

## A confession of faith based upon the symbol of faith.

By St. Theophan the Recluse

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We must believe all that God, in His good pleasure, has revealed to us<sup>1</sup>, without adding or removing anything, just as it is preserved in Holy Orthodoxy<sup>2</sup>.

Specifically: God is one in substance, but in three distinct persons<sup>3</sup>. The Father, through the Son, made the world and provides for it<sup>4</sup>. He created man in His image to live in paradise<sup>5</sup>. By the disobedience<sup>6</sup> of the first-created man we lost paradise, and it became impossible for us to be saved<sup>7</sup>. The Son of God took pity on us, undertook the work of redemption and restitution, came to earth, assumed flesh, suffered, died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and sat as God-man at the right hand of the Father<sup>8</sup>, Who thus showed that He accepts the sacrifice of the Son and the power of His mediation for the salvation of the faithful<sup>9</sup>.

The Son Himself sent the Holy Spirit<sup>10</sup> who proceeds from the Father<sup>11</sup>, and the Holy Spirit came down to the apostles, filling them with divine wisdom and power. Then they, full of the Holy Spirit, planted the Christian faith and established the church from all the faithful and with Christ being the head. The same apostles, according to the commandment of God, performed the Divine Mysteries<sup>12</sup>, which provide Divine Grace to the faithful, and left the bishops and priests as their successors in the apostolic work and as caretakers of the heavenly, spiritual treasures that the Holy Spirit entrusted to the church.

Through the special grace of ordination, the successors of the apostles continued the work of salvation throughout the centuries, and so this work continues uninterrupted till our days. The faithful, who receive divine grace through the divine mysteries, are saved in the bosom of the church, not alone, but are all joined together in the true, living faith<sup>13</sup>, and under the guidance of the shepherds.

The salvation of each soul is worked out mystically, and every believer anticipates another life full of light, for the sake of which he endures voluntary and involuntary deprivations<sup>14</sup>. He also believes that those who have fallen asleep do not cease to be in the body of the church<sup>15</sup>, but they communicate with us, not visibly, of course but invisibly.

You must believe in all of this wholeheartedly. We confess that they by studying the creed often<sup>16</sup>. These are the truths of our faith and it cannot be otherwise.

From "Preaching Another Christ", An Orthodox View of Evangelization", From A Letter by St. Theophan The Recluse, Page 32 – 33

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<sup>1</sup> A fundamental dogma about God is that we can know nothing about Him without him revealing it to us. God is transcendent, completely unknowable by anything created, unless He chooses to make Himself known. This fundamental truth is why we cannot learn about God from our reason. The only way to learn about God is to become like Him, as the beatitudes say: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". The Christian life is to seek illumination. Although God's grace is like the rain which falls upon the evil and the good, we only understand Him when our heart is in the proper disposition. It is good to learn from books and especially from the Scriptures and the church service books, and the holy fathers, however if we do not add to this learning the struggle for virtue and to follow the commandments and to do good works, we will never experience God or know Him. A Christian must keep this in mind in everything that he does. Reason is useful, but not adequate to know God. The only thing that causes us to know God is when he in His divine providence sees that we are ready and makes Himself known to us. This is called illumination. We should seek it more than we seek water and food.

<sup>2</sup> (All endnotes and comments are authored by Priest Seraphim Holland) The sources of this revelation include the "Symbol of Faith", which was produced by the First and Second Ecumenical Councils and reapproved in every subsequent Ecumenical Council, all seven Ecumenical Councils which produced canons about dogma and how to live in a Christian way, the Holy Scriptures (the Old and the New Testament), of which the entire New Testament was ratified by the church, and is interpreted by the church, the writings of the holy fathers in their totality and their agreement (of course individual fathers have said certain things which are not in keeping with the corpus of the fathers, and sometimes they may have erred when they did so), the holy services, and especially their texts, which expression in worship our dogmas, how to live the Christian life and all that is important to us, and of course the Holy Spirit who enlightens the church and guide her in enlightens each individual Christian according to their capacity.

<sup>3</sup> capitalism we were commanded to describe the entirety of human existence was only three dogmatic statements, one would be about God, the Trinity Who is, was and ever will be, and created all things. This is the primary and first dogma of the universe, because before the universe there was God and God has always been a Trinity of persons one in essence and undivided. The second dogmatic statement would be about man, and is well represented by Genesis 1:26: "and God said, let us make man according to our image and likeness". The third dogmatic statement would be about Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten before all ages, who became man for our salvation. In these three truths, everything is described concerning why man was made and how, and his purpose, and how and why he can obtain his purpose.

<sup>4</sup> The beginning of Genesis teaches that the Holy Trinity created the world. God the Father is mentioned, and the Spirit, and also God speaking. Every time that this is said during the creation story, it is indicating the presence and activity of the son of God, the word of God. "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. (2) But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished, and darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water. (3) And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." Gen 1:1-3 Brenton

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<sup>5</sup> Gen 1:26-27 Brenton "And God said, let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of heaven, and over the cattle and all the earth, and over all the reptiles that creep on the earth. (27) And God made man, according to the image of God he made him, male and female he made them." This verse tells us the entire Gospel if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. It tells us why God made us and how he made us and what our destiny will be. It tells us how to live, and the things that will bring us life and the things that bring death. This verse is the most important statement of dogmatic theology regarding man in a Scripture. It gives man a purpose and a direction, and encouragement.

