or the other dogma or teachings regarding Christ, but of Christ Himself.

5. INNATE KNOWLEDGE AS A GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

When Jesus asked the patients if they believed in Him so that He would cure them and give them good physical health, He never demanded a superficial acceptance, an absurd naivety or an alignment with Him because of vested interests. The faith He asked of the ordinary people did not depend on the intellect, however at the same time, was not irrelevant to the intellect.

As St. Isaac of Syria points out very wisely, there is knowledge that precedes faith, and there is knowledge that is born from

117 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία μ’, κεφα’, PG.59, 230.

faith¹¹⁸. The knowledge that precedes faith is the so called, 'innate knowledge', which is this inner voice that was given from God and points to what is good and evil. It is the gift that God Himself placed in man; whom He created in His image. It is His present to the rational nature of man. Man, having this gift among other similar ones, is not a simple existence, a mere animal, but a person that has the natural ability to know the law of God (Romans 1:32), to distinguish between good and evil¹¹⁹ without prior learning or education¹²⁰. According to Saint Isaac, this is an innate natural knowledge; it precedes faith and leads us to faith.

In other words, when our Lord requested faith from the patients and his contemporaries in general, He did not ask for a love token, a willing submission or a plain vote of confidence, like the sovereign or the politicians do, who entice men into rushed and erroneous decisions.

Jesus simply asked every man the following. You are witnessing the holiness of my life and listening to my wonderful teachings that raise you to the heights of true love and honor you insurmountably, as they establish you as a real person and detach you from brutish life. You are simultaneously receiving the experience of My love which manifests through the abundant and multiform energies; do you believe that I am your Creator?

Do you implicitly accept that you have never met or heard about anyone else or associated with a person that does everything that I administer: the holiness of life, the perfect moral teaching, the benevolent miracles, the Divine Grace that attracts

118 *Τά άσκητικά, λόγος ιν´, σελ. 78-80.*

119 *Άγίου Ίωάννου του Χρυσοστόμου, Εἰς τόν ροζ´ ψαλμόν, κεφ. γ´, PG.55, 482.*

120 *Άγίου Ίωάννου του Χρυσοστόμου, Εἰς τοὺς Ἀνδριάντας, ὁμιλία ιβ´ κεφ.γ´, P.G.49, 131.*

men and internally informs them that they have finally met their Creator?

Do you understand that only My teaching, this divine teaching of true and genuine love, is most certainly consistent with all these wondrous things that the voice of your conscience has taught you since the day you were born? The voice that at the same time guides you to distinguish good from evil, the voice that guides you towards the knowledge of God?

Subsequently, man would reply with a 'yes' freely and implicitly. "Yes Lord, I believe in You." This inner voice in him would necessitate faith towards Jesus. As St. Isaac wonderfully elaborates: *"through this innate knowledge we can find the way to God... and accept faith, while the power of nature (the conscience, natural knowledge) denotes that man has to believe in God... and in the words of His holy commands.... Innate knowledge,... which was raised into our nature from God, persuades us that we have to believe in God."*¹²¹

Consequently, Innate knowledge which man has received as a gift from God, guides us to faith. It guides us to accept the holy revelation; it guides us to accept the holiness and the perfect moral teaching of Jesus and to believe that Jesus is God, the Creator and the Saviour of humanity.

Consequently, this faith enables spiritual knowledge in the finite and humble man, which is mentioned by St. Isaac of Syria and certainly all the holy Fathers our Church.

This faith gives us the inner certainty and assurance of the existence of the holy, supernatural, invisible, transcendental and spiritual mysteries. For example, that God is Triune, that man can unify existentially and ontologically with God, that there will be a resurrection of the dead and that souls will live eternally.

121 "Ενθ' ἄνωγτ.

Hereafter, this faith gives man the ability to see ahead with the eyes of the soul and not of the body, the light of divinity, the indescribable happiness of heaven, the divine love and providence.

When, like the Saints, the faithful Christians reach higher spiritual perspectives, they even see all the above with their physical senses and they acquire a higher faith, which is not objective to the initial one but a validation of the initial faith. It is even more perfect because the latter is not based on hearing but 'theory' and 'foresight'.¹²²

6. IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE?

As I have mentioned extensively so far, God preferred to become known to man through faith and not through other ways of acquiring knowledge, which are through the intellect or the senses. The choice of faith as the way of getting to know God aims for the defence of free will, which is the ability of man to decide and choose freely.

Through the unshakeable faith that man received because of the credibility of our Christ, he knows many spiritual and transcendental mysteries. Faith is an 'unconfirmed' knowledge¹²³, according to St. Maximus the Confessor. Of course he did not mean that we believe in something that does not exist, but that none of the above can be proven through human rationality and generally through the methods that science has been using through the centuries. Faith is not the fruit of knowledge and it is not an

122 Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ.

123 *Πρός Θαλάσσιον, Περί ἀποριῶν, ἐρώτησις λγ'*, ΕΠΕ τόμος 14B, σελ. 222.

intellectual calculation. In essence, it is not the conclusion that is based on rationality and analysis.

Consequently, this is where the burning issue of the relationship between faith and rationality, intellect, knowledge, science and research, rises. Is there, then, a relationship between Christian faith and human intellect and knowledge, or are faith and intellect completely irrelevant and contrasting concepts? If there is a relationship between them, then which one comes first; faith before knowledge or knowledge before faith? Thus, do I get to know first and then I believe, or do I believe first and then I get to know?

It is true that the great precision, substantial study and research is demanded from science, in order to obtain the knowledge of a subject matter and a natural phenomenon. Today, science brings together all the knowledge that man gains through systematic research and logically proven observation and analysis.

Indeed, currently the only proof that is considered acceptable for the confirmation of the existence of an object is scientific proof, which is based on something that can be tested and confirmed objectively; in something that is certainly independent of subjective interpretation and experience.

In this sense, since the existence of God cannot be proved scientifically¹²⁴ due to the fact that God preferred not to become known to man in any other way other than faith for all the reasons mentioned above, we can claim that there is no God using 'intellectual', 'rational' and 'scientific' thinking. After all, this is the most common argument for atheism¹²⁵. Of course, it is a massive mistake on the behalf of science to "*overestimate the value of the*

124 Κωνσταντίνου Παπαπέτρου, *Είναι ή θεολογία Έπιστήμη;*, σελ. 12.

125 Λεωνίδου Κ. Διαμαντοπούλου, *Η Αθεΐα στην έποχή μας*, σελ. 24.

*scientific achievements and to proclaim the omnipotence of scientific knowledge and through this to abolish religion and God.”*¹²⁶

As an answer to the above, we ought to say the following: the attitude of Christianity, and especially of Orthodoxy, towards science and its progress, is one of doxology and thanksgiving to God. After all, we should never forget that both Christian faith and scientific knowledge share a common root because a human soul that believes and a human soul that knows are one and the same.¹²⁷

In fact, just like one's conscience, logic is a gift from God to man whom He has created in His image. Even Jesus Himself asked from all of us to optimize our logic, prudence, genius and wisdom. (Matthew 10: 16) Saint Paul the Apostle gave similar encouragement, when he asked that we aim for the perfection of our minds and of producing wise, prudent thoughts (1 Corinthians 14: 20) and in general, that we are “*wise unto what is good*” (Romans 16:19) and “*walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.*” (Ephesians 5:15)

Human knowledge and science are perfectly respectable and desirable, provided they do not try to prove, through their characteristically rational methods, the existence of the inconceivable, incomprehensible God, Who is hidden willingly from the finite human intellect. Human knowledge should not be overrated; it should not become absolute or exceed its limits.

A real Christian knows very well that he has to connect faith with human knowledge, logic and cognition. While a Christian depends on faith, regarding the transcendental and holy mysteries,

126 Μάρκου Σιώτου, *Χριστιανική πίστης καί σύγχρονος έπιστημονική έρευνα*, σελ. 45.

127 Εὐαγγέλιου Δ. Θεοδώρου, *Σχέσεις Χριστιανισμού καί Έπιστήμης*, σελ. 4.

he uses human knowledge correctly, with wisdom and at the same time with plenty of discernment and circumspection.

Indeed, through faith in the words of God, a man knows what God is, as much as humanly possible. Through faith, he knows of the resurrection of the dead, immortality and the eternal beatitude. Through faith in God, he knows God, and he believes that God exists without having to use knowledge and proof about the existence of God. A Christian knows because he believes; he does not believe because he has rational and scientific knowledge.

Human knowledge is a clearly natural condition, which works with natural laws, while faith, on the contrary, is a supernatural condition. It is a charismatic condition and a communion with God. It is the life that develops in the soul with the advent of God's grace.

Consequently, the first spiritual task a man needs to do in order to obtain knowledge of God (who has gotten their innate knowledge of a conscience as a gift from God), is to acquire faith and not logic. In other words, through faith in God, man will acquire knowledge of God and not through human logic or intellect.

If we sidestep the value of faith and incorrectly aim towards a 'scientific' knowledge of God, we will in fact, end up in ignorance and devoid of faith. We end up with ignorance, because the finite man cannot possibly approach, especially in this life, the incomprehensible and pre-eternal God and our Creator. We end up devoid of faith, since the respect towards God, is not the product of man's free thinking and choice but as a result of a compulsion. In eternity, according to the holy Theophilus of Antioch, "*you will believe whether you want to or not and your faith will be considered as faithlessness if you do not believe now.*"¹²⁸

Indeed, through faith, man acquires a kind of knowledge that has absolutely nothing to do with the knowledge we talk about in

128 *Πρός Αὐτόλυκον*, 1, 8.

our everyday life. When we say that we believe in God, we attempt an affirmation, which demands a choice or a concrete decision. As soon as this personal participation and choice disappears, then faith dies; it is lost. It becomes non-existent, it becomes faithlessness; it becomes a coercion. Indeed, when a man gets to know something, then by necessity he accepts it. When he receives objective knowledge about something, this knowledge becomes independent of him and any free choice; the man ceases to believe because he knows.

Obviously the value of knowledge should not be sidelined. The faithful Christian does not use human logic, knowledge and wisdom as a way of knowing God but certainly, neither does he reduce their value, nor regard them as useless for his approach towards God. When it comes to the matter of the existence of God, in the same way that knowledge without faith is considered ignorance and unfaithfulness, so is faith without logic, wisdom and knowledge, which would be considered gullibility.

When it comes to faith, Jesus condemned gullibility and superficiality though, by saying that we ought to be very wise and careful and that *“if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.”* (Matthew 24:23)

Let us finish this chapter with the wise words of Holy Theodoritos (6th Century), *“Nobody should condemn faith. After all, Aristotle regarded faith to be the criterion of science... Faith needs knowledge, just like knowledge needs faith. After all, there is no faith without knowledge, but also, knowledge cannot exist without faith. Certainly, faith precedes knowledge, but knowledge follows faith.”*¹²⁹

129 *Περί πίστεως*, 1, 92, P.G.83, 816.

7. TRANSCENDENTAL AND INVISIBLE FAITH IS NOT CONTRARY TO LOGIC

Certainly, one could bring forward the following questions: Is it befitting for an educated man to believe in everything that Christianity teaches? Does logic accommodate religious faith; as it consists of invisible, inconceivable things and genuine mysteries?

As I have already proved, in addition to faith not going against logic, it also forms the basic source of our knowledge in our everyday lives as well as our scientific and philosophical knowledge.¹³⁰ Therefore if it is not irrational to believe our fellow man, provided they are credible, it would also not be logical to exclude religious life based on the general rule of faith, and generally everything that concerns Christianity.

On the contrary, the opposite would be irrational: showing trust towards our fellow man for mundane matters and in turn regarding faith in this case as unworthy of our logic. Nevertheless, when it comes to matters that are not of this world, but the transcendental, for which God Himself reveals the Truth to us, then we should not regard faith to be unworthy of our logic.

Again, one could come up with the following objection: Christian faith is not like the faith we use in our everyday life, as it is filled with dismal and incomprehensible things. It asks men to believe in something inconceivable, in something that he cannot understand or even examine. How is it possible then, that I will accept mysteries that I cannot understand?

130 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Περὶ ἀσάφειας τῶν προφητειῶν*, κεφ.β', P.G.56, 167.

