

# Faith, Dogma and Knowledge of God

## DOGMA & THEOLOGY

### Does Dogma really matter?

Suppose a well respected servant suddenly leaves the Orthodox Faith for a non-sacramental church. Upon inquiring why, the servant challenges you to read scripture and find God's vision on the sacraments, implying their lack of reality. Naturally, one will be quite inquisitive and seriously attempt to re-read scripture with a closer keen eye. Subsequently attending bible studies, in quest of these answers. Your questions, in an inquisitive behavior, turn more and more dogmatic, upon which point another attendee in exasperation shares their feelings: "enough with these dogmatic questions, they are not practical!"

Naturally, this raises a question: are all these dogmatic questions a waste of time? Were all these questions really all that necessary as long as we were all on the page that Christ is our Savior? Does anything else really matter? Does dogma really matter? Does Theology matter?

To answer these questions, it's essential to understand the significance of dogma and theology in shaping our faith. Let us first differentiate the terminologies.

### What is dogma, doctrine and theology?

To fully grasp the level of importance of dogma, we must first differentiate the terminologies that often get intertwined: dogma, doctrine and theology. In the following table is presented the definition of each term and a practical biblical example. The table will show that dogma defines, doctrine titles and theology reflects.

|                   | Dogma                                                                                                                                                                           | Doctrine                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Theology                                                                |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Definition</b> | The unchanging, non-negotiable core elements of the Orthodox Christian faith. Dogma is defined mainly by Ecumenical Councils. Dogma is not subject to debate or interpretation. | The ways in which dogma is explained to those who are learning it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines doctrine as follows:<br>"That which is taught.<br>a. In the most general sense: Instruction, teaching; a body of instruction or teaching.<br>b. esp. That which is taught or laid down as true concerning a particular subject or department of knowledge, as religion, politics, science, etc.; a belief, theoretical opinion; a dogma, tenet." | Expansive, creative reflections and applications of dogma and doctrine. |

**Example**

Jesus Christ is fully both God and man.

Referred to as the “Incarnation”.

An emphasis on how divinity has become truly united with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Note, here the emphasis is actually on how God became human, not on a precise insistence on the fullness of both natures.

Because of the Incarnation, we engage God sacramentally.

To reiterate, dogma then defines, doctrine titles and theology reflects!

## Importance of knowing God

Dogma is critical. We cannot know God and at the same time not imitate Him to some degree. Does that mean a theological scholar is like God? Absolutely not. There could very well be very knowledgeable people about many religious matters; but little knowledge of God. At least, little true knowledge of God. At times, their very knowledge, and love thereof, prevents them from coming to the knowledge of the truth.

Knowledge that is not accompanied by diligence is dangerous – no matter whether the knowledge is of an academic character or of a mystical character. For this reason St. Paul says: “Knowledge puffs up.” (1 Corinthians 8:1) Yet, we cannot *truly* know God and at the same time not imitate Him to some degree. Imitating Him and conforming to His image is itself a result of such *true* knowledge.

It is for this reason that the Scriptures tell us that “by their fruit you shall know them.” (Matthew 7:16) If someone claims knowledge of God, but his life is not in conformity with the commandments of Christ, then we know that what we are hearing is largely delusional in character.

There is a beautiful story in Lives of the Desert Fathers: One of the Fathers was in prayer when the devil sought to trick him. A demon appeared in the cell of the monk (who was in prayer) and said, “I am the angel Gabriel sent from God.” Without looking up the monk replied, “Have you not been sent to another? For I am a sinner. I am not worthy for an angel to visit me.” The demon disappeared, defeated by the humility of the monk.

This is a description of the proper state of our heart. We desire to know God, but we want to know Him deeply enough, that we refuse to settle for anything less. Much of modern religious experience, as witnessed by its fruit, has little to do with the true God.

Before continuing, consider asking yourself, what is the relation between faith and knowledge – which comes first?

## Knowledge of God begins with ...

Many early church fathers clearly tell us that faith precedes the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is not merely some scholastic achievement rather an expression and extension of one’s faith. God is invisible and incomprehensible, and the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery; consequently, many parts of this learning can not be embraced by knowledge, but may be received by faith. “Faith, say, is

the eye which enlightens every man's conscience; it gives man knowledge. For, as the prophet says, 'If ye will not believe, ye shall not understand.'" St. Cyril of Jerusalem

This principle of working based on faith and developing knowledge based on faith is not simply a religious principle but St. Cyril meditates and says it extends even to non-believers in many of their day to day work: "It is not only amongst us, who hear the name of Christ, that faith is made so great a thing; but every thing which is done in the world, even by men who are unconnected with the Church, is done by faith. Agriculture is founded on faith; for no one who did not believe that he should gather in the increase of the fruits of the earth would undertake the labor of husbandry. Mariners are guided by faith when they entrust their fate to a slight plank, and prefer the agitation of the unstable waters to the more stable element of the earth. They give themselves up to uncertain expectations, and retain for themselves nothing but faith, to which they trust more than to any anchors."

Here, St. Cyril shows how agriculture, a fundamental human activity, is rooted in faith. Farmers toil the land, trusting that their efforts will yield a bountiful harvest. Without this belief in future returns, the arduous labor of husbandry would be futile. Mariners, too, live on this principle. They entrust their lives to the fragile planks of ships, navigating treacherous waters with faith as their guide. The vast expanse of the ocean may seem daunting compared to the stability of the land, yet mariners choose to venture forth, driven by hope and faith in a favorable outcome.

St. Cyril's observation highlights the power of faith. It permeates various aspects of human existence, even among those who may not identify as religious. Faith serves as a guiding force, inspiring individuals to undertake endeavors that require trust in the unknown and the unpredictable. It is a testament to the human capacity for hope, optimism, and unwavering belief in the potential for positive outcomes, regardless of the odds.

### Knowledge of God is His delight

Josiah, a young boy blessed with an inquisitive mind and a deep yearning for spiritual truth, embarked on a remarkable journey of faith at the tender age of eight. From that tender age, Josiah dedicated himself to seeking understanding of the divine, driven by an unyielding desire to know God more intimately. "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, **he began to seek the God of his father David**; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images." Josiah's pursuit of knowledge was not a fleeting interest but a lifelong commitment that shaped his character and influenced his actions as a king.

Growing up in a time of religious turmoil and idolatry, Josiah recognized the importance of turning away from false gods and wholeheartedly embracing the worship of the one true God. He immersed himself in the study of the scriptures, seeking wisdom and guidance from the words of the prophets. Through his diligent study, Josiah gained profound insights into the nature of God, His laws, and His love for His people.

