

# **Precepts of Religion**

## **of the Apostolic Orthodox Church**

### **God the Absolute**

There is no other reality or existence apart from God, “in Whom we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) In truth, there is no separateness in creation, but rather a kinship. This kinship pervades not only the animate matter of this earth, but the inanimate as well. The same maybe said of these realms and conditions which are not perceived by man, which may or may not exist simultaneously in time and space with us, and the beings composed of Light and Spirit which inhabit them. All are from God, all share in and of His essence; all, at this unfathomable level, are one.

Although He can be experienced in the depths of the soul, God is cognizably unknowable to those who wear the robe of matter upon this earth. Hence the word for “God” in Greek is *Theos* (Θεός) signifying that which is alien to our comprehension. This is expressed in Christian and Jewish Scripture in the Book of Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My way, saith the Lord.” Indeed, the concept of God the Absolute is extant within all religions, but perhaps none express it more concisely than the Hindu *Upanishads*: “That from Which the mind and senses turn back: That is Real, That is God.”

### **The Trinity**

God the Absolute is made manifest to, and expressed in, creation through what Christianity terms the *Holy Trinity*, consisting of three Persons or Aspects—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All Persons are from and of the same Substance, all are equally divine, all possess the same attributes. It is only the manner in which each expresses these attributes, which induces us to interpret them as being separate from each other.

The Apostolic Orthodox Church recognizes and accepts that the Trinity is not solely a Christian concept, but was, and is, extant in those religions which predated it. For example, the Persons of the Hindu Trinity (called the *Trimurti*) are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, corresponding to the Christian Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively.

### **God the Father**

The Church does not view the Person of the Father as fatherhood without motherhood, male without female; in truth, He is neither, yet both. The Father is the archetypal Parent, manifesting the paternal or masculine qualities of protective love, kindness power, authority and will through the Son, and the maternal or feminine qualities of patience, understanding, tenderness and nurturing love through the Holy Spirit. The Father may be said to be the Aspect of God from Which we came and to Which we shall return. In no wise is the Father wrathful or vengeful, ignoring natural law to punish or reward at His whim. Such an unfortunate image the Apostolic Orthodox Church regrets and repudiates. As with God the Absolute, the manifestation of the Father is not cognizable, but only experiential.

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## God the Son

The Son is begotten, not made, in eternity of the Everlasting Father, and is of one substance with the Father. As with the Father, the essence of the Son is neither male nor female, yet both. Unlike the Father, however, the manifestation of the Son is solely masculine in Christianity.

## God the Holy Spirit

The essence, too, of the Holy Spirit is neither masculine nor feminine, yet both. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit manifests as feminine, and as such is referred to in Hebrew as *ruach* (רוח—“breath,” fem.) and in the ancient Greek texts as *Kuria* (Κυρία) meaning “Lady.” In accordance with these ancient forms, the Apostolic Orthodox Church always uses the feminine when referring to the Holy Spirit.

## Creation

In all creation, there is only one reality—God—with all else being a part and a reflection of Him. Saint Thomas described creation as a continuous process, such as breathing; like breathing, it is cyclical in nature. Each cycle is unique, complete with both physical and spiritual elements, yet is interconnected with those previous and those following, much like an infinite number of interlacing circles. Beings from any one cycle may coexist in physical and temporal space with those of other cycles, thus accounting for the presence of Angels and Saints before the advent of Jesus.

## Angels

Angels comprise a most important facet of creation, that Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite called the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Through them, the power of the Trinity flows to mankind, flooding the world with beauty, love, peace and an awareness of the Presence of God, especially during the celebration of the Divine Mysteries. It is in this aspect that they were seen as messengers, “bringing” God’s power and will to humans, and thus was derived their name from the Greek, *aggelos* (αγγελος): “to bring tidings.”