Indeed, religious faith presents us with many supernatural truths, which are surrounded by a veil of mystery. We cannot understand these truths because they transcend our senses and regard matters that are not of the visible world but of the invisible and supernatural, which cannot be permeated by our intellect and senses.

Despite the fact that these religious and spiritual matters are transcendental, which means that they exceed our perceptible or intellectual skills, it does not mean that they are non-existent. Anything that is invisible and transcendental is not necessarily non-existent or absurd. Faith in the invisible and the transcendental does not go against logic.

After all, our daily experience and study of our senses teach us the following: that which is revealed through our senses is not what solely exists, as they are finite and do not grant us the feeling of every existing reality. There are numerous natural truths and realities of this world that we are unable to perceive fully and understand with our senses. Beyond this perceptible world then, there is the, so called, 'transcendental reality' which is equally existent and objective as the one we experience.

Despite the fact that this transcendental reality exceeds our senses and intellectual powers, as it encompasses various 'mysteries', it certainly does not follow that it is non-existent or that it is averse to logic. If someone appears, who can give us authentic assurances for this real and non-imaginary existence of this transcendental reality, then our mind can perfectly accept and believe it.

Many famous scientists accept that the whole Universe is full of unexplained mysteries. Nevertheless, even though we cannot understand them fully, we believe in the existence of various natural truths because logic, experience and the testimony of others verify their existence.

Therefore, if the natural world presents us with so many unknown mysteries, why should it be considered a paradox that the spiritual world has its own mysteries? Why should we be surprised and resentful of the transcendental spiritual mysteries and willing to dismiss them as unreasonable, from the moment that the human intellect cannot even remotely understand and explain this visible world, in which we live and move in?

How is it possible that we are full of mystery, and yet still have the demand that the Creator of the universe not be veiled with mystery? How is it possible that our finite and weak intellect can understand the infinite God, Who has no beginning, if He does not reveal Himself to His creation in all those miraculous ways in which we have referred to so far?

Consequently, it is not illogical at all to use faith for these spiritual truths, which we do not perceive with our senses and comprehension. In order to be consistent with the thought of his, whoever claims that he does not believe because he cannot understand, should not only confine his objection for the matters of the spiritual sphere, but also, for all those simple things of the world because most of them, if not all, are full of mysteries. Certainly, in the end he will end up doubting even his personal existence¹³¹, since this too is associated with infinite mysteries.

This, is the actual point where all the atheists and nihilists end up. All of them deny the existence of God because professedly, there is not enough scientific proof but, essentially, they end up denying the theosis of man by Grace, the eternal beatitude and the immortality of their soul. Consequently, they end up denying their very existence, their self and their soul itself. And as Saint Isidore of Pelusium says, [characteristically materialistic men] *"think that they have no soul"*¹³² and continue to raise objections.

131 Λεωνίδου Κ. Διαμαντοπούλου, *Ἡ Ἀθεΐα στὴν ἐποχὴ μας*, σελ. 17.

132 *Ἐπιστολὴ τκθ* ', βιβλίο ε ', P.G.78, 1525BC.

Saint John Chrysostom says, *“and whence is it clear that we have a soul?”* *“Who has returned from hell to prove its existence?”* *“Who has arrived here from heaven and told us that there is a God who created all things?”*¹³³ *“Who rose from the dead? Who is the one that told us about Hades?”*¹³⁴ *“Do not then disbelieve these things, because you see them not; thou dost not see your soul, and yet you believe that you have a soul, and that it is something different besides the body.”*¹³⁵

Consequently, we presume *“that only faith can provide knowledge about the extrasensory, extra-empirical and transcendental reality, which has authority and is satisfactory”* just like many *“contemporary, leading representatives of the exact sciences.”*¹³⁶

8. “HAVE FAITH AND DOUBT NOT”: RATHER REJECTABLE

A sentence, which sounds rather belittling when it comes to our faith's character, is the infamous expression: *“have faith and doubt not.”* Usually the ones that use it obviously mean that Orthodox Christianity declares its authority with arrogance, without having the disposition to apologize for it, and without showing that it accepts or contradicts research. Through this sentence, Orthodox Christianity is presented as a tyranny, as a dynastic regime, which simply demands the slavish subservience of its members who submit without any contradiction as voiceless

133 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ιγ', κεφ.ε', P.G.57, 215.

134 Εἰς τόν πτωχόν Λάzarον, λόγος δ', κεφ.β', P.G.48, 1009.

135 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία κε', κεφ.β', P.G.59, 149.

136 Εὐαγγέλιον Δ. Θεοδώρου, Σχέσεις Χριστιανισμοῦ καί Ἐπιστήμης, σελ. 12.

beings. Faith is considered a comfortable getaway, the refusal to fight, a mere self-betrayal and an irremovable dogmatism.

Therefore, especially during our modern era, where research through science and the Internet have made great discoveries; Orthodox Christianity is mocked by ignorant people and everyone that is not willing to deal with it in a sincere and earnest way¹³⁷.

There have been many interpretations of this humorous sentence (the title of this chapter), as well as plenty of guesswork, concerning the source of its origins. Others attribute this sentence to the heterodox papists, while others to the secularists.

Since there is not enough time to research each specific speculation and because we should not believe anything if we do not first research it very well so that it is satisfactorily proven in our intellect, we set them aside completely and simply answer the following with certainty:

Following a meticulous and methodical research of many years, I can verify that this sentence does not exist, neither in the Holy Bible nor in Holy Tradition. Orthodox theology never used this sentence, at least not in the way that some are presenting it, and it never demanded slavish and improvident obedience from its members.

We certainly cannot deny that in one of his sermons, Saint John Chrysostom says: *"I believe, I search not."*¹³⁸ Let us see what the Saint means but also, what the Holy Bible and the Fathers of our Church teach about this matter.

Initially, we should not forget that our Lord Himself, in one of His conversations with the Hebrews, said characteristically: *"Search the scriptures...they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39) Also, as Saint John of Damascus stresses, *"What else have*

137 Νικολάου Π. Βασιλειάδη, *Ἡ Χριστιανική Πίστις εἰς τόν αἰῶνα τῆς Ἐπιστήμης*, σελ. 54.

138 *Λόγος κατηχητικός...*, κεφ.γ', P.G.59, 584.

*we got to suggest to the unbelievers and the misbelieving, other than what our Lord Himself said to the Hebrews, which is ‘Search the scriptures’.”*¹³⁹

Holy Damascene goes on to say, *“Through the Holy Spirit, therefore, the law and the prophets, the evangelists and apostles and pastors and teachers, spoke. All Scripture, then, is given by inspiration of God and is also assuredly profitable. (2 Timothy 3:16) Wherefore to search the Scriptures is a work most fair and profitable for souls. For just as the tree planted by the channels of waters, so also the soul watered by the divine Scripture is enriched and gives fruit in its season.”*¹⁴⁰

Thus, if the research of the Holy Scripture was not useful and necessary to every Christian, neither the Evangelists would write their Gospels, nor the Fathers of our Church would leave countless writings as a sacred legacy and tradition, in which the evangelical and holy teachings are interpreted in the best possible way.

Consequently, *“‘believe and search not’ does not convey the true spirit of Christianity, because, using this concept, there is a clear distinction between the subjective themes of human research and its hypertexts.”*¹⁴¹ *“The axiom ‘believe and search not’ is a great fallacy and it is wrongly attributed to the Christian Religion.”*¹⁴²

In other words, not only does Orthodoxy not disagree with research but, on the contrary, it encourages it. In particular, it

139 *Πρός τοὺς καταλέγοντας τὰς εἰκόνας*, λόγος Β΄, κεφ.ζ΄, ΕΠΕ τόμος 3, σελ.116.

140 *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Δ΄ (17) 90, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ.500.

141 Μάρκου Σιώτου, *Χριστιανική πίστις καί σύγχρονος ἐπιστημονική ἔρευνα*, σελ.15.

142 Δημητρίου Ι. Μαγκριώτη, *Πίστις καί Ἐπιστήμη*, σελ.45.

encourages the “research of the material world and knowledge in general, which consists of everything, fact or truth, which can be apprehended, learnt and proven by man.”¹⁴³

Nevertheless, as is mentioned above, Christianity does not only encourage man to research and generally develop this great charisma of the intellect, which is a gift from our Creator, in philosophical matters. It also encourages them to research the matters of the Orthodox teachings and theology. Additionally, it encourages them to research the matters that are relevant to the knowledge of supernatural truths; to research what is related to transcendental spiritual approaches.

Indeed, man is invited to research and learn a lot more useful things than what usual human research and science have to offer. In other words, he is invited to connect and become acquainted with the so-called transcendental world and with the world of the unknown spiritual mysteries in the best possible way.

Of course, this is the point where the interpretation and solution of the contentious issue of the ability to research is found. On the one hand, for science the transcendental is ‘relative’, but for Orthodoxy, on the other, the transcendental is ‘absolute’.

For science, the transcendental is indeed ‘relative,’ as it refers to what it has not analysed up until today and which after a while, just like electricity, pauses to be transcendental as it becomes fully researched and understood.

On the contrary, for Orthodoxy the transcendental is not something ‘relative’ but something ‘absolute’. The faint knowledge of the transcendental mysteries that a man receives from researching the Holy Bible and through faith is clearly definite and is exclusively linked to the holy revelation. It is related only to what our Lord, the Holy Bible and Holy Tradition have taught us. “*The holy*

143 Νικολάου Βασιλειάδη, *Ἡ Χριστιανική πίστις εἰς τόν αἰῶνα τῆς ἐπιστήμης*, σελ.65.

revelation recommends God's energy, through which, it acquaints man with the secrets of God's nature and even with the contents of the holy will."¹⁴⁴ The knowledge of the Orthodox dogmatic theology through faith does not evolve, as science does, but it stops where the holy apocalypse decides so that man's free will is safeguarded.

For instance, through the Holy Bible man learns that during the Second Coming of our Lord, our bodies will be resurrected and will be indestructible, immortal and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44). Christians ought to research and become acquainted with the specific written word, which refers to the supernatural event of the resurrection of the dead through the words referred by Jesus, the Prophets, the holy Apostles, the holy Fathers and the Theologians of our Church. However, this research and knowledge has to be satisfactory to the degree that the holy revelation allows us to know.

By receiving the knowledge of the supernatural mystery of the resurrection of the dead through the Holy Bible, Christians have to be content with the credibility of Jesus and His word, and of the Holy Bible, as we have referred in detail above. They ought to remain within the context of the specific Biblical cognitive material and not to try to interpret the specific supernatural event with intellectual and scientific thought, nor should they try to make it a subject of scientific research with logical analysis and proof. If they attempt to do something like that, then from faithful researchers they turn into faithless scientists.

After all, we have often stressed that faith is a man's relationship towards reality which is different to the relationship that is perceived through science. Christian faith, as the relationship of man with the transcendental, does not become the subject of scientific research, just like its subject cannot be researched by

144 Ἀθανασίου Δελφικωστοπούλου, *Ἡ πίστις τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων*, σελ.16.

any science. *“The knowledge of God is not the simple knowledge of certain worldly definitions about God, but it is the encounter with Him through Revelation.”*¹⁴⁵

All faithful Christians ought to know that God is Triune, absolute and eternal; He is the Creator of the Universe. They ought to know that Jesus took human form for our salvation, and He became a real and perfect man. While all these spiritual mysteries about God exist in the Holy Bible, they exist without the need to provide any intellectual and rational proof or scientific analysis.

Orthodox theology accepts that God is completely transcendental, and every effort of man to research this transcendental (that is God) subject scientifically is doomed to be an utter failure from the beginning. The relationship of the theologian, of the faithful researcher towards his transcendental subject, God, is not the relationship of the scientist with his research subject but an existential relationship of adoration. The theologian believes; he does not research God scientifically.

