



February 14, 2010

**FEAST OF THE MEETING OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR
JESUS CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE;
FORGIVENESS SUNDAY**

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE THREE:

Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad! For the Lord has shown strength with His arm! He has trampled down death by death! He has become the firstborn of the dead! He has delivered us from the depths of hell, and has granted to the world great mercy!

MEETING OF OUR LORD TROPARION, Tone One:

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace! From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those who sat in darkness! Rejoice and be glad, O Righteous Elder; you accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls, who grants us the Resurrection.

MEETING OF OUR LORD KONTAKION, Tone One:

By Your Nativity You sanctified the Virgin's Womb, and blessed Symeon's hands, O Christ God. Now You have come and saved us through love. Grant peace to all Orthodox Christians, O Only Lover of Man!

SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS KONTAKION, Tone Six:

O Master, Teacher of wisdom, Bestower of virtue, Who teaches the thoughtless and protects the poor, strengthen and enlighten my heart. O Word of the Father, let me not restrain my mouth from crying to You: "Have mercy on me, a transgressor, O merciful Lord!"

HYMN TO THE THEOTOKOS, *Instead of "It is truly meet..."*, TONE THREE

O Virgin Theotokos, hope of all Christians! Protect, preserve, and save those who hope in you!

We faithful saw the figure in the shadow of the law and the Scriptures: every male child that opened the womb was holy to God. Therefore, we also magnify the first-begotten Son of the unoriginate Father, the first-born Son of the unwedded Mother!

EPISTLE & COMMENTARY

THE PROKIMENON IN THE 8TH TONE:

Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!

AND IN THE 3RD TONE:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

ROMANS 13:11 - 14:4 (For Forgiveness Sunday)

Brethren, do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

HEBREWS 7: 7-17 (For the Feast of the Meeting of our Lord)

Brethren, now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood, being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.

For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

ALLELUIA

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Your Name, O Most High.

Lord, now allow Your servant to depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation.

COMMENTARY on ROMANS 13:11-14:4

As Orthodox Christians, we understand that there are certain things that can not be compromised, while there are other things in which the Church allows some flexibility. God is gracious, and allows diversity in these doubtful things (matters not related to essential doctrines and moral teachings). The weak in the faith are people who assign primary importance to secondary matters. The two examples of flexible areas given here involve food restrictions and the observance of liturgical calendars--things which the weak might try to use to judge others, or to divide the Church. In both cases, we are commanded to give flexibility to others, just as God Himself does. May Christ our God strengthen our weak faith, and help us to sacrificially love each other as He intended!

GOSPEL & COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 6: 14-21 (*For Forgiveness Sunday*)

Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

LUKE 2: 22-40 (*For the Meeting of our Lord*)

At that time, when the days of purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "*Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD*"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*" And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary, His mother, "Behold, this

Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. So when they had performed these things, according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

COMMENTARY on Matthew 6: 14-21

Christ’s words reinforce one simple fact: we must forgive others in order to be forgiven by God. Or, put another way, those who do not forgive are not forgiven. This teaching is repeated in the parable of the unforgiving servant (18: 21-35), which concludes with the same teaching. To not forgive others is to willfully flee from the forgiveness of God for ourselves. This teaching explicates the fact that our intention must remain on our eternal reward, and not our earthly one. Our fasting must reflect this as well. Fasting is for the growth of the spirit and the glory of God, not so that others may see and praise our effort. The focus of our fast, just as the focus of our forgiveness, must be so that God sees it in secret and rewards us openly. May Christ grant us the humility, strength and endurance to forgive those who have offended us and fast for the glory of God.

SPIRITUAL ARTICLES

From *The Prologue for Feb. 2/Feb. 14* by St. Nikolai Velimirovic:

The Meeting of Our Lord

The fortieth day after His birth, the All-holy Virgin brought her divine Son into the Temple of Jerusalem, in accordance with the Law, to dedicate Him to God and to purify herself (Leviticus 12:2-7, Exodus 12:2). Even though neither the one nor the other was necessary, the Lawgiver did not want in any way to transgress His own Law, which He had given through Moses, His servant and prophet. At that time, the high-priest Zacharias, the father of John the Forerunner, was serving in the Temple. Zacharias placed the Virgin, not in the temple area reserved for women, but rather in the area reserved for virgins. On this occasion two very special persons appeared in the Temple: the Elder Simeon and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. The righteous Simeon took the Messiah in his arms and said: Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation (Luke 2:29-30). Simeon also spoke the following words about the Christ-child: Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). Then Anna, who from her youth had served God in the Temple by fasting and prayer, recognized

the Messiah and glorified God. She then proclaimed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem the coming of the long-awaited One. But the Pharisees who were present in the Temple, having seen and heard all, became angry with Zacharias because he had placed the Virgin Mary in the area reserved for virgins, and they reported this to King Herod. Convinced that this was the new king spoken of by the Magi from the East, Herod immediately sent his soldiers to kill Jesus. In the meantime, the holy family had already left the city and set out for Egypt under the guidance of an angel of God. The Feast of the Meeting of our Lord in the Temple was celebrated from earliest times, but the solemn celebration of this day was established in the year 544, during the reign of Emperor Justinian.

The Holy New Martyr Jordan

Born in Trebizond, Jordan was a coppersmith by trade. Because he openly defended his faith in Christ and unmasked Islam, Jordan suffered at the hands of the Turks in 1650 at Galata in Constantinople. The monk Gabriel, a canonarch of the Great Church [Hagia Sophia] in Constantinople, suffered in the same manner in the year 1672.

HYMN OF PRAISE

Saint Simeon the God-receiver
When winter encountered spring,
The aged Simeon was of good fortune:
He encountered the long-awaited One
Who was foretold by the prophets.
The treasury of all heavenly riches
Was seen as a naked infant by Simeon.
And in this manner Simeon prophesied:
“Evening has descended upon my life;
This One is set to conquer many
And to raise many.” Thus the spirit spoke—
The elder’s prophecy was fulfilled:
Jesus became the measure and the standard,
The source of happiness, peace and joy,
But also the target of disputes and maliciousness.
One He lifts up, the other He overturns,
And Paradise and hades He opens to men.
Let everyone choose whatever their hearts tell them.
In Paradise with Christ! That is our hearts’ desire.

REFLECTION

Speaking about the gradual spread of the celebration of Christ’s Nativity, St. John Chrysostom said: “Magnificent and noble trees, when planted in the ground, shortly attain great heights and become heavily laden with fruit; so it is with this day.” So it is also with the day of the Meeting of our Lord. From the beginning this day was commemorated among Christians, but the solemn celebration began in the time of the great Emperor Justinian. During his reign, a great pestilence afflicted the people in Constantinople and its vicinity, so that five thousand or more people died daily. At the same time a terrible earthquake occurred in Antioch. Seeing man’s inability to prevent these misfortunes, the emperor, in consultation with the patriarch, ordered a period of fasting and prayer throughout the

entire empire. And, on the day of the Meeting itself, he arranged great processions throughout the towns and villages, that the Lord might show compassion on His people. And truly, the Lord did show compassion, for the epidemic and earthquake ceased at once. This occurred in the year 544. From that time on, the Feast of the Meeting began to be celebrated as a great feast of the Lord. The tree, in time, grew and began to bring forth abundant fruit.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

SPECIAL APPEAL

Dear reverend clergy, dear children in Christ,

Blessed beginning of the Great Paschal Lent, that bring us into the Lord's and our Pascha, into the Cross and Resurrection - Christ's and ours in Him.

I am sure that all of you read recent appeals of Decani Monastery Relief Fund about emergency need for a multi-purpose vehicle for a village in Kosovo. Bellow, you can read the whole letter in its entirety.

One of our eparchiotes suggested that we collect from each parish in our Diocese, only \$100.00 and along with other Serbian dioceses we can pull the money together and send it to our brothers and sisters in great need.

Please respond to this minimal plea favorably and let's pull our strength together!

With paternal love,

prayerfully yours in Christ
bpMaxim

Urgent Request for Assistance

To: All Parish Priests and Executive Boards

From: Metropolitan Christopher
Bishop Longin
Bishop Mitrophan
Bishop Maxim

Date: February 10, 2010

Re: **Special Appeal for Help from the Decani Monastery Relief Fund**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As explained in the attached e-mail from Fr. Nektarios Serfes, there is an urgent need to purchase a replacement van for the Serbian village of Kos located in Kosovo, for a cost of \$15,000.