Josiah's love for God was not mere intellectual curiosity but a genuine desire to live in accordance with His will. He implemented religious reforms, purging the land of pagan practices and restoring the temple to its former glory. His unwavering commitment to righteousness extended to social justice as

well, as he worked tirelessly to ensure fairness and compassion for the marginalized and oppressed. Josiah's true internal desire for the knowledge of God left a lasting impact on his kingdom and beyond.

In the 8th century BC, during a time of great material prosperity yet spiritual bankruptcy, the prophet Hosea witnessed to the northern ten tribes of Israel. He announced the coming judgment upon them at the hands of the Assyrians, which came to pass in 722 BC. In the midst of this impending doom, Hosea delivered a message of hope and restoration. He called the people to repent and return to the Lord, promising that God would heal their wounds and raise them up on the third day.

"Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight. **Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.**" (Hosea 6:1,6)

In response, God emphasizes that His delight is not in sacrifices and offerings alone, but in the genuine knowledge and pursuit of Him.

"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

Here, we see God clearly expressing His desire for us to get to know Him. More than the rituals and external religious acts, which played a significant role in the salvation of mankind, God longs for a deeper connection with His people. The true God can be known. This is one of the first and most important things to understand about Him. God not only desires to be known but also takes delight in revealing Himself to those who have accepted His movement toward them and His revelation.

Knowing God is not merely a task or an obligation, but the very purpose and goal of human existence. It is through this knowledge that we find true fulfillment and meaning in life. As the verse from John 17:3 states, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

As previously mentioned, this knowledge of God extends beyond mere intellectual understanding. It encompasses a deep, personal, and intimate relationship with the Creator. It is a journey of faith, trust, and surrender, where we open our hearts and minds to the divine presence within us. When we know God, we come to understand our place in the universe, our purpose, and our ultimate destiny.

Saint Athanasius, an early church father, beautifully expresses the transformative power of contemplating God and His Word. He says, "... the contemplation of God, and the Word which is from Him, suffice to nourish those who hear, and stand to them in place of all food. For the angels are not otherwise sustained than by beholding the face of the Father and of the Savior who is in heaven."

This contemplation is not a passive or idle activity but an active engagement with the divine. It involves seeking God through prayer, meditation, and the study of His Word. It is a process of continually growing in our understanding and appreciation of His character, His love, and His wisdom. As we immerse ourselves in this contemplation, our hearts and minds are nourished. We find solace, strength, and guidance in the midst of life's challenges. We begin to see the world through God's eyes, developing a deeper compassion for others and a greater understanding of our own purpose.

The knowledge of God is not limited to a select few but is accessible to all who seek Him with a sincere heart. It is through this knowledge that we experience true life. And as we continue to grow in our understanding of God, we come to realize that the journey of knowing Him is an eternal adventure, filled with wonder, awe, and the promise of endless discovery.

### Ignorance of God is death

As the world grows in diverse theistic and atheistic teachings, Christians are more and more tempted to grow indifferent to their surroundings. "To each their own" one might think. Is the sheer indifference to living a Christian life a tragedy, something unfortunate, inconvenient, relevant, irrelevant, none of our business? Should our faith be PASSIVE or ACTIVE with these individuals?

False concepts about God that abound in the world do not please Him. It does not please Him that some people think Him to be a part of creation, while some think He is an impersonal force. Or that others think that the Godhead is not one single but various and multiple as the polytheists do. Or to have monistic monotheistic model theists affirming that the one god who exists is not a father. He does not have a son. Such erroneous concepts of God are not just unfortunate. Those are tragic. Not in passing 'all to their own' or 'that is sad'. It is a tragic event painful to Your Father!

Are we guilty of sins committed unwillingly, or unknowingly? If those sins are unrepented, how does God perceive them? In reading Leviticus 5:17-19, one comes to see that we are indeed guilty of sins committed willingly and unknowingly.

“If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, **yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.** 18 And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. 19 It is a trespass offering; he has certainly trespassed against the Lord.” – Lev 5:17-19

Clearly, atonement is required for unwilling and unknowingly committed sins. A desire and will that Christ, the true High Priest, offers the atonement on our behalf is necessary for salvation. Thus, to some degree, ignorance of God is death. Without this simple basic knowledge, how will those sins come to be atoned?

To affirm that all religions are true in their affirmations about God is to say that God is both created and uncreated. He's both all powerful and not all powerful; both personal and impersonal; both single in nature and supreme; at the same time multiple and divided in nature and without a clear supremacy of power. Of course to say such a thing is utter nonsense. And an insult to the true God. Such teachings about God are not only a denial of His self revelation, but also of the fact that He has labored to make himself known to us. So that we can actually have meaningful communion. This is what you do with people you love. You want them to know you and you want to know them. Faith is not passive.

### God's continuous Revelation

God's existence and nature transcend human comprehension. He is not a mere product of our imagination or a result of intellectual deduction. Rather, our understanding of God stems from His own revelation toward us. Through His outstretched hands, He seeks us, inviting us into a profound relationship.

The created cosmos serves as a daily testament to God's glory. As Psalm 19:1-2 NKJV beautifully expresses, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge." The intricate beauty and order of the universe, from the celestial bodies to the smallest living organisms, speak volumes about the majesty and wisdom of its Creator.

However, there are certain aspects of the Lord God Almighty that remain beyond our limited human understanding. No mere mortal has ever gazed upon God's true essence, nor can any created being fully comprehend His nature. Scripture confirms this, stating that "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18 NKJV).

Even the truths that God has chosen to reveal to us in His wisdom for our salvation can be challenging to grasp, especially given our inherent limitations and biases. Our personal perspectives, often clouded by sin and worldly desires, can hinder our comprehension of divine mysteries. That's why Jesus emphasized the importance of purity of heart in Matthew 5:8, saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

A cleansed heart allows us to perceive God's presence and understand His ways more clearly. By seeking holiness and living in accordance with His commandments, we open ourselves up to a deeper revelation of His nature. It is through a humble and devoted heart that we can truly encounter God and experience the profound joy and peace that come from knowing Him.

### **Discerning proper Dogma - Theology and Prayer**

Theology, far from being a mere propagation of ideas about God, holds a profound connection with prayer. It is through the act of prayer that we truly come to know and understand the Divine. No human, no creature, should dare to speak about the Lord God without a sense of trepidation and deep circumspection. We do not use God's name casually in our everyday language or invoke it flippantly. It is a sacred and awe-inspiring name that deserves our utmost reverence.

Why, then, do we make the sign of the cross before we speak about God? This simple gesture is a reminder of the profound mystery and majesty of the Divine. It is a way of acknowledging that we are approaching a subject that is beyond our full comprehension, and that we do so with humility and respect. The act of making the cross also serves as a prayer in itself, invoking the protection and guidance of God as we embark on our theological inquiries.