Thus, theology as ‘Theo’-‘logy’, is not a science like other ‘-ologies’ because it cannot research its subject, God, with the methods that human science follows. God is not a worldly subject, neither for science nor theology. Since theology speaks of God as a supernal subject, it ceases to be a science. At the same time, every attempt to gain scientific knowledge about God is disused. Neither theology nor science conceives God as an objective and empirically discernible reality of this world.¹⁴⁶

Precisely for these reasons, Saint John Chrysostom said, *“I believe, I search not”* and went on to say *“I believe, I do not attempt to explain the inconceivable; I believe, I do not number the innumerable. If I believe, my soul is enlightened; if I begin to examine, I darken my intellect. If I believe, as I should, I am*

145 Κωνσταντίνου Παπαπέτρου, *Εἶναι ἡ θεολογία Ἐπιστήμη*., σελ.22.

146 Ὑνθ', ἀνωτ.σελ.53-57.

*elevated to the sky, if I search out with curiosity, I descend to the bottom.”*¹⁴⁷

9. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND RESEARCH ACCORDING TO THE HOLY SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Let us see how Saint John Chrysostom connects faith with research, through a series of successive sermons.

*“As I have told you on many occasions, we ought to search every syllable of the Holy Bible. After all, Jesus said ‘search the Scriptures.’ Even an iota or a simple comma sometimes creates a different meaning.... I do not want to catechize you simply and trivially, but to make you perceptive to the matters of the Scriptures, to help you conceive all the depth of their meanings. I want you to become acquainted with the depth of the Holy Scriptures, which not only have no turmoils but is even safer than peace. The more in depth you delve, the greater safety you find in the harmonious ordinance of the sacred meanings.”*¹⁴⁸

*“For just as if a man can gain no great achievements in this life if he involves himself in trivial and nonsensical things, even more so will this be the case in spiritual matters, since these require yet even greater attention. Wherefore when Christ referred to the Hebrews in the Scriptures, He sent them not to merely read, but to complete careful and considerate research; for He did not say, ‘**Read** the Scriptures’, but ‘**Search** the Scriptures’.”*

“Since Christ’s words required great attention, (for they had been concealed from the beginning as an advantage for the man who followed Him at that time,) He bids them now to dig down

147 Λόγος κατηχητικός..., κεφ.γ´, P.G.59, 584.

148 Εἰς τόν πτωχόν Λάzarον, λόγος στ´, κεφ.η´, P.G.48, 1040.

*with care that man might be able to discover what lay in the depths below. These teachings were not obvious, nor were they cast forth to open view, but lay like some treasure hidden very deep. Now he that searches for hidden things, if he seeks them without due diligence and toil, he will never find the object of his search.”*¹⁴⁹

*“Our Lord tells the negligent: ‘Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures.’ (Matthew 22:29) Indeed, this kind of man does err. After all, what is this arduous spiritual poverty due to other than the fact that we do not study the Holy Scriptures? How many riches have we deprived ourselves of by neglecting to study them, as our Lord commands us? Search laboriously, search, seek and in this way, you will find plenty and unexplored riches and treasures.”*¹⁵⁰

*“Simply reading the Holy Scriptures is not enough for the treasure of the hidden riches to be revealed should you not research deeper. After all, if only reading the texts were enough, the Apostle Phillip would not ask the eunuch ‘Understandest thou what thou readest?’ (Acts 8:30), which means ‘Do you understand what you read?’ Neither would Jesus have told the Hebrews, ‘Search the Scriptures’. Thus, the one that actually searches does not read superficially but descends to the essence and core of the meanings.”*¹⁵¹

*“There is a particular need for us to do proper research of the Holy Scriptures so that not even one of these deep meanings will evade us.”*¹⁵²

“Pay heed, though, to the claims of the enemy of truth... You have to search our faith in God with the help of logic as well,

149 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία μα´, κεφ.α´, P.G.59, 233-235.

150 Λόγος περὶ ψευδοπροφητῶν..., κεφ.β´, P.G.59, 555.

151 Λόγος κατὰ τῶν ἀπολειφθέντων..., κεφ.γ´, P.G.51, 148.

152 Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία κδ´, κεφ.α´, P.G.53, 206.

*and not to leave piety unexamined. All right, but the condition and basis of this search should be the divine words and the laws of piety that God gave us. You exceed these laws, though, and you do not follow the God-inspired Scriptures, but you criticise and find fault in the Holy Mysteries, extort the truth and hasten to follow your illogical thoughts, instead of serving in faith.”*¹⁵³

*“But, when no one compels you, does thou want to understand the unfathomable abyss of doctrine and the mysteries of faith? I beseech you, do not do so. Let us sail upwards, but without floating with only logic as our guide, for we shall soon be weary and sink. Instead, using the divine Scriptures as a vessel, let us unfurl the sails of faith. If we sail in them, then the Word of God will be present with us as our Pilot. But if we float upon human reasonings, it will not be so.”*¹⁵⁴

“Notice how the Holy Apostle Paul disapproves of questioning. For where faith exists, there is no need to question. When there is no room for curiosity, questions are superfluous. Questioning is the subversion of faith. For he that seeks has not yet found. He who questions cannot believe. Therefore he advises that we should not be occupied with questions, because if we question, then it is not faith; for faith sets reasoning at rest.”

“But why then does Christ say, ‘Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.’? (Matthew, 7:7.); and, ‘Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life?’ (John 5:39) Through ‘seeking’ Christ meant prayer and vehement desire, and He bids us to ‘search the Scriptures,’ not to introduce the labours of questioning, but to end them, that we may ascertain and settle upon their true meaning, and so that we may not be forever questioning, but that we are able to be done with it.”

153 Λόγος εἰς τό 'Εν ποία ἐξουσία ταῦτα ποιεῖς, κεφ.γ', P.G.56, 416.

154 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τήν πρός Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολήν πρώτην, ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ.γ', P.G.62, 438-439.

“For great are the blessings which God is willing to dispense; but the greatness of them is not conceived with reasoning. This must then be the work of faith, which is the best medicine of our souls. This questioning therefore is opposed to the dispensation of God. For what is dispensed by faith? What is dispensed is to receive His mercies and become better men; to doubt and dispute of nothing; but to repose in confidence. For whatever ‘ministers questions,’ displaces faith and that which faith hath wrought and built.”

“Christ has said that we must be saved by faith... Moral. Let us not then give heed to questions. For we were called Faithful, that we might unhesitatingly believe what is delivered to us, and entertain no doubt. For if the things asserted were human, we ought to examine them; but since they are of God, they are only to be revered and believed. If we believe not, how shall we be persuaded of the existence of a God?”¹⁵⁵

“It remains to say that where God’s wisdom exists, there is no longer a need for man’s.... For to believe in Him who was crucified and buried, and to be fully persuaded that this Person Himself both rose again and sat down on high; needs not wisdom, nor reasoning, but faith. For the Apostles themselves came in not by wisdom, but by faith, and surpassed the heathen wise men in wisdom and loftiness....”

“...You see then, faith and simplicity are needed. We should seek faith everywhere, and prefer it to earthly wisdom. For ‘God,’ says the Apostle Paul, ‘has made wisdom foolish’ (A Corinthians 1:20). But what does, ‘He has made [wisdom] foolish’ mean? He

155 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν α΄ πρὸς Τιμόθεον Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ. β΄-γ΄, P.G.62, 506-507.

*has shown earthly wisdom to be foolish in regard to receiving the faith.”*¹⁵⁶

*“For indeed the excessively foolish are those who commit unto reasoning things which cannot be ascertained except through faith. Thus, consider the example of a blacksmith drawing out a red-hot-iron with his tongs. If any one should insist on doing it with his bare hands, we should vote him guilty of extreme folly. It is similar in manner when the philosophers who insisted on finding out these things for themselves, disparaged faith. It was due to this that they found none of the things they sought for.”*¹⁵⁷

“‘And how is it possible’ says one, ‘that being a Son, He should possess this (nature)?’ We are speaking of God, and you ask how? And you do not fear nor shudder? Yet should any one ask you, ‘How should our souls and bodies have endless life in the world to come?’ You will laugh at the question, on the ground that it does not belong to the intellect of man to search into such questions, but that he ought only to believe, and not to be over-curious on the subject mentioned, since he has a sufficient proof of the saying, in the power of Him who spoke it....”

*“...Why are you vainly and rashly striving to overshoot, by force of reasoning, this Life which is unlimited? You cannot do it. Why seek what may not be sought? Why be curious about what is incomprehensible? Why search what is unsearchable? Gaze upon the very source of the sunbeams. You cannot; yet you are neither vexed nor impatient at your weakness; how then have you become so daring and headlong in greater matters?”*¹⁵⁸

156 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία δ', κεφ. β', P.G.61, 32-33.

157 Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. ὁμιλία ε', κεφ.α', P.G.61, 40.

158 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία ζ', κεφ.α', P.G.59, 63.

*“The things asserted require faith, and to try to apprehend them through reasoning is not possible, for their magnitude exceeds, by a great deal, the meanness of our understanding.”*¹⁵⁹

*“Faith is all. If that establishes [it], the heart stands in security. It follows that Faith establishes; consequently human reasoning is shaky. For Faith is contrary to reasoning.”*¹⁶⁰

*“For where there is not faith, there is not knowledge; when anything springs from our reasoning, it is not knowledge....Let us not then pursue this science, but adhere to faith, that unshaken rock.”*¹⁶¹

*“So then since knowledge is through faith, and without faith it is impossible to know Him. How? Through it we must ‘know the power of His resurrection’. For what reasoning can demonstrate to us the Resurrection? None other, only faith.”*¹⁶²

*“You see that this is a chief characteristic of faith, to leave all the consequences of this lower world and therefore to seek that which is above nature and to cast out the feebleness of calculation and so to accept everything from the Power of God.”*¹⁶³

*“Do not ask to know how or in which way all things will happen because God is the One that accomplishes them. You only need faith, and only when you have true faith, will you understand the power of the One that makes them happen.”*¹⁶⁴

159 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ζ΄, κεφ. ε΄, P.G.61, 61.

160 Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία λγ΄, κεφ.γ΄, P.G.63, 229.

161 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν α΄ πρὸς Τιμόθεον Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία ιη΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.62, 598.

162 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλιππησίους Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία ιβ΄, κεφ. β΄, P.G.62, 265.

163 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ρωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία ιη΄, κεφ.γ΄, P.G.60, 566-567.

164 Eis Ἠσαΐαν, Κεφ. Ζ΄, P.G.56, 81-82.

*“This is why we are called faithful, that having left the weakness of human reasoning aside, we may ascend to the height of faith.”*¹⁶⁵

10. IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS FAITH PRECEDES RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned above, man must search so that his faith in his Creator can be increased, empowered and perfected, however only within the cognitive material of the divine revelation. Faith in the holy and transcendental mysteries should not discard and detest knowledge or research. If knowledge diverges from faith, then man is led to credulity, while when research diverges from faith, then man will be faithful even though his faith would be a completely infantile faith.

Ending this reference on the relationship between faith and knowledge, as well as faith and research, I would like to refer to specific distinctive opinions of our holy Fathers.

According to Saint John of Damascus: *“it is a great folly by the ones who do not accept and consider God’s goodness and omnipotence through the power of faith, but search divine things with human and natural reasoning instead. Because all the things that are of God, are above nature, reason and conception.”*¹⁶⁶

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says characteristically: *“of God we speak not all we ought (for that is known to Him only)...For in what concerns God to confess our ignorance is the best knowledge.”*¹⁶⁷

165 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τόν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία κε', κεφ.α', P.G.59, 149.

166 Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, Δ' (11) 84, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ.448-450.

167 Κατήχησις ΣΤ' φωτιζομένων, κεφ.γ', P.G.33, 540-541

Saint Cyril of Alexandria expounds on St Paul's phrase to Christ *"And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God,"* (John 6:69) by saying the following renowned words:

"Therefore in full assurance of faith do the most wise disciples say that they know and are confident that He is Christ the Son of the Living God."

"And with great wisdom will you find their speech constructed as to this again. For they say they believe and they know, joining both together. In fact, one must both believe and understand, but not because Divine things are received through faith. We therefore ought to completely depart from all investigation respecting them. On the contrary, we should try to attain a moderate knowledge just as when one looks into a mirror to see although it is muddled, so that many riddles which we cannot explain remain, as Paul saith."