We your bishops request from each of our parishes a voluntary assessment of at least \$100, and, that these contributions be sent to the office of your bishop by February 21, 2010. Upon receiving a response from all parishes, we will forward the money to Decani Monastery Relief Fund, via Fr. Nektarios.

If every parish contributes this very small amount, together we can provide significant assistance to our long-suffering brothers and sisters in Kosovo. Please respond favorably to this opportunity to participate in a most worthwhile cause. However, if you are unable to participate with a contribution, please let your bishop know by February 21.

Thank you very much in advance for your positive response.

In God's work:

Metropolitan Christopher
Bishop Longin
Bishop Mitrophan
Bishop Maxim

Enc: E-mail from Fr. Nektarios

**IC/XC
NI/KA**

Press Release

The Decani Monastery Relief Fund Inc. USA

A Special Appeal for Help from the Decani Monastery Relief Fund

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May our Gracious God always bless you!

There is a village in Kosovo that needs your generous support now! The Serbian village of Kos located in Kosovo has only one vehicle available to serve the following important purposes: transports thirty children daily to school from their homes located several miles away (and back again later in the day); transports sick people for medical care whenever necessary (again located several miles away); takes villagers on shopping trips to stores located in unfriendly areas; and represents the only transportation for a multitude of other purposes, including emergency travel. This van is old and has essentially ceased to function. The village has decided it needs a vehicle that is mechanically functional to help accomplish this desperate important task. The old van has now lived out its life and has no amount of repair work allow it to operate on a consistent basis or even on a daily basis.

This van is old and has essentially ceased to function. The village has decided it needs a new vehicle that is mechanically functional to help accomplish these desperately important tasks. The old van has now lived out its life and no amount of repair work will allow it to operate on a safe and consistent basis or even on a daily basis. I myself have experienced the hazardous nature of travel in this ancient vehicle.

The Decani Monastery Relief Fund (DMRF) - with the blessings of Bishop Teodosije - has authorized us to purchase a used, good quality van from Germany to help the Serbian village of Kos in this hour of desperate need.

This van will cost **\$15,000.00** and carries nine passengers. We are humbly asking you to contribute to a special fund which will allow us to purchase this van for our Serbian friends in Kosovo.

What a blessing this working van would be for the village of Kos and its people!

Thank you humbly!

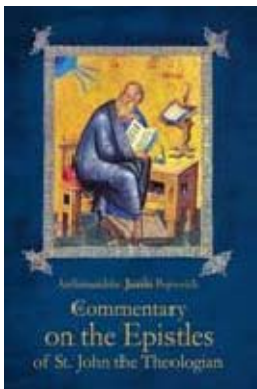
May the grace and the love of our God always be with you!

Peace to your soul!

Humbly in Christ our Lord,

+ Very Reverend Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes
President of the Decani Monastery Relief Fund Inc. USA
Cell phone: 208-860-2479

FROM SEBASTIAN PRESS:

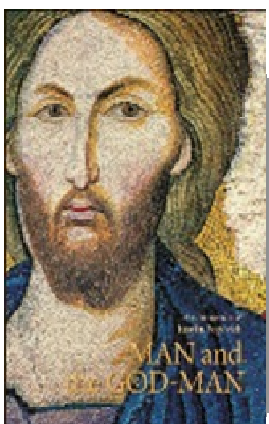


Commentary on the Epistles of St. John the Theologian
By Archimandrite Justin Popovic

Retail price: \$7.

This Commentary on the Epistles of St. John the Theologian - published now, three years after the blessed repose of Venerable Fr. Justin (on the Feast of the Annunciation, 1979) - was written by the tireless Messenger of Christ forty years ago, in circumstances similar to those in which Christ's Holy Evangelist John wrote his sacred Epistles.