As the ancient Christian writer Evagrius once said, "He who prays is a theologian, and a theologian is the one who prays." These words capture the essence of the relationship between prayer and theology. Prayer is not simply a means of asking God for favors or making requests. It is a way of communing with the Divine, of opening our hearts and minds to God's presence and grace. Through prayer, we enter into a dialogue with God, and it is in this dialogue that we come to know Him more deeply.

Theology, in turn, is not merely an intellectual exercise or a body of abstract ideas. It is a living, breathing tradition that is rooted in prayer and contemplation. True theologians are not simply scholars who study about God, but people who have a deep personal relationship with Him. They are people who have spent countless hours in prayer, seeking to know and understand God more fully.

It is through this combination of prayer and theology that we come to a deeper understanding of God and our relationship with Him. Prayer helps us to open our hearts and minds to God's presence, while theology provides us with the language and concepts we need to articulate our understanding of Him. Together, prayer and theology form a powerful path to spiritual growth and transformation.

### **Discernment of proper Dogma - Basis of Judgement**

A judge uses the law, the jury and the work of prosecutors and lawyers to discern the fate of the accused. When it comes to discernment in Christianity, the judge (you, the individual) has what as its means of discernment? Which of the following is the most governing authority of discerning proper dogma/teachings? Feelings/Conscience, Scripture, Holy Tradition or The Law? Let us look at each separately.

#### **Feelings/Conscience**

As narrated in the Bible, during creation God imprinted into the nature of man His Divine Image, which draws man toward everything that is morally good and averts him from everything that is morally evil. As a distinct human faculty, conscience provides a sense of goodness or blameworthiness in our conduct and quality of character, urging us to do right and be good.

Because it is an integral part of human nature, it is active in all people—regardless of their age, race, education, or development. However, this conscience may be corrupted due to sin, and should not be counted as a basis for discernment: “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” (Titus 1:15). Furthermore, the conscience is often intermixed with feelings and feelings and emotions are highly deceptive: The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

#### **The Law**

Just as judges and lawyers govern our society based on laws, God's law serves as the standard for our conduct. Not as those who focus only on the law have a haram / halal perspective. The Law is not a list of dos and don'ts—the things you need to do to make God happy. In Christ, the Law is more about preserving proper worship of God. God's commandments are invaluable instructions on how to interact with God and how to interact with man.

The law represents God's expressed will, demonstrating His holiness, justice, and goodness. It is intended to bless and guide us. The Law has a role in revealing our sins. “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20). However, the written law does not directly address all matters, rather the law teaches us the spirit of that which needs to be achieved.

## Scripture/The Revealed Word of God

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). St. Basil the Great says, 'The hearers taught in the Scriptures ought to test what is said by teachers and accept that which agrees with the Scriptures but reject what is foreign'. 'Therefore let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth'

St. John Chrysostom says, 'Everything in the divine Scriptures is clear and straightforward; they inform us about all that is necessary' (Epis 2 ad Thess 3,4) and St. Origen says, "It is necessary to take the Holy Scriptures as witnesses; for our comments and statements without these witnesses are not trustworthy.”

However, Scripture in the Orthodox view is not as those that follow only scripture who are called sola scriptura. Orthodox Christians hold to both Tradition and the Scriptures, as both are seen as coming from the Holy Spirit. St. Paul twice specifically calls Christians to follow the Traditions of the church. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 says, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” And in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”

## Holy Tradition

Holy Tradition is that same faith that Jesus taught to the Apostles and that they gave to their disciples, preserved in the Church and especially in its leadership through Apostolic succession (Jude 1:3).

St. Anthony says, "Wherefore keep yourselves all the more untainted by them, and observe the TRADITIONS of the FATHERS, and chiefly the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have learned from the SCRIPTURE, AND of which you have often been put in mind BY ME." We are a church that looks at it all. Which is what Holy Tradition is. Encapsulates all that matters.

Holy Tradition encapsulates the the Scripture, which teaches us the Law and which in turn encapsulate that which feeds our conscience “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (Psalm 19:7)

## Holding on to doctrine

While some argue that dogmatic questions are impractical and unnecessary, they serve several vital purposes. Dogma offers a foundation for our beliefs, helping us to articulate and clarify our understanding of God and the world. It also provides a shared language and framework for all believers, allowing them to communicate and engage in meaningful dialogue. Moreover, dogmatic questions lead to deeper spiritual growth and understanding.

By grappling with complex theological concepts, we challenge our assumptions and biases, fostering a more nuanced and mature faith. This process of inquiry and reflection can bring us closer to God and strengthen our connection to our traditions. Theological questions also have practical implications for

our daily lives. They shape our moral decision-making, ethical considerations, and attitudes towards the world around us. By engaging in theological discussions, we can develop a more informed and compassionate approach to life's challenges and opportunities.

The significance of dogma and theology cannot be dismissed as mere intellectual exercises. They are essential components of faith, providing a foundation for our beliefs, fostering spiritual growth, and guiding our practical actions. While it's important to approach dogmatic questions with humility and openness, they are anything but a waste of time. They are an invitation to explore the depths of our faith, connect with others, and deepen our understanding of the divine.



### *Review Questions*

1. What is Dogma? (A. The unchanging, non-negotiable core elements of the Orthodox Christian faith. Dogma is defined mainly by Ecumenical Councils.)
2. What is Theology? (A. Expansive, creative reflections and applications of dogma and doctrine)
3. What is true knowledge? (A. Knowledge that is not accompanied by diligence is dangerous. We cannot know God and at the same time not imitate Him to some degree. Imitating Him and conforming to His image is itself a result of such true knowledge.)
4. True or false: Knowledge of God begins with Faith. (A. True. Many early church fathers clearly tell us that faith precedes the knowledge of God.)
5. What is the agnostics and atheists approach? (A. It is an approach to emotions and feeling. Their atheism is not due to dispassionate reasoning, but the effect of emotional or relational discomfort with what they perceived God to be.
6. If the Law is not a list of dos and don'ts—the things you need to do to make God happy, what is it? (A. The Law in Christ, is more about preserving proper worship of God. God's commandments are invaluable instructions on how to interact with God and how to interact with man.

# The Holy Trinity

## DOGMA & THEOLOGY

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### The Holy Trinity is a Mystery

The concept of the Holy Trinity has been a focal point of theological discourse throughout the history of Christianity, sparking debates and occasionally leading to the emergence of heresies. Within the Coptic Orthodox Church, there is a clear distinction between monotheism and polytheism. Monotheism, stemming from the Greek word "mono" meaning "one," asserts the belief in a singular God. On the other hand, polytheism refers to the belief in multiple deities. As Coptic Orthodox Christians, we firmly adhere to monotheism, recognizing the existence of only one true God.