"The Holy Apostles, in their great wisdom, again do not say that first they know, then they believe, but they put their faith first, and in that way they bring in knowledge, and not before faith, as it is written, 'If ye will not believe, neither shall ye understand'. For simple faith having been fore-laid in us, as a kind of foundation, knowledge is afterwards built up upon it by degrees, and brings us up 'to the measure of the mature age that is in Christ, to a perfect and spiritual man.'¹⁶⁸ (Ephesians 4:13)"

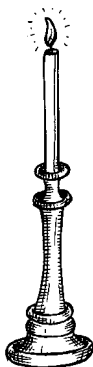
St. Basil the Great stresses that faith is incomparably superior to human cognition, knowledge, and research, which must be limited to the material of the Holy revelation. *"If we are to appreciate everything merely because of the fact we understand it or not and we consider that which cannot be contained in our minds as entirely non-existent, we will lose obtaining the reward of hope. Thus, how could we [who believe only in what is clearly proven with logic] be worthy of Christ's beatitude in comparison*

168 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τό κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον, 1, 576.

*to everyone that believes in what they have never seen (John 6:69)?”*¹⁶⁹

*“I think that whoever is interested, even in the slightest, for the truth, must first abandon the physical metaphors and stop blemishing the concepts that refer to God with material imaginary concepts, and then have to follow the theological truths that the Holy Spirit delivered to us.”*¹⁷⁰

In conclusion, let us refer to the very wise words of Saint Isaac of Syria. *“Human knowledge is not impeached but faith is superior to it. We do not reprove human knowledge. Knowledge is the stairway through which, one ascends to the height of faith, and when he is close, he does not need knowledge. We learn what is inconceivable through faith and not through research and the power of knowledge. Human knowledge opposes faith, which in turn paralyses the laws of human knowledge, as the former does not do anything without inquisition and research. There is no human knowledge that is not poor and does not have deficiencies.”*¹⁷¹



169 *Ανατρεπτικός του ἀπολογητικοῦ...*, λόγος β΄, P.G.29, 628.

170 *Ἐνθ' ἄνωτ.* P.G.29, 604.

171 *Τά ἀσκητικά*, λόγος ξβ΄, σελ.312-317.



CHAPTER THREE

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH

1. THE TWO KINDS OF FAITH

So far, we have examined the reasons that prove the correctness of our faith in relation to the various religions, as well as the superiority and priority of faith against the intellect and knowledge. Subsequently, I will also go on to analyse some very important aspects of faith as a Christian virtue.

Initially, I will have to point out that it is common place in the theology of the Holy Fathers of our Church, that there are two kinds of faith.¹⁷² There is the so-called, dogmatic faith and then, the active faith. The first is the fruit of our personal accord while the second is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit;¹⁷³ the one

172 Αγίου Κυρίλλου Ἀλεξανδρείας, *Υπόμνημα εἰς τό κατά Ἰωάννην...*, 2.285.

173 Αγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Δ' (10) 83, ΕΠΕ τόμος 1, σελ.448.

in which, *“the Grace of God works in us.”*¹⁷⁴ Indeed, *“the meaning of faith has a dual meaning. Faith is the ability that leads us to the knowledge of God. Also, faith is the ability to achieve the understanding of signs and miracles.”*¹⁷⁵ In other words, faith is not only *“the knowledge of piety, but also the ability to perform miracles.”*¹⁷⁶

Also, Saint Isaac of Syria, clearly reveals the difference between the two forms of faith by saying the following about the latter. *“But we refer to this faith as the one that rises from the Divine Grace into the soul... and through the spiritual eyes, it shows the hidden Divine Mysteries to the soul, but which are not seen through the eyes of the carnal man.”*¹⁷⁷

Before I explain what the above means, it is necessary to mention that faith is a great virtue. Thus, according to the Orthodox teachings, all of our good or virtuous deeds, and salvation in general, result from two factors: the Grace of God and the free choice of man. No real virtue is solely from our personal achievement. For this reason, our Lord stressed that *“without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:5) while Paul the Apostle calls these virtues *“gifts”* (Romans 12:6), that are given to us from God. (Philippians 1:29)

By saying all of the previous, I certainly do not mean that the man's free will is nullified. On the contrary, man initially offers his personal will and power to acquire the various virtues *“through*

174 Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου, *Τοῖς τόν μονήρη βίον ἀσκούσι...*, P.G.26, 1188.

175 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Εἰς τὴν ἀποστολικὴν ρῆσιν...*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.δ΄, P.G.51,275.

176 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Εἰς τόν ριε΄ ψαλμόν*, κεφ.β΄, P.G.55, 322.

177 *Τά ἀσκητικά*, λόγος ξε΄, σελ.325.

the mind, word and works."¹⁷⁸ Since the greatest part of acquiring every virtue is as a result of the Divine Grace and Its assistance, this is precisely why the Christian virtues are called gifts or "*the fruit of the Spirit.*" (Galatians 5:22)

*"Good deeds need both our personal effort and God's synergy as well. This is why Paul the Apostle calls them the 'fruit of the Spirit'; because although we offer and plant the seed of virtues on our personal accord and wish, its fruition is the work of God's power."*¹⁷⁹

Based on all of the above, faith, like all virtues, is man's work but at the same time the gift of God and this is why the Elders mention the two kinds of faith: dogmatic and active.

The first type of faith, the dogmatic, refers to our personal acceptance and consent to the teachings of Christ. With this faith, man becomes willing to accept Christ as his Lord and God, to trust his Saviour fully, to learn all the dogmatic truths that our Lord promulgates and to submit to all His commands that will lead him to salvation and theosis.

Nevertheless, as St. John Chrysostom very wisely teaches us, "*in the beginning, it depends on us whether we believe and obey God's calling. Therefore, after we believe in God, then we need the help of the Holy Spirit so that this faith of ours will always remain steady and unchanged.*"

"After all, neither God nor the grace of the Holy Spirit precedes our personal accord and disposition. On the contrary, God invites us and awaits for us to obey, on our own personal accord, through our personal will and consent. Then, when we believe, He gives us all His alliance."

178 Ἀγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος β', ὑποσημείωσις, 26, σελ.541.

179 Ἀγίου Θεοφυλάκτου, *Τῆς...πρός Γαλάτας Ἐπιστολῆς Ἐξήγησις*, P.G.124, 1020B.

“Consequently, after the acceptance of the proper faith, the devil appears immediately, wishing to uproot this good root by hastily sowing weeds and thus destroying the genuine and pure seed. It is then that we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit so that by implementing every concern and care, this new plant of our faith is completely protected, with every concern and care, like a diligent farmer that has settled in our soul.”

“...Because no one can accept and believe in Jesus as God and our Lord, unless he has the assistance and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (Corinthians 1:12, 3). More importantly, though, he will not be able to maintain his faith steadily and steadfast, unless he has the support of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸⁰

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem encourages us to have *“that faith in Him which comes from your own self, that you may also receive from Him that faith which works things above man.”*¹⁸¹ Let us then accept Christ and His teaching willingly and heartily. Let us strive with all our powers of our soul so that our (dogmatic) faith, or trust and love towards Him, will be empowered and stabilised and our Lord will gradually give us, as a gift active and superhuman faith. The faith that elevates man above the very narrow limits of his nature and establishes him able, not only to see the eternal as temporal and the things that are not seen as things that are seen (2 Corinthians 4:18) but also, it establishes him able¹⁸² to “move mountains.” (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Indeed, according to our Lord’s saying, the truly faithful man *“shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe*

180 *Εἰς τὴν ἀποστολικὴν ρῆσιν...*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.ε΄, P.G.51, 276.

181 *Κατήχησις Ε΄ φωτιζομένων*, κεφ.ια΄, P.G.33, 520B.

182 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία κθ΄, κεφ.γ΄, P.G.61, 245.

that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith." (Mark 11:23)

Thus, God gives man the perfect and "*the active faith that is above man,*" with which, as Christ promised, he can achieve 'greater' works and miracles (John 14:12), even greater than those that Christ Himself achieved. A man can do wonders just as the Holy Apostles had done,¹⁸³ he can suffer martyrdom as the holy Martyrs had, can overcome his faults and weaknesses by precipitating the intelligible mountains of his passions which are raised before him, he can suffer resignedly and philosophise through all the sorrows and the difficult situations of his life.

These superhuman energies might seem that they are works of our faith but, in reality, they are works of God, "*for it is God which worketh in you*" (Philippians 2:13). "*Do not spend thyself in vain pursuits,*" said St. John Chrysostom. "*If this be the case, God will work all things. Do thou be bold; 'for it is God that worketh in you.' If then He worketh, it is our part to bring a mind ever resolute, clenched and unrelaxed.*"¹⁸⁴ In this way we will achieve the unachievable, "*for as [the Saints] wrought greater miracles than He... but all is of Him that worketh in them; so did they suffer also more than He, but all again is of Him that comforteth them, and fitteth them to bear the evils that betide them.*"¹⁸⁵

Of course, I have to point out that no one is ever crowned or rewarded for the gifts that he has received from someone but only for his efforts towards succeeding something good in his life. If a man truly wants to be rewarded by God, then he has to

183 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Eis tón ríe ' psalmón*, κεφ.β', P.G.55, 322.

184 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλιππησίους Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία θ', κεφ. α', P.G.62, 240.

185 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραν Ἐπιστολὴν, ὁμιλία α', κεφ.γ', P.G.61, 387.

search thoroughly and find the real God, to believe in Him with all the power of his heart. He has to willingly obey in His saving commandments and to show full confidence in the providence of God, chiefly for himself, but also for the human race by extension.

It is this faith, which forms the dynamic and voluntary 'yes' to God's invitation, which has real value and is rewarded by God. It is not so much by the faith through which we perform observable and comprehensible miracles¹⁸⁶ so much as it is the faith that is based on our own accord and our willing obedience to Him and in particular, when the conditions and events of our life dishearten us from this purpose. When the faithful Christian shows the possible, total trust and reciprocation to God's calling and at the same time, he defies dangers, slander, harm, contempt, deprivation and anything else that is entailed in the life of a faithful Christian; he also receives the grace of God that completes and perfects his work.

After all, St. John Chrysostom stresses that this is the reason that disbelief is a sin because although faith can be precisely deemed as a great gift of God, this gift does not come to us unless we become worthy of receiving it internally; unless we acquire our initial personal faith.¹⁸⁷ If faith was solely a gift of God and not our personal achievement, then logically, neither the disbelievers would have to be punished or the faithful to be crowned and praised.¹⁸⁸

Since the faith of many Christians towards God is subdued, their willing submission, obedience, and trust towards Him are imperfect, and this is why their whole life subsists on mediocrity. Despite the fact that some are baptised Christians, they do not

186 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, *Eis tήn ἀποστολικήν ρῆσιν...*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.δ΄-ε΄, P.G.51, 276.

187 *Eis tόν ριε΄ ψαλμόν*, κεφ.β΄, P.G.55, 322.

188 *Eis tήn ἀποστολικήν ρῆσιν...*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.ε΄, P.G.51, 276.

fully possess the first faith of their volition and certainly lack in active faith too.

Of course, this has disastrous consequences, not only to the relationship between man and God or between his fellow man, not only to the spiritual salvation of every faithful person but also, to every aspect of his social, family or even professional life. Without faith in God's help, man has difficulty making brave decisions, taking great steps in his life, having spiritual successes, acquiring virtues and primarily, sacrificing his self, by showing in this way his love towards the Creator as well as his fellow man.

2. THE INCREASE OF FAITH

As it is mentioned above, faith is a virtue. In other words, it demands free choice, consent and the toil of man but at the same time, the complicity of Holy Grace. Faith, like any other virtue, is not something static but something that is strengthened and perfected, reduced and weakened or it even ceases to exist.