The text of this 93-page soft-bound book has been translated from the Serbian by Radomir M. Plavsic. Published by Sebastian Press, Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Contemporary Christian Thought Series, number 5, First Edition

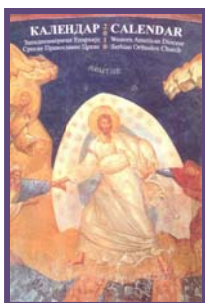


MAN AND THE GOD-MAN by Archimandrite Justin Popovic

This newest publication of our Sebastian Press Publishing House is now available for purchase online at:

http://www.westsrbdio.org/ads/man_and_the_godman.html

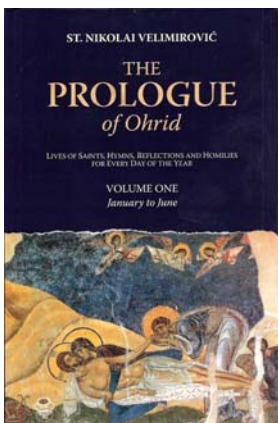
Retail Price: \$15.00



2010 POCKET DIOCESAN CALENDARS NOW AVAILABLE

Be sure to watch for your order in the mail. If you have not already received them, you will shortly! Contact the Diocesan office if you have any questions.

Retail Price: \$5.00



THE PROLOGUE OF OHRID

St Nikolai of Zica (Velimirovic) (1880-1956) has been called the "Serbian Chrysostom" for his theological depth and golden-tongued eloquence. Now for the first time, a complete and unabridged English translation of St. Nikolai's Prologue of Ohrid has been made available. St. Nikolai's Prologue has become a much-loved spiritual classic for Orthodox Christians worldwide. An inspirational source-book of the Orthodox Faith, it contains within its pages a summation of the Church's wisdom and Her experience of sanctity through the Grace of Jesus Christ. Lives of Saints, Hymns, Reflections and Homilies are presented for every day of the year. St. Nikolai's beautiful Hymns have never before appeared in English. – *Retail \$120 per set*

For **Continual Education in Liturgy and Theology**, we recommend the following article by Metropolitan John Zizioulas:

http://www.westsrbdio.org/pdf/Orthodox_Church_Third_Millennium.pdf

We will offer the same article here in sections on a weekly basis; today, Part II of III.

The Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium by Metropolitan John Zizioulas

II. The most important issues in the new millennium?

We are all familiar by now with the famous theory of an American political theorist of our days, who sees in the new millennium the period of what he describes as "a clash of cultures." Whether he is right or not in his predictions, it remains true for the Church that one of the main problems she will have to face will be, and I think has always been, that of enculturation. What will the Church do in relation to this issue?

When the Christian Gospel was preached to the Greeks, it was confronted with a culture that was not only different from, but one could say deeply opposed to the one that, historically, produced the Gospel—namely the Semitic culture. Historians argue the extent to which Hellenic culture had infiltrated Judaism at the time of Jesus. But a study of the Patristic period reveals that the enculturation of the Gospel in the Greco-Roman world of antiquity was by no means an easy task.

The problem was not simply how to replace polytheism with the biblical faith in one God. It went much deeper, touching the very ethos and mentality, the very worldview of Greek culture. As is evident from the reaction of Greek philosophers in the first century, such as Celsus and the "Neoplatonists," the Greek mind could not absorb the historical outlook that Christianity brought with it, including faith in God's Incarnation and the resurrection of the dead. At an even deeper level, the enculturation

of Christianity in the Patristic period stumbled at the Greek worldview which gave priority to the “one,” the unity of the universe and its cyclical and orderly movements, at the expense of the “many,” that is, particular and concrete beings, to the point of regarding the “many” as identical with the Fall or with evil. In other words, a Gospel which carried with it a respect for history and an eschatological outlook with regard to the end of the history as having greater significance than the beginning of things, had to become part of a culture that mistrusted history and regarded the beginning of things as more decisive than the end or the eschaton. And yet enculturation did take place at that time. Views may differ among scholars as to whether it was a successful enculturation, faithful to the Gospel, or as Harnack put it, an “acute Hellenization” of it. Certainly from the point of view of our own Orthodox tradition, what happened in the Patristic era was indeed a successful enculturation, since the purity of the Gospel was not lost through it. What happened in the Patristic era may therefore be proposed, not perhaps as model to be copied, but certainly as an example from which we can draw some lessons in our present-day situation. What could these lessons be?