However, there is a common misconception that the Holy Trinity is simply a form of monotheism, equating the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three manifestations of the same God. This interpretation is incorrect and fails to grasp the profound mystery of the Trinity. The Holy Trinity comprises three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person possesses their unique role, or hypostasis, within the Godhead. While they embody their own individual "Person," they are united in essence, forming the inseparable Holy Trinity.

The analogy of a triangle is often used to illustrate this concept. Just as a triangle consists of three distinct sides, each with its unique properties, the Holy Trinity comprises three distinct persons. However, much like the sides of a triangle collectively form a single geometric shape, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit collaborate and act as one unified entity.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that while the Holy Trinity comprises three distinct persons, whose roles remain distinct, they are not separate entities. Rather, they coexist harmoniously, supporting and complementing one another, forming the one true God. This profound mystery lies at the heart of the Coptic Orthodox faith, and it is through this understanding that we come to appreciate the depth and richness of our Christian tradition.

### Key terms

Within the realm of theology, two fundamental terms hold great significance: Essence and Person. Essence, often referred to as substance or nature, encapsulates the inherent qualities that define the identity of something. It delves into the question of "WHAT" something truly is, transcending physical characteristics or external appearances.

On the other hand, Person, also known as Hypostasis, addresses the question of "WHO" someone is. It encompasses the distinct individuality of a being, their unique personality, and their specific role within a larger entity. While multiple individuals may share similar essential characteristics, their personhood sets them apart as distinct and separate entities.

In the context of the Holy Trinity, this distinction between Essence and Person becomes crucial. While the Trinity is acknowledged as ONE in Essence, it simultaneously comprises THREE distinct Persons:

the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. This profound mystery defies human comprehension, but it is a cornerstone of Christian faith.

As Saint Athanasius, the theologian of the early Church, eloquently stated, "The Trinity, praised, revered and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees. It is united without confusion, just as the One God is also distinguished without separation." Saint Athanasius further illustrates this concept by referencing a passage from the Book of Isaiah (Chapter 6) and the Book of Revelation (Chapter 4:8), where venerable creatures offer praises three times, saying "Holy, Holy, Holy." This threefold repetition, he argues, signifies the distinct perfection of the Three Persons within the Trinity. "For the fact of those venerable living creatures (Isa/ 6; Rev 4:8) offering their praises three times, saying 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' proves that the Three Persons are perfect, just as in saying 'Lord,' they declare the One Essence"

Moreover, the declaration of "Lord" in these passages points to the singular Essence that unites the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Saint Athanasius emphasizes that the Trinity maintains its unity while simultaneously preserving the distinctness of each Person.

Many of our Fathers, such as St. Cyril of Alexandria, have been adamant about the essence of the Holy Trinity stating, "for the whole Holy Trinity opens out, as if it were into three distinct or separate Persons, it is as though it contracts into the one nature of Deity." This profound understanding of the Trinity as ONE in Essence but THREE in Persons has served as a cornerstone of Christian theology for centuries. It encapsulates the mystery of a single divine being existing in three distinct and interdependent manifestations.

### To Each His Own

Each "Person" of the Trinity possesses a unique name and plays a specific role in our lives. This differentiation is crucial for understanding our relationship with God. Consider the example of Andrew and Peter. Although both are male, they are distinct individuals with distinct names. Similarly, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while all being aspects of God, are distinct "Persons" with distinct roles.

For instance, when we pray "Our Father," we are addressing God the Father, not Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son. This distinction highlights the importance of recognizing each Person of the Trinity when approaching, defining, and forming a relationship with God.

The independence of the Father and Son is further emphasized in the Bible. In John 5:22, it is stated that "the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." This verse clearly acknowledges that the Father and Son are not the same "Person."

Another instance of this distinction can be found in Acts 1:7, where Jesus tells His disciples, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." This verse converges with a later verse in Matthew 24:36, which states, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only." These verses highlight the Father's exclusive knowledge of certain aspects of God's plan, further emphasizing His distinctiveness from the Son.

### The Epiphany Regarding the Holy Trinity

The baptism of Jesus Christ, often referred to as the "Baptism of Christ" or the "Epiphany," holds immense significance in the Church. The term "Epiphany" itself means "a moment of sudden revelation or insight," and this event certainly embodies that definition. During this pivotal moment, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three distinct yet equal Persons of the Trinity, were all revealed.

As Jesus emerged from the water after being baptized by John the Baptist, the heavens opened up above Him. In a remarkable display of divine revelation, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and alighted upon Jesus, symbolizing the Spirit's anointing and empowering of Him for His earthly ministry. At the same time, a voice came from heaven, declaring, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

This event affirmed the identity and mission of Jesus as the Son of God. It also signified the Father's love and approval of His Son, emphasizing the unique and intimate relationship between them. Additionally, it provided a glimpse into the unity and cooperation within the Trinity, as each Person played a distinct role in this momentous occasion.

The baptism of Christ is also recognized as a theophany, a visible manifestation of God to humankind. Through His physical presence at the baptism, God the Father made Himself known to those present, demonstrating His involvement in the life and ministry of His Son. This event not only confirmed Jesus' divine nature but also served as a powerful reminder of God's ongoing presence and guidance in the world.

The baptism of Christ is one of the most significant instances in the New Testament of the Holy Trinity's nature as well as existence, with St. Augustine of Hippo explaining, "Here then we have the Trinity presented in a clear way: the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Holy Spirit in the dove. This only needs to be barely mentioned, for it is so obvious for anyone to see. Here the recognition of the Trinity is conveyed to us so plainly that it hardly leaves any room for doubt or hesitation."

### Analogies for the Trinity

Throughout history, various analogies have been employed to illustrate the concept of the Trinity, each shedding light on different aspects while ultimately falling short of fully capturing its profound mystery. By harmonizing these analogies, we can gain a multifaceted understanding of the Trinity.

One common analogy is that of the Sun, which comprises three distinct components: the sun, its light, and its heat. This analogy emphasizes the idea of three distinct entities existing within a single entity. However, it does not adequately explain the Essence of the Trinity, as the Essence of light differs from that of the physical Sun and the heat. Similarly, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct in nature.

Another analogy is the "3-In-1" analogy. Recall from earlier the example of Andrew and Peter; they are distinct individuals despite sharing the same male gender. Now, imagine three individuals: Peter, Andrew, and John. All three possess the same human essence, yet they are distinct human beings. Peter is not Andrew or John, and vice versa. Each has unique attributes such as hair color and nose shape, yet they are all human beings. Now, consider that all three exist within one another: Andrew within Peter, Peter within Andrew, John within Peter, John within Andrew, and so on. Additionally, this being that contains all three permeates the entire cosmos. However, it is crucial to remember that they remain distinct entities.