## Saints

Saint Paul call the Saints, the spirits of just men made perfect.” (Heb. 12:23) The Church affirms this, teaching that the Saints are those who have become perfect human beings and reside in that spiritual plane of existence known to us as *Paradise*, the true home of humanity before the Fall of Adam and Eve. The Apostolic Orthodox Church does not canonize (officially declare) Saints. Other than the High Holy Days, the feasts of Jesus and Mary, and those of Saints Thomas, Thecla and Mar Gregorios, it does not maintain a canonically binding *Rota Sanctorum*, or “Calendar of Saints,” to which all must adhere. Honoring all those who have sought to advance the teachings of Christ, the Church leaves individuals and groups free to commemorate and venerate those Saints who are meaningful to them, including those who are no longer formally recognized by other Sacramental Churches, such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria.

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## Man

*Let Us make man to Our image and likeness.* (Gen 1:26) With these few words comes the announcement of our true nature—our *divine* nature. And as God is triune, so also is man, possessing a spirit, soul and body, to which Saint Paul attests in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

The **Spirit** (*psuche*—ψυχη) is composed of two distinct, yet interacting, animating energies: one sensate (*patho*—παθω) and one insensate (*apatho*—απαθω). Spirit pervades all creation, and nothing is apart from it. It is in no way “personal,” but rather “generic,” in nature in that it does not take and/or retain personality.

The **Soul** (*pneuma*—πνευμα), according to the most ancient of Christian Traditions, like the Spirit, possesses a twofold nature: Divinity (*theotes*—θεοτης), which is changeless, and Mind (*nous*—νους), which is changeable. Divinity, by its very nature, is perfect; and it is this divinity which, although shielded from our cognition, is our birthright as children of God. Nous is the seat of our intelligence and our personality; it is that part of the soul which ever strives towards union with God.

The **Body** (*soma*—σωμα) is the soul’s mode of existence in the material universe. At conception, and throughout gestation, it is the Soul and the Spirit which provide intelligence, guidance and power to the cells, enabling them to divide and form a human body. This guiding intelligence works through the physical genetic material that is supplied by the parents, laying a “blueprint” for embryogenesis.

## Cause and Effect

Cause and Effect is also known as the “Law of Compensation,” “Retribution” and the “Law of Sowing and Reaping.” The concept is not unique to Christianity, but exists within all religions and philosophies. The Church stresses that although this Divine Law may appear to operate both positively and negatively, the effect of one’s actions is not for reward or punishment, but for the spiritual edification and advancement of the soul’s *nous* until, no matter how far it strays, it reaches union with the Father.

## Salvation

The Apostolic Orthodox Church looks upon salvation not only as a single act in space and time, but also as a continual, ongoing process. The only true salvation is from the impermanence of human existence unto the permanence of eternal union with God. The historical self-sacrifice of Jesus made it possible for beings of this creation cycle to progress beyond the material plane, eventually to unite with the Father. However, it is each individual who is ultimately responsible for attaining that union.

## Mysteries

The Church, according to Oriental Tradition, recognizes and administers both the Great Mysteries and the Lesser Mysteries, called in the West, “Sacraments” and “Sacramentals,” respectively. The Greater Mysteries are seven in number, in three classifications or divisions: *The Mysteries of Initiation* (Baptism, Chrismation, the Holy Eucharist), *The Mysteries of Healing* (Holy Anointing and Absolution), and *The Mysteries of Union* (Holy Orders and Holy

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Matrimony). The Lesser Mysteries are those other rites of the Church that only ordained clergy may administer, such as the blessing of Holy Water, the blessing of a house, the consecration of Holy Oils, etc. The Mysteries are much more than mere symbols of Christian profession; they are effectual channels of God's grace. When received with faith, they are instrumental in progressively transmuting the human consciousness into one that is divine.

## Baptism

Baptism is the first of the three steps in the process of Christian Initiation. It is this Mystery by which one becomes a Christian, being spiritually linked with what Saint Thomas called the *Christian Current*, that Power of God which, although existing from eternity, was actualized on the earth by and through Jesus Christ. The Church stresses that Baptism does not make one a member of a specific denomination (Catholic, Lutheran, etc.), but rather of the universal Christian Church, which is beyond any denominational barriers.

## Chrismation

This Mystery, performed by a Bishop (or by special dispensation, by a Priest), confers upon the Initiate the "Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit." This constitutes the second step of Christian Initiation, obeying Christ's injunction that His followers be, "born again of water and the Holy Spirit." (Jn 3:5) With Chrismation is also conferred the ability to draw upon and use the full spiritual power of the Christian Current.