In the first place, we must note that the Church at that time was aware of the weaknesses of the Greek culture and the fact that this culture had exhausted its possibilities. This diagnosis of the end of their world allowed the Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, to place the Gospel in a critical attitude toward ancient culture and to propose alternatives to it. The situation we are in today is not different from this point of view, only that the Church cannot stand face to face with culture since, to some extent, it has contributed to its creation. In any case, what the Church should note today is that we live at the end of an historical culture shaped by the Enlightenment, and that the Gospel should be detached from it and be presented as an alternative to this culture. If the Church fails to do this, others may step in to answer man’s needs at the present period of transition, as I fear they are doing already. In the Patristic period the fact that the Church entered into a deep dialogue with the surrounding culture prevented others from stepping in. We must draw from this the lesson that the Church in our days must play a leading part in dialoguing with the prevailing culture at the deepest level, if it is to avoid marginalization.

Secondly, the Greek Fathers did not take simply a critical view of Hellenic culture, but entered deeply into it and established creative links with its premises. This took various forms. At the level of worship, for example, many things were accepted and Christianized, such as natural feasts and rituals of all kinds. On the level of philosophy, all questions raised by the Greek mind were regarded as legitimate, above all the ontological concern of the Greek mind, which was to a great extent alien to the Bible and Semitic culture. Philosophical terminology was unhesitatingly borrowed and used in theology. Greek language was adopted in non-Greek speaking parts, while the use of Latin in the West never presented a problem for the Church’s unity.

All this did not take place at the expense of the Gospel. The eschatological orientation of the Bible was preserved through the centrality of the Resurrection, the iconic representation of the Kingdom in the Eucharist, the strong emphasis placed on community and monasticism as a

form of protest against secularization, etc. In other words, enculturation can and must employ all forms of a given culture, provided that the basic aspects of the biblical outlook are maintained. The Church in these cases must be aware of what is important and must be maintained at all costs, and what can be changed. This is no easy task, as the history of the Patristic period itself shows. This underlines the crucial importance of theology in all forms of enculturation. Theology must try to reach conver394

Part Three: Studies on the Ecumenical Movement

gence with regard to what constitutes the essential aspects of the Gospel, which must be maintained, albeit expressed in different cultural forms. Enculturation without theological awareness and sensitivity can be a very dangerous matter.

So much for history. Theology on the other hand, at the level of doctrine, relates to the issue of enculturation via a Christology conditioned by the Spirit. Enculturation is a demand of the doctrine of the Incarnation. By entering and sharing fully the human condition, God in the person of Christ made it imperative that His Church constantly allows Him to enter fully into every culture. The fact that the Son of God entered a specific culture, that is the Hebrew or Jewish milieu of a certain time in history, may be easily taken to imply that He sanctified and affirmed only that particular culture, thus calling for all other cultures to be converted. Indeed, a Christology which is not Pneumatologically conditioned may lead to such a conclusion. Pneumatology, however, points to a Christology that is eschatological and therefore inclusive. The Christ of the Spirit is not an individual conceivable in Himself, but He has a Body. He is the first born among many brethren. And this may be extended to the point of making him a “cosmic Christ,” and an ἀνακεφαλαίωσις of all. There is no race and no culture to which He can be irrelevant. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, He can be enculturated in all places, and at all times.

This stress on Pneumatology with reference to enculturation is not the same as the one encountered so often nowadays, according to which all cultures somehow contained the presence of the Holy Spirit. A Pneumatology which is separated from Christology is just as bad as a Christology without Pneumatology. The Holy Spirit is present everywhere. He blows whenever He wills and fills all things, as the prayer says. But He never acts away from Christ or independently of Him. There is no “economy of the Holy Spirit.” There is only the economy of the Son. Enculturation inevitably involves the Incarnation of Christ, be it in forms other than the historical one. Instead of making of the Holy Spirit a divine Person that works outside Christ, it is better to regard Him as the Person who makes Christ inclusive, that is, eschatological. In the Spirit Christ ceases to be Jewish or Greek (“In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek”), while in some sense being all that at the same time. The Spirit allows Christ to enter again and again in every culture and assume it by purifying it, that is by placing it in the light—one might say under the judge395

The Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium

ment—of what is ultimately meaningful as it is revealed in Christ. All this allows for a variety of cultural expressions of the one Christ.