Applying this analogy to the Holy Trinity, we understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in Essence, meaning they are all divine. They exist within one another, implying that the Father is within the Son, the Son within the Father, the Holy Spirit within the Father, the Father within the Holy Spirit, the Son within the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit within the Son. We profess our belief in one God with three hypostases (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one essence.

It is essential to recognize that within the Trinity, there is diversity but never division. The Trinity exists in unity without requiring uniformity. This mystery transcends human understanding, but through analogies and contemplation, we can deepen our appreciation for the complexity and beauty of the Trinity.

### Biblical Usage

The concept of the Holy Trinity, comprising the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit, is profoundly established in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament, specifically in Genesis Chapter 1, sets the stage for the existence of a triune God. It narrates the act of creation, stating that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3) Each ‘Person’ of the Holy Trinity is clearly established long before the arrival of Christ, as He exists as the Word of God.

Moreover, the Old Testament reinforces the notion of the Holy Trinity in Genesis 1:26, where it is written, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." The plurality of the action of creation of man implies This verse suggests that God exists alongside the two other ‘Persons’ of the Holy Trinity.

The New Testament further elaborates on the distinctions within the Trinity. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, the Apostle Paul writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit..." This verse acknowledges the unique attributes and roles of each person of the Trinity: the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

In John 5:30, Jesus Christ himself declares, "...I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." This statement illustrates the submission of the Son to the will of the Father, emphasizing their distinct persons while acknowledging their unity in purpose. Similarly, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This instruction underscores the inseparable nature of the Trinity and the recognition that true knowledge of God involves understanding Him as three distinct but interconnected persons.

### Hypostatic Union of the Trinity

The word ‘Hypostasis’, meaning ‘Person’, finds its roots in the Greek language. The term is derived from two Greek words: "hypo," meaning "under" or "sub," and "stasis," meaning "stance" or "existence." Together, these elements combine to form the concept of hypostasis, which can be understood as "substance" or "person."

To grasp the essence of hypostasis, it is helpful to consider the analogy of a triangle. In this analogy, the hypostasis of the Father represents the source and origin of all that exists. Uncreated and unbegotten, the Father stands as the supreme being, from whom all creation flows. The hypostasis of the Son, on the other hand, is begotten of the Father. This relationship between the Father and the Son is often described as "eternal generation," emphasizing the unique and intimate bond between them. Through this generation, the Son shares in the divine nature of the Father, yet maintains a distinct hypostasis or personhood.

Lastly, the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit completes the Trinity. The Spirit proceeds from the Father. This procession signifies the dynamic and interactive nature of the divine relationship. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of God, partakes in the divine essence while possessing a distinct hypostasis.

It is essential to emphasize that the concept of hypostasis does not imply separation or division within the Godhead. Rather, it affirms the unity and oneness of God while acknowledging the distinct personal characteristics of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each hypostasis fully possesses the divine nature, yet they are distinct in their personal relations and roles within the Trinity.

Understanding the hypostases of the Trinity is crucial for comprehending the multifaceted nature of God and the intricacies of Christian doctrine. Let us slowly dive into each hypostasis.

### **The Father**

Within the Holy Trinity, the Father stands as the ultimate source, the wellspring from which all creation flows. Far from being an abstract, distant religious entity, He is a present, loving Being who yearns to be known and cherished by His children. As Christ proclaimed in the Gospel of John, "If anyone loves Me, they will keep My word, and My Father will love them. We will come to them and make Our home with them" (John 14:23).

This profound verse reveals the Father's desire for intimate relationship with humanity. He longs to dwell within our hearts, to walk with us through life's journey, and to share His love and wisdom with us. Through His presence, we find comfort, guidance, and strength to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of this world.

The relationship between the Father and the other two persons in the Trinity, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit, is defined through the concepts of "begetting" and "procession." Begetting refers to the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, while procession describes the eternal proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father. These timeless actions demonstrate the mystical, internal connections within God and the dynamic life He holds within Himself.

It is through the Son, Jesus Christ, that we have access to the Father. As Christ Himself declared, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Christ's life, death, and resurrection provide the bridge that spans the chasm between humanity and God, making reconciliation and relationship with the Father possible.

One of Lord Jesus Christ's primary goals during His earthly ministry was to guide people to His Father along with Himself. He taught His disciples about the Father's love, mercy, and grace, revealing His

character and attributes through His words and actions. Christ's teachings and example invite us to embrace the Father's love and to experience the transformative power of His presence in our lives.

## The Son

The second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, is referred to as the Son of God, the Word, or Logos. This concept finds its basis in the opening chapter of the Gospel of St. John, which likens the relationship between thought and word to that of the Father and the Son.

Thought, originating from within itself, utters a word, much like the Prophet's declaration, "My heart hath poured forth a good word" (Ps. 45:1). Thought and word, though distinct and occupying separate spaces—thought remaining in the heart while the word is on the tongue and lips—are inseparable and codependent. Thought gives rise to word, and word, in turn, communicates thought to the listener.

St. Dionysius of Alexandria provides further insight by explaining that thought is like a word hidden within, while word is thought brought forth. Thought transforms into word, and word carries thought to the ears of the listener. This process allows thought, through the medium of the word, to be instilled in the souls of those who hear it.

“Our thought utters from itself the word according to what the Prophet has said: ‘My heart hath poured forth a good word’ (Ps. 45:1). Thought and word are separate one from the other, and each occupies its special and separate place: while thought remains and moves the heart, the word is on the tongue and the lips. However, they are inseparable, and not for one moment are they deprived of each other. Thought does not exist without word, nor word without thought, having received its existence in thought. Thought is, as it were, a word hidden within, and word is thought which has come without. Thought is transformed into word, and word transmits thought to the hearers. In this way, thought, with the help of the word, is instilled in the souls of the listeners, entering them together with the word. Thought, coming from itself, is as it were the father of the word: and the word is, as it were, the son of the thought. Before the thought the word was impossible, and the word does not come from anywhere outside, but rather from the thought itself. Thus also, the Father, the greatest and all-embracing Thought, has a Son, the Word, His first Interpreter and Herald.” - St. Dionysius of Alexandria explains,

In this analogy, thought, emerging from itself, can be seen as the father of the word, and the word, as the son of thought. Before thought, the word cannot exist, and the word originates not from an external source but from thought itself. Similarly, the Father, the greatest and all-encompassing Thought, has a Son, the Word, who serves as His primary interpreter and messenger.