## The Holy Eucharist

If the Mystery of Baptism is the means by which one becomes a Christian, and Chrismation empowers him, then the Holy Eucharist, the final step in the process of Christian Initiation, is the means by which his spiritual life is nourished and sustained. The Apostolic Orthodox Church declares that the Eucharist is not merely a symbolic act but, at the moment in the Mystical Worship known as the *epiklesis*, the complete spiritual essence of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity known as God the Son incarnates under the appearances of bread and wine (i.e., transubstantiation). Further, the Church holds that the Holy Eucharist is the renewal and perpetuation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered not only in the earthly realms of time and space, but also cosmically in perpetuity, "by Him Who, as the Eternal High Priest, forever offers Himself as the Eternal Sacrifice."

## Absolution

This Mystery is dual in nature, requiring contrition by the penitent, and the official pronouncement of forgiveness by the officiant. The Church holds that while the strengthening, comforting grace of the Mystery is imparted to those who open themselves to it, and the transgression is forgiven, the need for reparation by the penitent under the Law of Cause and Effect remains.

## Holy Matrimony

This Mystery is an estate blessed by God, hence a holy one for Christian living, whereby the souls of a man and a woman are bound together by the blessing of a Priest or a Bishop, to grow

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in mutual love. It is also the estate wherein a couple may be entrusted with the care of other souls—their children—and hence should not be “entered into lightly.” Whereas the other Mysteries are administered at the hands of ordained clergy, the ministers of Holy Matrimony are the couple themselves, the presiding clergyman being in attendance to bless the union, which imbues the husband and wife with the powerful grace of the Mystery.

## **Holy Orders**

The Mystery of Holy Orders is effected by the Power of the Holy Spirit, as are all the Mysteries, through the agency of a validly consecrated Bishop possessing Apostolic Succession. Through Holy Orders, men are ordained to the Minor Orders, which are for the many, and the Major Orders, which are for the few. The clergy exist to teach and to be the dispensers of the Mysteries and are not lords over the consciences of those committed to their care; rather, they are the servants of the people.

## **Holy Anointing**

The administration of the Mystery takes place under two circumstances: as a healing rite for those who are ill and as a final unction for those who are dying. In both instances, the recipient is anointed with Oil of the Sick and prayers are offered for deliverance from suffering and pain. As a final anointing, it is accompanied by Absolution, Holy Communion, and prayers to bring the divine grace necessary for the protection of the soul and the easing of its final departure from the body.

## **Scripture**

The Apostolic Orthodox Church views Scripture as a compilation of historic fact, myth, legend and allegory, a style of writing prevalent in the times prior to the Christian Era, and even beyond into the Third and Fourth Centuries after Christ. The Church, while relying most heavily on that Scripture known as *The Holy Bible*, acknowledges that all Scripture is inspired by God. That inspiration, however, does not lie in the written letter of the Scripture, but rather in the inspiration within each soul through the grace of God. Together, all Scriptures contain all that is necessary for salvation, and although the Truth may be hidden or seemingly confused in some, where one Scripture lack, another supplies.

## **Creeds**

While the Church does not rely upon a creed to formally express the faith of its members, the *Nicene Creed*, and those others which may be authorized by the Church, are symbols of the universal Faith as understood by the Church. But, they are considered symbols only, not the Truth itself, and should be received as a source of contemplation and a means of understanding that Truth.

## **Christian Faith and Tradition**

The Church maintains those Traditions of the universal Christian Church, which were handed down as teachings, holy rites and ceremonies. The Apostolic Orthodox Church has striven to

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preserve what is best in our heritage and has restored to its original form what has been debased or misunderstood by primitive thinking or political motives, whether civil or ecclesiastical.

## **Authority of the Church**

All authority and power of the Church comes from Jesus Christ, Who transmitted it to his Apostles, they to their disciples, and so forth, to the Bishops of the present day, in an unbroken line which is termed the *Apostolic Succession*. As the Apostolic Orthodox Church possesses this Succession, it has the power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and authority in concerns of Faith. This in no way, however, implies that the decisions and pronouncements of the Church are infallible, that it, completely free of error. Such perfection the Church ascribes solely to God.