No Christian should ever become complacent in his existing faith. Instead, he should always strive to perfect it and at the same time, pray that God will give him faith that goes beyond human measure; with which he will be able to do miracles and achieve the unachievable because *"all things are possible to him that believeth."* (Mark 9:23) He will have to aim for the greatest possible faith, so that he will claim, like the centurion, the blessing of our Jesus: *"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."* (Matthew 8:10)

The words of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem are distinct, *"if thou thinkest that thou really art faithful but hast not yet the fullness of faith, thou too hast need to say like the Apostles, Lord, increase*

*our faith: for some part thou hast of thyself, but the greater part thou receivest from Him.”*¹⁸⁹

Indeed, St. John Chrysostom goes on to add, “*to ascend to the heights of faith, one needs the providence of the Spirit.*”¹⁹⁰ At another time, he says that “*faith has a need of the assistance and consistency of the Spirit in order to remain steadfast, while the assistance of the Spirit usually stays with us when our life is pure, and our behaviour is flawless. Therefore, if we want to have steady and steadfast faith, we have to look after our virtue so that the abode of the Spirit in our soul will be ensured, which in turn ensures the power of faith.*”¹⁹¹

Consequently, God adds faith to our existing faith, but only if we wish and request so; only if we make ourselves worthy of the holy gifts through our pious life. After all, it is known that the Lord does not want to provide His gifts simply as a work of His philanthropy. It is His wish that His gifts should have the nature of a reward for our toils: He wishes to provide us with all that He is supposed to owe us.

Our personal exertion and toil are the basic requirements for the Lord to strengthen our faith. God gives us perfect faith in Him when we work hard to purify and cleanse our hearts as much as possible by acquiring virtues and primarily when we achieve humility. A pure and humble heart forms the essential condition for every virtue and, by extension, for faith to increase within us. If a man does not strive to shed selfishness, he will never accept Jesus as God and his Saviour. If he does not discard evil, hatred,

189 Κατήχησις Ε΄ φωτιζομένων, κεφ.θ΄, P.G.33, 516C-517A.

190 Εἰς τόν ριε΄ ψαλμόν, κεφ.β΄, P.G.55, 321.

191 Εἰς τήν ἀποστολικήν ρῆσιν..., ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.θ΄, P.G.51, 280.

self-interest, double-mindedness, hypocrisy, self-love, sensuality, he will never be able to accept His teachings of salvation.”¹⁹²

At the same time, man has to diligently strive to obtain this specific virtue. Saint John Chrysostom interprets the sentence of the Apostle Paul, who says that Abraham “*was strong in faith*” (Romans 4:20), by saying, “*See the pertinacity of Paul. For since this discourse was about them that work and them that believe, he shows that the believer works more than the other, and requires more power, and great strength and sustains no common degree of labour.*”

“*For they counted faith worthless as having no labour in it. Insisting then upon this, [the Apostle Paul] shows that it is not only he that succeeds in temperance, or any other virtue of this sort but he that displays faith also who requires even greater power. For as the one needs strength to beat off the reasoning of intemperance, so has the faithful man also a need of a soul endued with power, that he may thrust aside the suggestions of non-belief....*”

“*... Again, as works need power, so does faith. For in their case the body shares the toil, but in the faith the well-doing belongs to the soul alone. And so the labour is greater, since it has no one to share the struggles with it.*”¹⁹³

Undoubtedly, the effort with which every man endeavours to stabilise his faith and trust in God is great. A brave struggle is needed so that he will always be able to see with the eyes of his soul more ‘invisible’ things which are continually and ruthlessly attacked by waves of rationalism and doubt. A superhuman effort is needed so that one can trust his life completely to God,

192 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία κγ΄, κεφ.γ΄, P.G.57, 311.

193 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία θ΄, κεφ.ε΄-στ΄, P.G.60, 461-462.

but also, the life of his beloved ones; especially during the great afflictions of life.

Saint John the Chrysostom verifies all of the above by saying the following: *“But if Paul is thankful for the good of others, what will they suffer, who not only are not thankful, but ever pine at it. ‘For that your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another abounds.’ And how, you say, can faith increase? That is when we suffer dreadfully for it. It is a great thing for it to be established, and not to be carried away by reasoning. But when the winds assail us, when the rains burst upon us, when a violent storm is raised on every side, and the waves succeed each other- then that we are not shaken, is a proof of no less than this, that it grows, and grows exceedingly, and becomes loftier.”*¹⁹⁴

Thus, true, genuine, stable and great faith is the one that has been tried; it is the one that has gone through all the stages of the necessary tribulations. *“After all, the Lord of all that exists is accustomed to doing the following to all pious men. Although He promises, He does not grant His promises immediately but looks to cultivate and test the faith, obedience and great patience of the pious man, and then, with great generosity, He fulfils what He has promised.”*¹⁹⁵

Apostle Paul used to look forward to the increase in the faith of the Christians of his time with great happiness and anticipation: *“but having hope, when your faith is increased.”* (2 Corinthians 10:15) Holy Paul was certain that the increase in his spiritual children’s faith would give greater glory and impetus to the preaching of the Gospel.

194 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολὴν δευτέραν, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.α΄, P.G.62, 474.

195 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν, ὁμιλία νδ΄, κεφ. δ΄, P.G.54, 476.

A Christian should not miss any chance to increasing his faith through the constant study of the Holy Scriptures, the lives of our Church's Saints, as well as their holy teachings. The studious search for the Truth within the material of the holy revelation is necessary for the increase in faith. Again, St. John Chrysostom goes on to say, "*when we reach the graves of our holy Martyrs, then our spirit becomes loftier, eagerness becomes greater, and faith becomes warmer.*"¹⁹⁶ *The act of reading every God-inspiring Scripture becomes, to all that are careful, a reason for knowing the correct faith and piety,*¹⁹⁷ *and at the same time, it seizes the soul, as if from a fire, from all the evil thoughts and passions.*"¹⁹⁸

At the same time, we should not neglect, but instead, accept the advice, guidance and teachings of our spiritual fathers and guides, who, as the successors of the Holy Apostles, strive to help us in every way, so that our faith is strengthened. Spiritual fathers try to *'perfect that which is lacking in [the] faith'* (1 Thessalonians 3:10) of the Christians; in other words, to reduce the weaknesses and defects of their faith and to teach them with precision, all the dogmatic and moral truths they do not know.

Finally, the interpretation of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite, concerning the phrase of Apostle Paul, *'from faith to faith'* (Romans 1:17), is unique.

According to Saint Nicodemus, our faith has to increase, progress and become continuously stronger and greater.

Starting off as faith of our personal accord, our faith has to become a faith that is a gift from God; a synergy and revelation of God.

196 *Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν μεγαλομάρτυρα Δροσίδα...*, κεφ.β', P.G.50, 686.

197 *Περὶ τοῦ κατὰ Θεὸν πολιτεύεσθαι...*, κεφ.α', P.G.51, 41.

198 *Ὅτι χρήσιμος ἡ τῶν Γραφῶν ἀνάγνωσις...*, κεφ.α', P.G.51, 89.

Our faith, from faith in the teachings of the prophets, which looks like a plain seed, has to become a belief in the teachings of the Gospel. That is a faith which is alive with virtues and fruition.

From a faint and incomplete faith, our faith has to become perfect: the Everlasting faith.¹⁹⁹

3. THE DETERIORATION AND INFIRMITY OF FAITH

Since it is a virtue, faith has the ability to increase within a person, as was previously mentioned, but during certain moments of our life, it is possible that it can deteriorate or, as we shall see, it can even die.

On many occasions in the Bible, our Lord scathed the small amount of faith, the lack of faith and in general, the lack, weakness and infirmity of faith.

There are many reasons for the deterioration and weakening of faith. Of course, the most important reasons have to be sought for and discovered within each man, in what is relevant to his ability to make a free choice.

Indeed, the three sources of all the passions and sins: egotism, sensuality and avarice; are the ones that enter our hearts and substitute faith in God with faith in our selves, pleasure and wealth.

Saint John Chrysostom says specifically that, *“it is impossible for someone leading an impure life not to waver in matters of faith. So that you know that this is true, that evil deeds destroy the stability of faith, listen to what Paul the Apostle says in his epistle to Timothy. ‘Mightest war a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience; (good conscience, of course, can only ex-*

199 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἰδ' Ἐπιστολάς...*, τόμος α', υποσημείωσις 34, σελ.70.

ist through a virtuous life and good deeds); holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.”(1 Timothy 1: 18-19). At different times the Holy Apostle Paul says that *“the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith.”*²⁰⁰ (1 Timothy 6: 10)

Consequently, the excessive, passionate love and care towards our self, gradually leads us to the decrease of faith in Christ and the Gospel, which mainly teaches true love towards God and our fellow man. The more a man tries to accumulate wealth and satisfy his sinful desires and selfish will, the more his faith and obedience in Christ decreases, as He teaches precisely the opposite. As long as our life is self-centered, it ceases to be Christ-centred.

Faith in Christ and the Gospel cannot grow roots in hearts that are arrogant, sensual and insensitive since *“an impure life is an obstacle to the understanding of the highest truths.”*²⁰¹ After all, faith in the commandments of the Gospel constitutes cause for intolerable guilt in the heart of the selfish and sensual man; this is the reason that it is almost impossible for one to have true faith in Christ and lead an impure life at the same time.

The reason for the decrease of faith is also the overall indifference towards spiritual matters. The preoccupations and distractions of life and the attachment to material needs, usually suppress every interest in a spiritual life and communion with God and undoubtedly, bring coldness to the fervour of faith. (Matthew 13: 22) Simultaneously, apart from indifference, a wilful smattering in matters of faith can be observed, which in turn, becomes the reason for our belief in God to waver a lot easier.

200 *Εἰς τὴν ἀποστολικὴν ρῆσιν...*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.θ΄-ι΄, P.G.51, 280.

201 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Κορινθίους πρώτης Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία η΄, κεφ.β΄, P.G.61, 70.

Finally, there are also external factors that can become the cause of a decrease in our faith. The delusion that faith averts science and progress, as well as the falsified theory that there is no sufficient proof to support our belief are the most common reasons for the disturbance of our faith.

Nevertheless, the external influences of the hardships of life are the chief catalysts which lead to the challenging, wavering, or even destruction of our faith in God. (Matthew 13: 20-21) The various sorrows of life are the ones which, while they should be rendering our faith stronger, contrarily, shake it or even destroy it.

Concerning the above, Saint John Chrysostom says that Christ *“saith to Peter, ‘Behold Satan hath asked to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.’ (Luke 22:31) What is the meaning of ‘sift’? To turn and twist, and shake and stir and shatter, and worry, which is what takes place in the case of things that are winnowed: but I he says have restrained him, knowing that you are not able to endure the trial, for the expression ‘that thy faith fail not’ is the utterance of one who signifies that if he had permitted it his faith would have failed. Now if Peter who was such a fervent lover of Christ...would have been carried away and fallen from profession if Christ had permitted the devil to try him as much as he desired, what other man will be able to stand, apart from His help?”*²⁰²

At this point, it is worth mentioning that Jesus did not only reproach the men that did not believe His sermons and the ones that did not accept Him as God and Saviour of humankind. Jesus even reproved Peter the Apostle for a lack of and weak faith, for little faith and cowardice,²⁰³ for when he did not manage to walk on the sea (Matthew 14:31), but He also reproved His

202 Εἰς τὸν παραλυτικόν..., κεφ.β´, P.G.51, 51.

203 Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ματθαῖον..., ὁμιλία ν´, κεφ.β´, P.G.58, 506.

disciples,²⁰⁴ when they did not succeed in healing the epileptic (Matthew 17:20) or when they were overcome with fear that they would be shipwrecked. (Matthew 8:26)

Just as is evident in the above mentioned cases, it is clear that there indisputably are two kinds of faith: the dogmatic and the active. The first is the fruit of our personal choice and effort, while the second is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, when Christ reproached His disciples for having little and a weak faith, He meant that they did not have the active faith yet so that they would be able to perform miracles. The disciples, of course, had faith. They had the dogmatic faith with which they recognised their Teacher as the Saviour of the world. Nevertheless, their faith was not strong enough so that it could attract the active faith as well; this charismatic faith of the Holy Spirit, which would make them capable of performing miracles.

Something similar happens to us as well. Due to the fact that our faith in God is lukewarm and weak, we do not become worthy of receiving the active faith in addition to the dogmatic faith. Because our faith, our personal acceptance of Christ as God and Saviour, our obedience to the dogmatic truths and the moral commandments of the Gospel, and even our trust in God's Providence are flaccid, we cannot achieve wondrous events in our life and we are not capable of praying to God with fervour, so that He will intervene miraculously in difficult situations.