## The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is often referred to as the 'wind' or 'breath' of God. While human language and understanding can never fully encapsulate the divine nature, we can attempt to describe the Spirit's role in relation to the Father and the Son.

The Spirit resides within us, guiding and empowering us as believers. Through the Spirit, we experience God's presence and work in our lives. Just as the Son Jesus Christ reveals the Father to us,

so the Spirit reveals the Son to us. Through the Spirit's work, the teachings and life of Christ become real and personal to us.

In John 15:26, Jesus promises “But when the Helper (i.e. the Holy Spirit) comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). Moreover, in John 14:16-17, Jesus assures us that the Holy Spirit can be known personally. “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16, 17).

There is a beautiful prayer in the Agpeya - Third Hour expressed to the Holy Spirit: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth who is present in all places and fills all, the treasury of good things and the Life-Giver, graciously come, and dwell in us and purify us from all defilement, O Good One, and save our souls” This prayer expresses our constant dependence on the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. It acknowledges the Spirit as the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, and the Life-Giver. This prayer reminds us of the essential role of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual lives and encourages us to seek His presence and guidance daily.

### Learning from the Trinity

In the following quote by Bishop Kallistos Ware, an Eastern church father, he emphasizes the profound connection between our love for one another and our faith in the Triune God. A genuine confession of faith in the Trinity is only possible when we demonstrate mutual love towards each other, mirroring the loving relationships within the Trinity. He asserts that love for one another serves as a precondition for faith in the Trinity, while faith in the Trinity, in turn, amplifies and gives deeper meaning to our love.

He also challenges the perception of the doctrine of the Trinity as an abstruse theological concept reserved for specialists. He argues that it should have a transformative impact on our daily lives, urging us to recognize that as beings made in the image of God the Trinity, we are called to replicate the mystery of mutual love that exists within the Trinity on earth.

A genuine confession of faith in the Triune God can be made only by those who, after the likeness of the Trinity, show love mutually towards each other. There is an integral connection between our love for one another and our faith in the Trinity: the first is a precondition for the second, and in its turn the second gives full strength and meaning to the first. So far, from being pushed into the corner and treated as a piece of abstruse theologizing of interest only to specialists, the doctrine of the Trinity ought to have upon our daily life an effect that is nothing less than revolutionary. Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven.” (Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*)

This quote highlights the inseparable nature of faith and love in the Christian understanding of the Trinity. It encourages us to see our relationships with others as reflections of the divine love and

community within the Godhead and to strive for a life of love and unity that mirrors the Trinity's perfect communion.

Therefore, as we seek to know and love God, let us turn our hearts toward the Father. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can enter into a personal and intimate relationship with the Father, experiencing His love, grace, and peace in our lives.



### *Review Questions*

1. As Coptic orthodox Christians, believing in the Holy Trinity, what is our primary religious orientation? (A: Monotheistic.)
2. Why do we call the sacrament of Baptism, 'the Baptism of Christ'? (A: Baptism marks our personal identification and connection with Christ. We are united with him and devote our loyalty and service to Christ.)
3. What is an appropriate analogy to describe the nature of the Holy Trinity? (A: the 3-in-1 analogy/ triangle analogy.)
4. What is an instance in the Holy Bible wherein the Holy Trinity is portrayed? (A: the Baptism of Christ, in the book of Matthew.)
5. Are God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equal in relation to each other? (A: No.)
6. How is it possible for three separate entities to exist as one? (A: They exist in one Essence, with differing roles.)
7. Within the Trinity, there is diversity and division. True or False? (A: False.)
8. What evidence is there for the existence of the Holy Trinity in Genesis? (A: See Genesis 1)
9. What is the difference between a 'Person' and their Essence? (A: Person is their role/ identity, while Essence refers to their nature.)
10. Can the Sun be used as an appropriate analogy for the Holy Trinity? Why or why not? (A: No, because the Essence of the light is different from that of the physical Sun, as well as different from the heat.)



*Books*



*Supplementary Material*



### **The Meaning of the Holy Trinity**

[Bishop Youssef on the Holy Trinity](#)

# The Nature of Christ

## DOGMA & THEOLOGY

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### Is Christ more Divine than Human?

The nature of Christ has been a contentious issue throughout history, with numerous heresies emerging to challenge its significance. One of the most notable divisions within the church occurred in 451 AD at the Council of Chalcedon, where monophysitism, which emphasized the unity of Christ's divine and human natures, was addressed. However, some churches, now known as the Non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox Churches, rejected the council's decisions, insisting on preserving the unity between Christ's humanity and divinity.

At the heart of this dispute lies the fundamental question: Did Jesus Christ possess one or two natures? Understanding the answer to this question is crucial for our salvation and for recognizing God's empathy toward us. The belief in the One Nature of the Incarnate Logos is essential, necessary, and fundamental for one's redemption. This belief affirms that Jesus Christ, the Logos, fully assumed human nature while remaining fully divine.

The significance of this belief lies in its implications for our redemption. Redemption requires an unlimited propitiation, a sacrifice capable of forgiving the countless sins of all people throughout time, not just those of an individual. Only the Incarnation of God, the Logos, offered this generous solution through His Divine Power. By becoming fully human, Christ experienced our limitations, temptations, and sufferings, demonstrating His empathy and solidarity with humanity.

Moreover, Christ's human nature facilitated His substitutionary death on the cross. As a perfect and sinless man, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, reconciling us with God. Through His sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection, He conquered sin and death, providing the means for our salvation and eternal life. Seeing this ultimate mystical unity between human and divine, St. Paul says: "For had they known it, they would not have ***crucified the Lord of Glory***." (1 Cor. 2:8) and instead they "...denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you and killed the Prince of Life..." (Acts 3:14)

Understanding the nature of Christ as both fully human and fully divine is essential for our faith and understanding of redemption. It assures us that in Christ, we have a Savior who understands our struggles and experiences and who has offered the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. By embracing the belief in the One Nature of the Incarnate Logos, we acknowledge His divinity, humanity, and sacrificial love, which grants us forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the promise of eternal life.

### The Orthodox Concept

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Logos, is God Himself. He assumed a perfect human nature, uniting His Divine nature with His human nature. This union is complete and permanent, never divided or separated. His Godhead never departed from His manhood, even for an instant. As we say in the liturgy: "his divinity never departed from his humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye."