The question of whether there is such a thing as Christian culture, that is, a culture to be applied universally in the name of Christ, should be answered

in the negative. A great deal of damage has been done to the Gospel whenever the Church's mission has been understood as the promotion, and quite often the imposition, of a certain culture. This does not mean that the Gospel must be totally divorced from all cultural forms in order to be preached. It rather means that mission should respect the freedom of the people to express the Faith in their own way, provided that the fundamental outlook or worldview remains the one brought by the Gospel.

Enculturation therefore requires discernment, a discernment that the Spirit offers through theological consciousness, through Orthodoxy in the original sense. The role of the Church in each enculturation is therefore of paramount importance and consists in overseeing and making sure that the new cultural forms embody and not destroy the basic existential outlook that the Gospel of Christ brings to the world. For culture is a very complex matter and cannot always be distinguished from the worldview it expresses. Theology must provide the Church with the fundamental guidelines that will enable her to judge in a given case which cultural forms embody the Gospel faithfully, and which express in fact "another Gospel." In any case, the Church must apply theological and not simply ethical criteria, which can often be identical with cultural ones. Questions, for example, of whether or not magic or polygamy, and its opposite, monogamy, constitute ethical matters in the cultural context of Africa, or relate to the basic outlook of the Gospel, is possible to decide only if we know in what this outlook consists. This is something that the theological consciousness of the Church can provide us with.

Raising therefore the fundamental or ultimate questions concerning the way of being that Christ represents in the Spirit will be extremely important in the new millennium, when the enculturation of Christianity will be once again crucial for the Church's existence. Enculturation in the new millennium will meet a number of challenges, which the Church must face.

1. The challenge of non-Christian faiths

We are moving rapidly into a religiously pluralistic world. How should the Church react to this? The first thing that Christianity must do is to abandon its aggressive missionary methods of past times. Evangelization should not involve coercion of any sort, even of the most delicate kind. Secondly, Christian theology must rethink its position with respect to what may be called religious pluralism. Historically different views have been expressed and practiced with regard to this matter. The view that prevailed in the past was a Christomonistic one: only those who believe in Christ can be saved. This view prevailed particularly among Protestants of what we may call the "Barthian approach." It is a view that inspired many missionary movements in the West in the last few centuries. This view has been challenged within Protestant theology itself in our time. There are Protestant theologians today who wish to promote the idea of what may be called a "cosmic Christ," that is of a Christology large enough to include even in the term "Christ" those of other religions who, consciously or unconsciously, are looking for what we Christians call "Christ." This enlargement of Christology seems to be favored particularly among Protestant Christians living in areas like India and Japan, where Christianity is in the position of a minority. They believe that, in their situation, the

traditional, narrowly Christocentric position makes no sense.

Within Roman Catholic theology, the view that has prevailed historically is marked by the principle going back to St. Cyprian (in fact it can be traced back to Origen in the third century), "extra ecclesiam nulla salus," or "there is no salvation outside the Church." By the term "Church" was meant, in the past, the Roman Catholic Church, a view that has been radically modified in our century, especially since the Second Vatican Council, through the idea of degrees of communion: those belonging to the Church of Rome are in full communion with the Church, whereas those outside the Roman Catholic Church are only partially in the Body of Christ. With regard to the non-Christian religions, Roman Catholic theology is beginning to promote an open position vis-à-vis the phenomenon of religious pluralism. An international commission of the Vatican published recently a very open report on the relationship between Christianity and other religions, while books like that of the former professor of the Gregorian University of Rome, Jacques Dupuis, suggest an approach to religious pluralism as a phenomenon which forms part of the plan of God for humanity.

Orthodox theology has not pronounced itself officially on this point. There are those who hold a rigid position similar to that of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants of the past. But there have also been more open views, which can be classified in two categories. One of these is based on Pneumatology. The other is based on eschatology. The first one makes a sharp distinction between the work of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation. This distinction takes as a starting point, more or less, the Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky's, idea of "two economies," that of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work, according to this view, is not limited to the Church and the Christians, but extends to all humanity and creation. The other religions, therefore, are not outside the sphere of the Holy Spirit's operation, although it may be said that they fall outside Christ.