It is a fact that today's Christians, for all of the above reasons, 'lose' their faith very easily and at any time. To all those '*weak in the faith*' (Romans 14:1) Christians, Christ complains, "*where is your faith?*" (Luke 8: 25) "*Why are ye fearful, o ye of little faith?*" (Matthew 8:26) "*Do not be afraid, only believe.*" (Mark 5:36)

204 Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, ἐνθ' ἄνωτ. ὁμιλία νζ', κεφ.γ', P.G.58, 562-563.

Indeed, because having little faith is always followed by cowardice, people of little faith are always afraid and cannot act bravely in their life. They are afraid to fast, lest they sacrifice their health. They are afraid to give alms, lest God does not reward them generously, as He has promised, and they are impoverished. They are afraid to be humble and patient, lest their fellow man wrong them. They are afraid to marry and have children because they believe that God will not stand by them. They are afraid of life itself, as they show no trust in their Creator's Providence and promises, despite the fact that Jesus rebuked our weak faith by saying that if the Heavenly Father cares for the flowers in the meadows, He will do the same for us or on a greater scale. (Matthew 6:28-32)

Let us imitate Abraham, who *"staggered not at the promise of God through disbelief."* (Romans 4:20) As Saint John Chrysostom explains, *"Paul the Apostle does not say that Abraham did not disbelieve but that he did not discern, which means that he did not hesitate or doubt, even when the obstacles were so many."*²⁰⁵ *We, too, should never disbelieve in God's promises, or be resentful when He postpones doing something. On the contrary, when the Almighty Lord promises, we should show trust in His promises for the things that we do not see; much more than for what we see or have in our hands."*²⁰⁶ *"Never should we pry into or over-examine His wisdom, or say, 'why did this happen,' 'what is the purpose of this,' or 'how will something else take place?'"*²⁰⁷

Let us finish this chapter with the truly sagacious words of Saint Basil, *"We should not doubt or hesitate to believe what our Lord taught us, but be certain that every word of God is real*

205 Ὑπόθεσις τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους Ἐπιστολῆς, ὁμιλία θ', κεφ.ε', P.G.60, 461.

206 *Eis tὴν Γένεσιν*, ὁμιλία λθ', κεφ.α', P.G.57, 311.

207 *Πρὸς τοὺς σκανδαλισθέντας*, κεφ.ι', ΕΠΕ τόμος 33, σελ.548.

*and can be fulfilled, even if it contradicts the laws of nature as we know them.... After all, this is what constitutes the strife of faith”*²⁰⁸ so that, us too, will hear from Jesus: “*According to your faith be it unto you,*” (Matthew 9:29); let what you request be unto you, according to your faith of course.

4. FAITH AND WORKS

As we have seen, faith is one of the greatest virtues man can possess. Nevertheless, we will have to ask; is faith alone enough for our salvation or is the practice of Christian virtues necessary as well”? In other words, is our faith in God real if the good deeds or the practical application of the commandments of the Gospel are absent? At this point, the Gospel’s teaching is crystal clear but also, the interpretation given by our holy Elders is unanimous. Let us leave our Saints then, to teach us what should be the relationship between deeds and Orthodox faith; how should Orthodoxy and correct acts be combined.

James, the Apostle, or the Adelphotheos (brother-god), says characteristically in his Epistle: “*What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man says he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself...show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith. Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder.... Thou seest that faith wrought with [Abraham’s] works, and by works was faith made perfect.*” (James 2: 14-22)

208 Ἡθικά, ὁρος n', P.G.31, 712CD

When interpreting James the Apostle, Saint Nicodemus, the Hagiorite, says the following, *“Through these sayings, Adelphotheos wants to show that, actions are more certain and demonstrative than faith, since by faith existing unseen in our soul, it cannot be proven to others without the visible actions of the body, which follow and denote faith. Actions or deeds, though, can prove to others that the one who has them, also has faith in his soul. Because if he did not, he would not do these good, God-loving and pious deeds, which cannot be done by a faithless man.”*²⁰⁹

Let us see, though, how St. John Chrysostom also, in successive sermons, clearly defines that faith, which is not adorned with pious deeds, is false and feckless. *“We have no benefit calling ourselves Christians if our deeds are not in accordance to our name. If you wish, I will certainly present to you Adelphotheos James, this reliable witness, who says, ‘faith, if it hath no works, is dead.’”*Thus, it is essential to do good deeds continually because when they are absent, the title of ‘Christian’ cannot be of profit to us.”²¹⁰ *“This is why you are a Christian; so that you imitate Christ and obey His laws.”*²¹¹

*“The communication of your faith,” says Paul the Apostle to Philemon, “may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in the name of Christ Jesus; that is, that you may attain all virtue, that nothing may be deficient. For so faith becomes effectual, when it is accompanied by works. For ‘without works faith is dead.’” (James 2:26)*²¹²

209 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς ἑπτὰ καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς...*, ὑποσημείωσις 37, σελ.96.

210 *Περὶ μετανοίας*, ὁμιλία θ´, κεφ.α´, P.G.49, 343.

211 *Κατὰ Ἰουδαίων*, λόγος η´, κεφ.θ´, P.G.48, 941.

212 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Φιλήμονα Ἐπιστολήν*, ὁμιλία β´, κεφ.α´, P.G.62, 708.

*“After all, ‘faith without works is dead’, and works without faith are dead. For even if we have sound teachings but fail in living, the teachings benefit us nothing; likewise, if we take pains with life but are careless about teaching, that will not be any good to us either. So it is necessary to shore up this spiritual edifice of ours in both directions.”*²¹³

*“Let us instead place our credence in Sacred Scripture and heed what is told us there; let it be our concern to lay its sound teachings in our soul and be scrupulously careful about them and about our life. After all, it will be to no avail for us to get teachings right if we neglect life; nor will we be able to gain any value for our salvation if we have life but neglect the right teachings. It is necessary, you see, if we would wish to avoid hell and reach heaven, to be distinguished for both: correctness of doctrine and attention to life. What good, after all, tell me, is a tree reaching to the sky and bearing leaves aplenty if it is devoid of fruit? So, too, with the Christian: correct doctrine is of no benefit unless one attends to the business of living.”*²¹⁴

*“Faith is indeed great and brings salvation, and without it, it is not possible to ever be saved. It suffices not however of itself to accomplish this, but there is need of a right conversation also.”*²¹⁵

“Confession is not only expressed through faith, but is also expressed with good works. If there is no confession through works, we are really in danger of being chastened along with those that deny faith in Christ. After all, there is not only one way of denying but many different ways, these are listed by the Apostle Paul, when he said that, ‘They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him.’ (Titus 1:16) At a different time, he also

213 *Eis tήn Gένεσιν, ὁμιλία ιγ´, κεφ.δ´, P.G.53, 31.*

214 *Ἐνθ’ ἀνωτ. ὁμιλία ιγ´, κεφ.δ´, P.G.53, 110.*

215 *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τήν πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολήν, ὁμιλία ζ´, κεφ.α´, P.G.63, 59-60.*

said the following, *'If any provides not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.'* (1 Timothy 5: 8) and also, to avoid 'covetousness, which is idolatry.' (Colossians 3: 5)²¹⁶

*"Yet that a right faith avails nothing if ones life is corrupt, both Christ and the Apostle Paul declare, having taken more care for this latter part; Christ when He teaches, 'Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;,' (Matthew 7:21) and again, 'many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And I will profess unto them, depart from Me, you that work iniquity;,' (Matthew 22:23) for they who take not heed to themselves, easily slip away into wickedness, even though they have a right faith."*²¹⁷

In general, the perception that faith and deeds have to exist together, for our soul's salvation, is commonplace in the teachings of the holy Elders. St. Basil the Great says characteristically, *"For you know that unless illumined by faith in God, strictness of life avails nothing; nor will a right confession of faith, if void of good works, be able to present you before the Lord. Faith and works must be joined: so shall the man of God be perfect, and his life not halt through any imperfection."*²¹⁸

Saint Theodore of Studites supports the same views,²¹⁹ and he considers that, *"Christianity consists of two things; faith and deeds. If any of the two is absent, then the other does not give any benefit to the one that has it."*²²⁰

In addition, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem supports the view that *"the method of godliness consists of these two things, pious doc-*

216 *Eis tήn Άνναν...*, όμιλία γ', κεφ.ε', P.G.54, 659-660.

217 *Υπόμνημα εις τον άγιον Ιωάννην...*, όμιλία ξγ', κεφ.δ', P.G.59, 352.

218 *Επιστολή* 295, P.G.32, 1040A.

219 Fatouros, G., *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, Έπιστολή 534, σελ.807.

220 *Επιστολή κη'*, βιβλίο α', P.G.99, 1000.

*trines and virtuous practice: and neither are the doctrines acceptable to God apart from good works, nor does God accept the works which are not perfected with pious doctrines.”*²²¹

“We call perfect, the life that is correct and faithful,” says Saint Athanasius the Great.²²² After all, he goes on, “what is the benefit, if a man confesses God’s existence while at the same time he denies Him with his evil deeds? How is it possible for him to admit that he has a master although for whom he does not work for?”²²³

Similarly, Saint Isidore of Pelusium teaches that “our confession in that we believe in God is little if there is no relevant disclosure through good deeds. Because, if, while we confess that God exists, we do things that someone who does not believe that God exists does, how will these actions and behaviour of ours not fail to impeach and cancel out our confession?”²²⁴ Indeed, as the Saint writes in a different epistle, the followers of different religions will, logically, deride us and tell us, “You, that openly sin with your evil works, how do you claim to become worthy of being believed on the latent dogmas of your religion? Their reaction will be justifiable because religious faith might be a first and paramount possession but it has great need of a devout life so that the faithful will be able to reach perfection and the peak of a successful life.”²²⁵

When Saint Maximus the Confessor interprets the saying of Apostle Paul, “...for in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love,” (Galatians 5:6) he says that “you should not assume that plain

221 Κατήχησις Φωτιζομένων δ', κεφβ', P.G.33, 456B.

222 Περικοπαί διάφοροι, P.G.26, 1220C.

223 Περί παρθενίας ἡτοι περί ἀσκήσεως, κεφ. 15.

224 Ἐπιστολή πε', βιβλίο δ', P.G.78, 1145A.

225 Ἐπιστολή σκστ', βιβλίο δ', P.G.78, 1321A.

*faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone can save you. This is impossible unless you acquire love in Him too, through good deeds because just believing is something that the demons do as well.”*²²⁶



²²⁶ Κεφάλαια περί αγάπης, έκ.α.α', κεφ.λθ', ΕΠΕ τόμος 14, σελ.182.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE VALUE OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

1. THE VALUE OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Let us also examine, however, what value the Orthodox faith has in life and, chiefly, in the unity of our Church.

In the Nicene Creed, we confess faith in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. When we talk about One Church, we do not mean that there is simply One and only Church but that the Church is one, a unique and single fundamental unity.

The Church is One because it has one Head: Christ; [it has] one soul that gives life to it and sanctifies it: the Holy Spirit; [and it has] one body (of Christ), one faith; one baptism; one beginning and one purpose. All of the above characteristics, make the Church one unbreakable and single entity, which is retained unchanged in essence, through the centuries and until the end of time.

The mystery of the Eucharist is the epicentre and a determinant factor for the unity of Church life. Through the Eucharist, faithful Christians are united both together, as well as with Christ, in a unique body. *“Christ becomes ours; the life of Christ becomes ours; His blood becomes our blood.”*²²⁷

The second determinant factor for the unity of the Church is the common dogmatic faith. The holy Elders, directly associate the uniqueness of the Church with the unique character of the unchanged apostolic faith. For them, apostolic faith does not exist outside the canonical limits of the One Church, nor does the One Church exist outside the boundaries of Truth, in other words, the Orthodox faith. Thus, Orthodox faith and the uniqueness of the Church coexist, according to the holy Elders.

Indeed, when Saint Athanasius the Great interpreted the words of Paul the Apostle, *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism”* (Ephesians 4:5), he said that through these words, the Holy Apostle *“declares with precision that only one truthful faith exists in the world; the one and only that the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church advocates.”*²²⁸

Likewise, Saint Simeon of Thessalonica teaches that the One, Orthodox Church is undoubtedly the holder of the Orthodox faith.²²⁹ In other words, the One Church consists of all the ones that confess Christ *“aright, along with Peter and the Apostles”*, or else, the *“assembly that confess their faith in an orthodox way”*²³⁰ and not in a disbelieving way.