After the schism in 451 AD, the Coptic Orthodox Church rejected the Council of Chalcedon and its theological positions. They, along with other churches, were incorrectly accused of being "Monophysites," believing in only one nature of Christ. The Syrians, Armenians, Ethiopians, and Indians also share this belief and are known as "Non-Chalcedonian" Orthodox Churches. Though the Non-Chalcedonian church do indeed believe in 'One Nature', it must be specified as 'One Nature out of Two', or also known as 'Miaphysite'. The one Nature of God the Incarnate Logos" as St. Cyril calls it.

On the other hand, the Chalcedonian Catholic and Greek Churches believe in the two natures of Christ. The Protestant Church also holds this belief. These churches are known as "Diophysites," believers in the two natures of Christ. These Roman (or Chalcedonian) Orthodox Churches include Constantinople, Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania, Hungary, and Serbia, as well as the Roman Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, America, and the St. Catherine Monastery in the Sinai desert.

According to our belief, the Divine nature united with the human nature in the womb of St. Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. This unity occurred from the first moment of the Holy pregnancy. As a result of this union, a single nature emerged from the combination of the two, rather than two separate natures coexisting.

### **Heresies Against the One Nature**

The nature of Christ has faced numerous challenges throughout history, with various heresies emerging to question His divinity and humanity. One such heresy is Arianism, proposed by Arius, who denied the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Arius believed that Christ was not consubstantial with the Father, meaning He was not of the same essence or nature. He asserted that Christ was created, diminishing His divine status. Despite being condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., Arianism's roots persist to this day, causing disputes and suspicion within the Church.

Another notable heresy is Apollinarianism, championed by Apollinarius, who acknowledged the Divine Nature of Christ but denied His complete human nature. Apollinarius proposed that Christ did not possess a soul and that His human nature was incomplete, with the Logos (the divine aspect of Christ) providing the necessary life. This notion was perceived as incomplete and heretical, and the Holy Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. condemned Apollinarianism, rejecting its claims.

Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople in 428 A.D., also sparked controversy with his heresy. He refused to refer to the Virgin Mary as "Mother of God" (Theotokos) and instead promoted the title "Mother of Jesus" (Christokos). Nestorius argued that St. Mary gave birth to a mere human, and that Divinity later descended and filled this human. His teachings essentially separated the divine and human aspects of Christ, which led to his excommunication by the Holy Ecumenical Council of Ephesus held in 431 A.D.

Lastly, Eutyches, an archimandrite in Constantinople, vehemently opposed the Nestorian heresy. In his zeal to emphasize the unity of the two natures in Christ, he fell into another heresy. Eutyches claimed that the human nature of Christ was absorbed and dissolved into the Divine nature like a drop of vinegar in the ocean. This teaching effectively denied the reality of Christ's human nature and was condemned as heretical.

These heresies reflect a diversity of perspectives on the nature of Christ, ranging from denying His divinity to disputing the completeness of His humanity. The early Church faced the challenge of discerning the truth amid these conflicting viewpoints, ultimately affirming the orthodox understanding that Christ is both fully divine and fully human.

### Doctrines Regarding the Nature of Christ

Miaphysitism, Monophysitism, Dyophysitism, Docetism, and Nestorianism are then the doctrines related to the nature of Christ that have been debated throughout Christian history.

Miaphysitism asserts that Jesus Christ possesses a single, unified nature that is both human and divine. This nature is often referred to as the "nature of the Incarnate Logos." Miaphysitism emphasizes the unity of Christ's person and the inseparability of his human and divine attributes.

Monophysitism, in contrast, teaches that Jesus Christ has a single, divine nature. Monophysites believe that Christ's human nature was absorbed into his divine nature, resulting in a single, divine nature. This doctrine was popular in the early church, but it was eventually rejected as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

Dyophysitism, on the other hand, teaches that Jesus Christ has two distinct natures, human and divine. These two natures are united in the person of Christ, but they remain distinct and unmixed. Dyophysitism emphasizes the full humanity and divinity of Christ and is the Christological doctrine taught in non-Oriental Orthodox churches.

Docetism is a Christian doctrine that teaches that Jesus Christ was not a real, physical human being, but rather a spiritual entity. Docetists believe that Christ's human body was an illusion or a mere appearance. This doctrine was popular in the early church but was eventually rejected as heretical.

Nestorianism is a Christian doctrine that teaches that Jesus Christ has two separate persons, one human and one divine. Nestorians believe that the human person of Christ is distinct from the divine person of Christ and that the two are united only by a moral union. This doctrine was condemned as heretical at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD.

The Miaphysitism is a doctrine that holds that Jesus Christ has a single, unified nature that is both human and divine. This doctrine emphasizes the unity of Christ's person and the inseparability of his human and divine attributes.

### The Nature of the Union

Coptic Orthodox belief holds that the union of the two natures of Christ is unique, distinct from any other type of union. This union is characterized by several key attributes. Firstly, it is without mingling, unlike the union of wheat and barley or salt and sugar. This means that the two natures of Christ remain distinct and do not merge or fuse together. Secondly, the union is without confusion, unlike the union of milk and tea. Although the two natures are distinct, they are perfectly united without causing any confusion or blending of their properties. Thirdly, the union is without alteration, meaning that neither nature is affected or changed by the union. Each nature retains its unique properties and characteristics. Fourthly, the union is without transmutation, meaning that neither nature is

transformed or converted into the other. This misconception of transmutation leads to the belief that one element can change into another through processes such as radioactive decay or nuclear bombardment.

To further illustrate the Coptic Orthodox belief in the union of Christ's two natures, certain analogies are employed. One such analogy is the union of iron and fire, as espoused by St. Cyril the Great and St. Dioscorus. When iron is ignited in fire, the two unite, but the iron does not change into fire, nor does the fire change into iron. While this analogy may not be perfect, as the union of iron and fire is not permanent, it serves to convey the idea that the two natures of Christ are united without being transformed or altered. Another analogy used is the union of the soul and the body, as described by St. Cyril, St. Augustine, and others. In this analogy, the nature of the soul unites with the physical, earthly nature of the body to form a union of one nature, which is the human nature we experience today.

Just as we say that human nature is one nature consisting of two elements, we can also say about the Incarnate Logos that He is one entity of two elements. Although a human being is formed of these two 'natures,' one would never claim that a person is two but rather one. All of a person's actions are attributed to this one nature, not solely to the soul or the body alone. "He is not bi-natured, to one we kneel down and to the other we do not, but He is rather of One Nature - the Incarnate Logos - that is one with His Body and before whom we kneel down in one genuflection" (St. Athanasius). This understanding of the union of Christ's two natures is central to Coptic Orthodox belief and distinguishes it from other theological interpretations.