<sup>6</sup> man, being made in the image of God, has the attributes of desire, and knowledge, and will. God possesses these attributes perfectly, having a perfect desire that only desires good, and knowledge of all things, and the ability to do whatever he wishes. He has perfectly free. The reason why God gave commandment to Adam and Eve was for them to exercise their freedom. If there are no options, then a person is not really free.

<sup>7</sup> God never changes, and His desire was to make man in his image so that man could grow to know Him and be united with Him. Since God is eternal, he made man to be eternal. It cannot be otherwise, because the Scripture tells us that we are made in God's image. Man did not cease being eternal after sin, but became incapable of union with God. This is the greatest tragedy that occurred in the universe, and is the reason for the incarnation.

<sup>8</sup> All of the works of Christ, in their totality, saved us. The Orthodox Church does not think that any one thing Christ did is the reason for our salvation.

<sup>9</sup> Sitting in the presence of God implies equality with Him.

<sup>10</sup> John 14:14-17 KJV If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (15) If ye love me, keep my commandments. (16) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; (17) Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 14:26 KJV But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 15:26 KJV But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

<sup>11</sup> Our Lord Jesus Christ himself proclaimed this dogma: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26 KJV). All of the ecumenical councils that followed the Second Ecumenical Council have approved of this expression of it from the symbol of faith: "(And I believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father, but with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets". All these councils forbade changing one word of the Symbol of Faith. These proclamations alone are enough for us to reject the addition to the creed which the Latins added, called the *filioque*: "Who proceeds from the Father (*and the Son*) ...". Of course, there are sound theological reasons to reject this unwarranted addition to the creed which is a heresy. We must take care and not consider these things to be just words. The only way to actually understand the Trinity is

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to become holy and for the Trinity to reveal Himself to us, but for us sinners, God has presented the dogma of who He is to the church with words, as a sort of hedge round about us to keep out heresy, and error and sin. An important attribute of any child of the church is to have the humility to accept that which the church has always held, and not to question it with their own human reasoning.

<sup>12</sup> Preeminent among the divine mysteries is of course the Eucharist, a word which technically means "Thanksgiving", but also in our usage indicates the body and blood of Christ, which in a mystical way that we cannot understand is formed out of bread and wine which we offer on the altar, and the priest blesses, and asked the Holy Spirit to make them into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which he has promised that he always will, regardless of whether the priest is worthy or not. Most sublime teaching about the Eucharist is in the sixth chapter of St. John. We cannot say enough words about the Eucharist to fully expound upon it, and if we could, there would not be enough books in the world to hold these words. But perhaps we can say simply regarding the Holy Eucharist, that God became man and therefore shared in who we are, and by living a perfect life as a human being while never ceasing to be also God, He made human flesh capable of becoming like Him. We share in who is by partaking of His body and blood, and combined with our efforts, our repentance and of course the grace of God in everything, we become like Him so that we can know Him and be united with Him.

<sup>13</sup> If we understand even a little about of the mystery of who God is, that is, God the father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, a Trinity of persons of one essence and undivided, then we would also understand why salvation is impossible without being saved in the church. God is a community, and the church is a community. God is love, and we become like God by love. Since we are made in the image of God, man is only whole when he is united to all of those of the same faith, in truth and love.

<sup>14</sup> We do not seek deprivations, or suffering, or anything else. All that we seek, and all that the church teaches us and helps us to obtain is union with God and perfection of the soul. Anything that happens along this path, we accept: deprivations, suffering, and any obedience to God gives to us in this life. We learn of these "obediences", that is what the will of God is for us and what we should do in a practical way, by listening to our heart, with the Holy Spirit abides.

<sup>15</sup> St Theophan is referring to our dogma that because of the resurrection, those who die in Christ are not only alive but able to hear us and will help us by praying for us to the One who saves us. God in His providence even allows the saints to sometimes visit this world and help us in physical and tangible ways. It is the same way with the Angels who have visited man countless times. We also have a dogma that we, because of love, must pray for those who have departed. Everyone who departs in the church is still part of the church, and we never forget anyone. It is impossible for love to forget. Praying for the dead is very confusing to those who do not understand the church, but for us it is quite simple. God is love, and we learn to be like Him by loving. Love never forgets, and we never forget. Since we, because of our sins, still see through the glass darkly, we do not fully understand the ultimate condition of everyone, so we pray, only expecting God's mercy, and nothing else.

<sup>16</sup> If we read our morning and evening prayers, or attend the Midnight Office (from which the morning prayers are abridged), or Compline, or the Divine liturgy, we will hear the creed chanted or sung. Every Christian memorize the

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Creed. If a person does not have a good memory, by long usage, and meditation, even they will memorize the creed. The greatest and most effective way in which we "study" the Symbol of Faith is to live according to its truth.