227 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ἡ θέωσις ὡς σκοπός τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, σελ.30

228 *Πρός Αντίοχον*, ἐρώτησις ριβ´, P.G.28, 665D.

229 *Διάλογος ἐν Χριστῷ κατά πασῶν τῶν αἱρέσεων*, κεφ.κε´, P.G.155, 136B.

230 Ἀγίου Συμεῶν Θεσσαλονίκης, *Ἑρμηνεία... εἰς τό... Σύμβολον*, P.G.155, 796D.

Also, during the 16th century, Jeremias II of Constantinople stressed that *“the Christians’ Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is one;”* the members of which, possess the orthodox faith: *“the ones that belong to the Church of Christ, belong to the Truth.”*²³¹

In his Confession of Faith, Dositheos of Jerusalem (1672) mentions that *“We believe that members of the Catholic Church are all and solely the Faithful, who, having received the flawless Faith of the Saviour Christ from Christ Himself, from the Apostles and the Holy Ecumenical Synods, they adhere to their flawless faith without wavering.”*²³²

At the same time, aside from the celebration of the Eucharist, a determinant factor for the unity between the Local Churches around the world and their thorough identification with the global Church, is certainly, the togetherness, and unanimity in the confession of the shared Apostolic and Orthodox faith.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria, maintains that the shared Orthodox faith unites the host of the Local Churches of the whole world. In reality then, because of their common dogmatic faith, all *‘the Churches of the world’*,²³³ constitute the Orthodox, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

According to the holy Elders, the unity of the Church is entirely impossible without unity in dogmatic faith and confession. Indeed, Saint John Chrysostom teaches that *“when we shall all believe alike then shall there be unity.”*²³⁴

For this reason, the Elders always advocated perseverance in the Orthodox faith, the paternal dogmas and the Tradition of

231 Ἰω. Καρμίρη, *Τά δογματικά καί συμβολικά μνημεῖα...*, τόμος α΄, σελ.457, 444.

232 Ὑνθ’ ἀνωτ. τόμος β΄, σελ. 755 [835].

233 *Εἰς τοὺς ψαλμούς*, ψαλμός μδ΄, P.G.69, 1041BC.

234 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους Ἐπιστολήν*, ὁμιλία ια΄, κεφ.γ΄, P.G.62, 83.

the Orthodox Church, without the existence of which, the unity of the Church would be fragmented. In a 13th century epistle to the Cypriot Christians, Patriarch Germanus II of Constantinople stressed the following: *“Anchor yourselves in faith, become valorous and mighty, by chastening the disorderly and gauging those tampering with piety. Do not betray any of the orthodox dogmas, which you have received from the past. Consider all life’s sorrows and losses to be happiness and profit, so that the treasure of the Orthodox Faith is safeguarded sacrosanct in you.”*²³⁵

With the term ‘ecclesiastical dogmas’, we mean the theoretical teachings of the Christian faith, which exist in the Gospel and the Holy Tradition. The holy and sacred dogmas constitute the crystallization and expression of the shared faith and the catholic conscience of the whole body of the Church through the centuries.

The value of Orthodox dogmas are so great that even Saint Maximus the Confessor decreed that the Church cannot exist without them.²³⁶ Also, because the Saint knew very well that every man *‘is sanctified through the correct confession of faith’*²³⁷, or else, through the absolute respect and the perfect acceptance of all the Orthodox dogmas, he argued that *‘I would rather die than have the slightest regret in my conscience, that I erred, in any way, in my faith towards God.’*²³⁸ After all, wonders Saint Theodore the Studite, *‘what is greater than faith?’*²³⁹

The Elders also proclaim unanimously, that it is wrong to distinguish dogmas into small or great, main or secondary, essential

235 K. N. Σάθα, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, τόμος β’, σελ. 19.

236 *Ἐξήγησις τῆς κινήσεως...*, κεφ.ε’, P.G.90, 117.

237 *Περί τῶν πραχθέντων...*, κεφ.κη’, P.G.90, 165A.

238 *Ἐξήγησις τῆς κινήσεως...*, κεφ.στ’, P.G.90, 121A.

239 *Ἐπιστολή ρξα’*, βιβλίο β’, P.G.99, 1501C.

or minor because they all share the same authority and weight among them as God's dogmas.²⁴⁰

Indeed, because the Christian teaching and faith form an independent and organic total, every attempt of rejection or contempt of any (seemingly) minor truth also leads, as the Ecclesiastical History teaches us, the denial of essential truths. *"The battle of the Holy Elders of our Church was, to maintain uninhibited the delivered faith because they knew that, even a little misrepresentation of the faith leads to greater misrepresentations and that the false dogma leads to both a flawed life and pastoral care, that jeopardizes a man's salvation."*²⁴¹

The words of St. John Chrysostom are very distinctive, *"For as he who but partially pares away the image on a royal coin renders the whole spurious, so he who swerves ever so little from the pure faith, soon proceeds from this to graver errors, and becomes entirely corrupted."*²⁴²

The words of the Encyclical of the Constantinople Synod in 1724 are also characteristic, *"The first, uttermost and prime work of the Christian profession, is the precise and immaculate faith and devoutness to God. This faith, like an undisturbed treasure and irremovable centrepiece of the soul, is necessary for all pious Christians, who profess to be genuine and perfect Christians, to always keep and never betray it, even to the slightest; while all that is related to piety and faith is to be kept completely unwavering... like healthy and pious members of the one body of the Church."*²⁴³

240 Μεγάλου Φωτίου, *Ἐπιστολή β΄*, βιβλίο α΄, P.G.102, 604C.

241 Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου Καψάνη, *Ὁρθόδοξος Μοναχισμός καὶ Ἅγιον Ὅρος*, σελ.43.

242 *Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὴν πρὸς Γαλάτας Ἐπιστολὴν*, ὁμιλία α΄, κεφ.στ΄, P.G.61, 622.

243 Mansi 37, 209.

Finally, a fundamental axiom of all the holy Synods and the Elders of the Church is that, while some local variations²⁴⁴ and diversifications are supportable and allowable in the external, liturgical life and worship, ethics and customs, as well as in the clerical forms and schematics of the Church, absolutely no cut-back is permitted within the sphere of the dogmas.

According to Saint Evlogios of Alexandria, cutbacks are only tolerable “*when nothing that belongs to the Church dogmas is changed.*”²⁴⁵ On the grounds that it is never permitted, according to the Orthodox Patriarch’s response to the Anglicans in 1718, to have “*any cutback or acquiescence*” regarding the holy dogmas, “*because they are unwavering, and they are safeguarded with enshrinement by all the Orthodox Christians.*”²⁴⁶

2. THE VALUE OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH IN THE UNIVERSALITY AND APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

The celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which maintains the union of the Body of the Church with its Head, Christ, together with common dogmatic faith, form the two main conditions, not only of the union but also of the other properties of the Church; the universality and the apostolicity.

The universality of the Church, is not so much a quantitative and geographical concept, as it is a qualitative. Its worldwide expansion does not measure the concept of the universality of

244 Μεγάλου Φωτίου, *Ἐπιστολή β´*, βιβλίο α´, P.G.102, 605C.

245 Μεγάλου Φωτίου, *Μυριόβιβλος*, 227, P.G.103, 956C.

246 Ἰω. Καρμίρη, *Τά δογματικά καί συμβολικά μνημεῖα...*, τόμος β´, σελ.808-809 [888-889].

the Church. When the early Christians used the words 'Catholic Church', they never meant a global Church.

In the qualitative sense of the term universality, the Church is Catholic because it teaches, *"universally and unfailingly all the doctrines which ought to come to man's knowledge."*²⁴⁷ According to Gregory VI of Constantinople (1868), *"ecumenical Church and true catholicity, is this holy and pure body in which, the pure teaching of the Apostles is summarized, regardless of its material number."*²⁴⁸

The word 'Catholic' then, always stressed the Orthodoxy of the Church, the Truth of the 'One' Church, in contrast to the spirit of heretical separation and differentiation. Thus, as the Gospel spread around the world and the heretics and schismatics, having separated themselves from the universal Church, formed separate communities- particularly from the second-century onwards-, the universal Church that preserved the proper faith was named 'Catholic'.²⁴⁹ Thus, while it dispersed around the world, at the same time, the Church formed a single body and a whole; the One and only, pure, perfect and authentic Church of Christ. Indeed, any deviation- large or small- from the dogmatic teaching of the Church, was called heresy by the Holy Elders.²⁵⁰

The Church of Christ is also called Apostolic because it was founded by the first and greatest 'Apostle' (Hebrews 3:1), Jesus Christ. It was built *"upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone"* (Eph-

247 Ἀγίου Κυρίλλου Ἱεροσολύμων, *Κατήχησις Φωτιζομένων in '*, κεφ. κγ', P.G.33, 533AB.

248 Ἰω. Καρμίρη, *Τά δογματικά καί συμβολικά μνημεῖα...*, τόμος β', σελ. 929 [1009].

249 Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, *Ἐπιστολή ε'*, P.G.46, 1029BC.

250 Ὁσίου Συμεών τοῦ νέου Θεολόγου, *Κατήχησις λβ'*, τόμος γ', σελ.321.

sians 2:20) and has always been maintained the same, exactly as it was founded by the Apostles.

The apostolicity of the Church is on the one hand distinguished by the apostolicity of teaching, which establishes the Church as the mouth of Christ and the Apostles through the centuries. On the other hand, the Church is distinguished by the apostolicity of the succession, whereby the current bishops and the liturgists of the sacred mysteries of the Church in general, descend from the Apostles themselves, through a continuous and unbroken succession.

Thus, a Church ceases to be Apostolic and consequently, One and Holy and Catholic and the true Church of Christ, if it breaks the apostolic succession of the ordinations of its liturgists or, if it adopts new, heretical doctrines, foreign to the apostolic teaching.

As we have seen, however, without a doubt, the fall from true faith also implies the fall from the Catholic Church of Christ; the fall from the Church, which sanctifies man with its holy sacraments, uniting him with our Holy God.

*“How are they of the Catholic Church, who have shaken off the Apostolical faith?”*²⁵¹ asks the great Athanasius. *“As there is only one Christ, says Saint Cyprianus, so there is only one Church, which is the only one that offers salvation. For this reason, only the Church can provide the Mysteries, and outside the Church, it is not possible to celebrate any Mystery with validity”*²⁵² because *“wherever the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit too; and wherever God’s Spirit is, this is where the Church and every virtue is.”*²⁵³

251 *Κατά Ἀρειανῶν, λόγος α΄, κεφ.δ΄, P.G.26, 20A.*

252 *Ι. Κοτσώνη, Ἡ κανονικὴ ἀποσις περὶ τῆς ἐπικοινωνίας μετὰ τῶν ἑτεροδόξων, § 11, p. 52.*

253 *Ἀγίου Εἰρηναίου, Ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπή..., βιβλίον γ΄, κεφ.κδ΄, P.G.7, 966C.*

As evident from the above reasons, it becomes apparent that the adoption and the exact preservation of the Orthodox doctrines guarantee that every believer will stay in the body of the Church, in which alone all sacred Mysteries are celebrated.

Finally, the holy Elders consider proper faith to be the essential prerequisite for the salvation of the soul and suggest perseverance and commitment to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Besides, the Very Founder of our Church said: *“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:16). According to His true and indisputable testimony then, the basic premises of salvation of every human is, on the one hand, the belief in the apostolic teachings and on the other, the entrance within the boundaries of the Church through baptism and the communion of the other Sacraments.