The eschatological view, on the other hand, is based on a different argument. Until the Last Judgement we cannot say with absolute certainty who does not belong to Christ and who is not saved. Let us note the word "not." The argument does not imply that there is agnosticism and uncertainty with regard to Christ and the Church as the sure way to God and to salvation. The agnosticism and the uncertainty concern only those who do not believe in Christ and are not members of his Church. This position allows for a positive attitude toward non-Christians and makes better sense than the argument from Pneumatology. It is in fact only reasonable for the Christian Church, living under the obscurities of history, to leave it to God to reveal His final Judgement concerning each person's salvation, when He decides to do so. This does not relativize Christ or the Church. As far as we know, the Church as the Body of Christ is the only sure and safe way to God, establishing the proper relationship of the human being to God. We cannot therefore propose as Christians any better way than the one we know. We stand firmly on this faith. But it is only in the final Judgement of God that we can see who, even from among the Christians, will be saved.

Such a position differs from religious syncretism. In syncretism, the assumption accepted by all parties which participate in it, is that every

religion has something positive to contribute. And it is by collecting, so to speak, the various contributions they can make that we arrive at a totality, a whole, which amounts in fact to a new religion of some kind. This is what syncretism means. In a non-syncretistic approach, each religion may recognize positive elements in another religion, but sees and judges these elements in the light of its own faith, and certainly not as forming part of a new religion.

This leads to my third point concerning what, in my view, Christianity should do vis-à-vis the religious pluralism of our times. Excluding totally the idea of establishing a new religion by turning religious pluralism into religious syncretism, and given the attitude of non-rejection on the basis of what had just been said, the only sensible and right thing for Christianity to do would be to enter into dialogue with other faiths. Such a dialogue must be constructive and cannot be an inter-religious dialogue in the absence of religious conviction. Christianity must strengthen and deepen its theology, not narrow and water it down to a kind of religious agnosticism or relativism. Dialogue does not mean indifference to truth or relativization. On the contrary, it means conviction, yet without stubbornness, fidelity combined with openness. Dialogue is a step further than tolerance. It involves the recognition that the other, the different, exists not simply in order to exist—that is what tolerance means—but exists as someone who has something to say to me, which I have to listen to seriously, relate to my own convictions, and judge under and in light of these convictions.

But what is it that the other will say to me in a dialogue of this type? A dialogue does not only need partners; it requires also a subject. What would the partners involved in such a dialogue speak about? Should it be about politics and the role of religion in the various national and other conflicts in the world? This might be an opportune and to some people, mainly politicians, a useful and welcomed thing. But it is doubtful that such a subject would be approached constructively. The result would most certainly be a negative one. For this reason, I suggest that the dialogue with religions we are talking about should have a different agenda. It should place us before the burning issues of humanity as we approach the third millennium. Religion is not about religion, even less about religions. Religion is about human beings and their relation with God, with one another, and with creation. Religions must face the challenges of our times.

2. The challenge of technology and globalization

The world is shrinking. We all know that by now. There are good things to be said about that, but there are also serious dangers. We cannot remain indifferent. The great problem in the coming century will be globalization: how to reconcile the “one” and the “many”? How to avoid achieving universal unity at the expense of local diversity; how to allow difference not simply to exist and be tolerated, but to contribute to the benefit of humanity? We must take a stance on this matter. We must explain our faith and offer solutions. We must inform our faithful and contribute accordingly to the formation of a universal consciousness on this matter.

3. The ecological challenge

This is probably the most serious problem facing humanity today. It cuts across nations and continents. Christianity shares a great deal of the responsibility for the ecological crisis. This is recognized by all. Fortunately it is also in a position to contribute very much to the solution of the problem. This is also beginning to be recognized. A dialogue on such a subject can bring together to the same table even those involved in national and political conflicts. This could be a constructive use of religious pluralism with beneficial consequences in many other respects.

4. The challenge from scientific advances

There is hardly anyone these days who does not feel alarmed by the news concerning advances in biology and genetics. Only yesterday, on my way here, I read in the press that scientists have managed to map more of our chromosomes, thus making it possible to manipulate life itself. Certainly we cannot watch what is going on with indifference. This is a subject that requires theological reflection. And it is so new that such a reflection is bound to be an extremely complex matter. But it is rather naive, allow me to say, to assume that the problem of bioethics can simply be a matter of state legislation. World opinion must be formed, and religion is a major factor in forming and informing the human conscience. No theological dialogue can have an effect, if it does not address issues of this kind.