Saint Maximus the Confessor instructs us to *“keep the great and first medicament for our salvation, the inheritance of good faith; confessing boldly with soul and body, as the Fathers taught us.”*²⁵⁴ Also, according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, only in our holy Church *“receiving instruction and behaving virtuously, shall we attain the kingdom of heaven, and inherit eternal life.”*²⁵⁵ Indeed, as the holy Chrysostom adds, *“a pure life profits nothing when doctrines are corrupt.”*²⁵⁶

Consequently, the practise of virtues and good deeds alone, is not sufficient for the salvation of our souls but rather, what is primarily required at the same time, is the perseverance in the faith of the Catholic Church. Virtuous life and the achievement of good deeds can also be achieved by the heterodox, or even by the non-Christians. Nevertheless, lack of good faith and residing

254 Ἐπιστολή ιβ', P.G.91, 465D.

255 Κατήχησις Φωτιζομένων ιη', κεφ.κη', P.G.33, 1049AB.

256 Ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην..., ὁμιλία ξστ', κεφ.γ', P.G.59, 369.

out of the body of the Orthodox Church and out of the body of Christ, cannot guarantee the salvation of their souls.

The Orthodox Church is one and unique; an arc of salvation that is presented by God. Thus, if the Church is the Body of Christ by Whom, His lifesaving, and redeeming work continues after His ascension into Heaven, it is natural to accept that the life and activity of the Church, pursues the same objective that its Founder sought after: the salvation and theosis of man. Consequently, to achieve the eternal goods, one should necessarily believe correctly, be a member of the Catholic Church and receive the blessing of the Sacraments from it.

3. “WE ALL BELIEVE IN THE SAME GOD.”

An opinion that is often heard is the following: *“There is only one God and, everyone believes in the same God. Simply, everyone names Him as he wants.”*

It is worth wondering, based on what we have developed thus far if this phrase befits Orthodox Christians; the people that have experienced the true faith and accepted, within the Church, the holy baptism. Why have such casualness when we talk and think about God?

It is undeniable that every man has the right to be an atheist or to believe in any ‘god’ he wants to. Nevertheless, the one who wants to be an Orthodox Christian is not entitled to degrade his faith in this way.

Orthodoxy has no intention of ever imposing itself on anyone. If our Lord wanted to impose onto people to have faith in Him, it would be sufficient enough for Him to appear to us for a few minutes; it would suffice to show us briefly a part of His glory; this would be enough to force us to accept Him. However, neither our

Lord nor Orthodoxy is ever imposed on people. As this deprives us of our personal freedom, it would be of no value.

In this light, Orthodoxy upholds the right of every man to believe, in what he wants to and if he wants to. However, Orthodoxy's respect in human freedom and love towards all people without exception does not mean, under any circumstances, that at the same time, our faith can be levelled in this way and thus compared with or paralleled to the teachings of other religions or doctrines. It is one thing to accept religious or dogmatic diversity, have mutual respect and peaceful coexistence between people with different beliefs, and it is another to have the comparative coexistence or the approximation of various religious beliefs.

Moreover, religious syncretism is totally rejected by the Orthodox Church. In Philosophy, the term syncretism is used to indicate the uncritical blending and harmonizing of dissimilar, or even contradictory thoughts, while in religion, the term indicates the phenomenon of misguided blending, fusion and coexistence of different religions and types of worship, correct or erroneous, with the aim of their interaction and distortion.

Through dogmatic syncretism, the tolerance across the heretical dogmas and erroneous beliefs are increased to a degree and thus lead up to indifference towards faith and apathy towards the Christian truth.

This book will not analyse: 1) the fate of man who believes in different dogmas or religions, 2) why God did not give man the chance to know Him or 3) how and on what basis and what criteria man will be judged by. These are other matters that demand specific and immense analysis.

What is necessary to stress, though, is that it never befits Orthodox Christians to use this kind of expression. If all religions led to the same God and were the 'means' through which man approaches the absolute and succeeds to reach his destination, then why were so many holy martyrs sacrificed for their faith?

Why did the Holy Apostles jeopardize their lives and most of them suffer death during the periods of their preaching? Why is it that even God Himself took on human nature, taught us and was sacrificed for us, if all religions lead to the same God, regardless of the name they give him?

Jesus taught us and proved, with as much proof as He wished to give to us, that He is the real God; that He is the only God. In fact, He demanded that neither a word nor a letter be changed, from all that he taught us. Today, how dare we call ourselves Orthodox and at the same time accept that the Buddhists and Hindus believe in the true God themselves, that they lead man to the real God, regardless of the name they want to give him and regardless of the 'religion' they advocate?

If a 'clever' man establishes his personal religion tomorrow, influencing and capturing crowds of followers, will we have to show respect to him and his teaching and consider that it leads to the real God?

To reiterate, we totally respect all man and their rights. We must consider their teachings, however, as figments of the human intellect or even demonic inventions and totally reject them.

The persistence of Orthodoxy for faith in the true God certainly does not imply arrogance, intolerance or hostility but respect for the Truth and devotion to the revelation of God on Earth. The act of evangelism never reveals a disposition of enforcement or conversion but an act of love that seeks to enlighten a man who is in ignorance or fallacy. The refusal of an Orthodox Christian to compare his faith with other philosophies of other religions is not an act of fanaticism or fundamentalism but an act that flows from the plenitude and peace of mind that the union with the true God, bestows him with.

The people who support the expression 'all men believe in the same God', not only confuse religions, deities and ways of worship but at the same time, the moral teachings of various

other religions with Orthodox teachings. And I wonder; can an Orthodox Christian ever compare the teachings of Christ with the ones of other religions?

To sum up, I would like to say that as Orthodox Christians, we believe that our Church is one and unique. It is an ark of salvation, which is founded by God, which accepts and teaches all the dogmatic truths about the real God and it presents man with the correct way to worship God, through its sacramental life.

An Orthodox Christian that does not believe these truths and does not try to enlighten the ones outside the Church, so that they experience the true faith, then probably is not a conscious Christian. It is our duty to lead the atheists, as well as the heterodox or non-Christians, to the true faith and the Church of Christ.

At the same time, we ought to admonish, with love, patience and humility, our Orthodox brothers, and sisters that, for various reasons, have been misled and have accepted, more or less, religious syncretism or even dogmatic minimalism, which is an attitude of complaisance towards the dogmas of our faith. Isn't it time we realised that some values in our life must remain completely non-negotiable?



4. "BUT I BELIEVE IN MY OWN PERSONAL WAY."

A phrase that is often said when a discussion with one's closest to them takes a theological turn is as follows, "*I believe in God too, and very much indeed. I just believe in my personal way.*"

Most people use this sentence to convey a particular meaning. Their conscience is content that they are close to God and at the same time they seem to agree and adapt to all the various categories of man. They appear to agree with the Christians that are faithful, sentient and consistent to their spiritual duties, but only on the matter of faith. At the same time, though, they also agree with the unfaithful, as they show that they too, refuse to take part in the ritualism and the ecclesiastical establishment.

Thus, this category of man, who considers that they follow the middle-of-the-road, 'reasonable' and royal road, seem to be the majority of people nowadays. It is this category of man, as our Lord says (Matthew 6:24), that follows two lords and serves two masters. Nevertheless, in reality, as our Lord goes on to say, that this is impossible; it is inevitable that they have to decide very soon, whom will they truly love and to whom will they choose to submit themselves to.

Is then "*I believe but in my own personal way*" a correct and Orthodox phrase? Our Church considers that this sentence does not befit Orthodox Christians. It would not befit Protestants either, despite the liberality and tolerance that characterize its devotional, moral and even dogmatic section of confession.

Of course, I do not mean that this is a phrase that characterizes non-correct Christians or the Christians that are outside the Church. Nevertheless, it belongs to Christians that, for some

reason, do not show the necessary responsibility and seriousness towards the matter of the existence of God and faith in Him.

After all, this sentence is not so much superficial, as it is conflicting. Considering, what does the word 'believe' mean? "I believe" means that I trust someone, that he convinces me and that I abide in him. Thus, it is as if saying: "I am convinced and abide in someone but at the same time, I do what I want and not what he prescribes." It is as if one is saying, "I love my spouse but I always want to get my way."

Consequently, this controversial phrase means that "although I believe and accept our God, although I often beseech Him to help me and although I firmly believe that He helps me, as I do feel His facilitation, I nevertheless place myself away from every ritualism and human, rather than holy canon laws."

Namely, we abstain from what the clergy teaches that is necessary for our salvation. We refuse to be compelled to go to church very often, to fast during certain days, to receive Holy Communion, to participate in the mystery of confession and so much more. We consider all the above habits to be ritualism and human inventions. After all, those of us who do not follow them are much better than many others that do follow them precisely, and this alone proves and justifies that their observance is a Pharisaic formalism.

Based upon these arguments, the glaring defects of the clergy are sometimes projected, who in turn identify themselves as the representatives of God, requiring absolute obedience and respect. The misdeeds of the priests can be used as a strong excuse for many people to believe in their own personal way and not in the way that the priests teach.

What is the answer to all this? Is an Orthodox Christian entitled to invoke this phrase and then follow a singular way of faith and worshiping of God? Of course not. If a statute governs even the simplest of human societies, it is inconceivable that the

Church, the body of Christ, all those who believe in God correctly, this theanthropic and God-inspired institution will not have a crystal clear statute and specific regulation. It is impossible that there are uncertainties in the doctrinal teaching of the Church and grave inaccuracies in its administration and divine worship. After all, our Lord Himself asked the faithful to observe all of His commandments without exception (Matthew 28:20) and at the same time, for respect in even the slightest point of His teaching that, according to His wish, should always remain unchanged. (Matthew 5:18)

The way in which, everyone ought to worship his Creator is just one, as one is our dogmatic faith and one is the way of administering the Church. It is wrong to consider divine worship as a human invention. It is unfair to connect it to the imperfections of a few representatives of the clergy or to some faithful people who are not so punctual in their Christian duties.

The participation in the sacramental life of our Church, as a means of unification with God in a mysterious way, is something we have no right to doubt. Jesus Himself undoubtedly recommended the necessity of our participation in the mysteries of our Church such as baptism, ordination, marriage and especially, confession and the Eucharist.

The sentence, "I believe in God in my own personal way", otherwise stated, "I worship God in the way I want," as it is remote from the mysteries of our Church that are necessary for theosis and our salvation; it is foreign to the Orthodox tradition. Those who allege this phrase ought to reconsider using and accepting it and they primarily ought to review all that this sentence suggests. The Church invites them, truly loves and waits for them patiently. All of us, at some point in our lives, possibly supported this sentence. Let us never consolidate it, though; let it never become our conviction; we can always repent and reconsider.

Let us not deceive ourselves. 'I believe in God' means that I accept all that He teaches in the Gospel, and

the Gospel is a teaching of love. Love towards God and love towards our fellow man are two sides of the same coin. Let us not think that it is solely enough to be good and to love our fellow man, without showing our love towards God. Just like the mother that embraces her child tightly, in the same way, the truly faithful Christian, continually embraces Jesus in his arms, through the mystery of the Eucharist.

Praying is not enough for the proper Christian. Jesus not only called for us to pray, but He also asked that we continually participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist, after the necessary cleansing of ourselves with the sacrament of confession. It is certain that we do not love and believe in God if we do not obey in these that are His most basic commandments.

The one that truly loves Jesus, by constantly going to church and receiving Holy Communion, is not concerned with the imperfections of the other faithful. He does not even see them because he always devotes his mind to the beloved face of the sweetest Jesus.

He does not even falter with the weaknesses of the priests because he can choose his spiritual father and physician of his soul, just as he has the right to pick a doctor for his physical ailments. I believe that also, doctors are sometimes unworthy of our confidence because of their human imperfections, lack of sufficient scientific grounding and when some take advantage of the pain of the patients; their clients.

We act accordingly in both cases of spiritual fathers and doctors. Thus, we search for the most suitable and capable one and avoid those that we do not fully consider trustworthy and deserving to guide and advise us. Why is it that the weaknesses and imperfections of the clergy should avert us from healing our souls?

Let us not invoke that phrase ever again. If, until now, we espoused it, let us reconsider through the advice of Christ; with the help of an experienced spiritual doctor. Christ gave the spiritual fathers the ability to give us counselling and guidance. To His successors, Christ gave spiritual power to legislate on all matters relating to the divine worship and the administration of the Church. We ought to know that, when we obey them, it is as if we obey Christ Himself. After all, these are His words and not ours: *“He who hears you (My disciples) hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me.”* (Luke 10:16)