## Miracles of the Incarnate Logos

In the Holy Bible, who was speaking with the blind man? It was not just human nature. This is evident from the Lord Jesus Christ's own words, when He confirms to the blind man that "it is He that talks with you, the Son of God" (John 9:37). The Son of God is a reference to Jesus Christ's Divine nature, as He is the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, it was not merely the human nature of Jesus Christ that was speaking with the blind man, but also in union with His Divine nature.

One can also consider the miracles performed by Jesus Christ, such as walking on water and rebuking the wind. These miracles were beyond the capabilities of human nature alone and could only be performed by someone with Divine power. Therefore, it is clear that when Jesus Christ walked on water and rebuked the wind, it was the whole Incarnate Logos that was acting.

Additionally, the same could be said about other miraculous events performed by Jesus Christ, such as giving sight to the man born blind, turning water into wine, and the bleeding woman touching Him for healing. All these events demonstrate the Incarnate Logos. It is important to note, that in the non-chalcedonian perspective, we cannot separate the natures and proclaim just the Divine Nature performed the miracle but rather refer solely and mystically to the Incarnate Logos. It is 'in thought alone,' as St. Cyril said, that one could expound and give account to one nature. Jesus Christ is not merely a human being but the Incarnate Logos, the second person of the Trinity, who possesses both Divine and human natures.

## The One Nature at the Birth of Christ

The birth of Jesus Christ, as recounted in the Bible, holds profound significance for Christians. At the heart of this event lies the question of who the Virgin Mary gave birth to. About who did the angel proclaim: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born of you will be called the Son of God." (Lk. 1:35)? While some may argue that she solely gave birth to the Godhead, others believe it was only the manhood. However, a deeper understanding reveals that the Virgin Mary gave birth to both God and man, in the form of the Incarnate God.

The prophecy in Isaiah 9:6 foretells the birth of a Child who would possess divine attributes such as "for unto Us a Child is born, unto Us a Son is given and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His Name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This passage suggests that the Virgin Mary gave birth to more than just a human being. Moreover, the account in Galatians 4:4 emphasizes that God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, according to Law." This verse highlights the human aspect of Jesus Christ's birth.

Rejecting the heresy of Nestorius, which claims that the Divine and human natures of Christ are separate, Christians recognize that the Virgin Mary gave birth to the Incarnate God. The inseparable union of these two natures is essential for understanding the significance of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Numerous verses from the Bible depict and substantiate both the Divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. For instance, in John 1:1, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This verse establishes the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus Christ. Conversely, in Luke 2:7, we find, "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." This verse portrays the human birth and humble beginnings of Jesus Christ.

The significance of the Virgin Mary's birth-giving extends beyond the theological debate surrounding the nature of Jesus Christ. It serves as a reminder of God's love and condescension toward humanity. Elizabeth, her cousin clearly saw this, and thus proclaimed: "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me." (Lk. 1:43) By taking on human flesh, Jesus Christ bridged the gap between God and man, making it possible for us to experience salvation and eternal life.

## **The One Nature during the sufferings of Christ**

How can we describe the sufferings of Christ if divinity is not susceptible to pain, yet the human nature within Him endured suffering while united with the Divine nature? It was this unified Nature that bore the pain, despite the Divine nature's immunity to suffering. Through His humanity, Christ suffered during crucifixion. As both man and God, His physical death offered limitless atonement for humankind, as stated in Acts 20:28: "...to shepherd the Church to God which He purchased with His Own Blood."

The holy fathers used the analogy of a red-hot iron to explain this concept, equating the Divine Nature united with Christ's human nature. When a blacksmith strikes the red-hot iron, the hammer impacts both the iron and the fire united with it. The iron bends (suffers), while the fire remains untouched despite bending with the iron.

Christ, the Incarnate Logos, embodies a unique nature that encompasses the characteristics of both His Divine and human natures. While His Divine nature is impervious to death, His human nature possesses the susceptibility to mortality. Crucially, at the time of Christ's death, there was no separation between these two natures.

On the third day, His soul, eternally united with His Godhead, returned to unite with His body, which also remained inseparably connected to His divine essence. This event marked the resurrection of Christ. Throughout this process, His Divinity never departed from either His soul or His body.

"The soul left the body, but His Divinity never departed, neither from His Soul nor from His Body. His Soul, likewise, whilst united with His Godhead, descended into hell to preach those who died in the faith and to open to them the gates of Paradise and let them enter. Yet His Body, also united with His Godhead, remained in the grave. " This is a saying from the Syrian fraction, concerning the death of Christ. The prayer emphasizes the indivisible unity of Christ's Divine and human natures, even in the face of death. They underscore that His Divinity remained present in both His soul and His body throughout the period of the Resurrection.

### **“Son of Man” vs. “Son of God”**

No doubt, the term "Son of Man" denotes the human nature of Christ, just as the phrase, "Son of God," denotes His Divinity. "No one has ascended up to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man which is in heaven. "(John 3:13) However, our Lord Jesus Christ used the term "Son of Man" on several occasions where He meant "Son of God." "For the *Son of Man* is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:8) The Son of man is thus in heaven and on earth. Similarly, the Lord uses the term "Son of Man" to demonstrate his Lordship: "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Matt. 12:8)

For those skeptical regarding the human nature of Christ, the Holy Bible portrays many instances of our Lord being referred to as "Son of Man," thereby evidencing his humanity. Recall his many miracles, such as that of the paralytic, "But that you may know that the *Son of Man* has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' And he arose and departed to his house." (Matthew 9:6-7) Not only does Christ show his authority of forgiveness but also demonstrates how the "Son of Man" is Lord and Judge: "For the Son of man will come in the Glory of His Father with His angels and then He will reward every man according to his works. " (Matt. 16:27)

The New Testament additionally uses this prevalent phrase to speak of what may come, such as the book of Matthew describing "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' " (Matthew 25:31-34). Also in the same book, "the Son of Man will come in the Glory of His Father with His angels and then He will reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27) Our Lord, Jesus Christ does not encompass only the nature of humanity, for these predictions and as His works, are far beyond the capability of any regular man. His Divine nature is what allows one to, God

willing, "...see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:63-65). The "Son of Man" is then seen and described as full of glory and seated at the right hand of the Father!

The book of Matthew is not the sole book of the Bible wherein this phenomenon is observed: throughout the book of Acts we are told that one saw "...the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:56). In summation, one needs to be aware of the duality of the nature of Christ, be it one nature altogether, as what shall you do "...if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (John 6:62)



### *Review Questions*

1. Does Christ have one or two natures? (A: One Nature )
2. What did St. Cyril call the nature of Christ? (A: The Incarnate Logos)
3. What is the difference between monophysites & miaphysites? (A: Miaphysitism is a doctrine that teaches the existence of a unified, but compound, nature of Jesus Christ, (one nature of both the human and divine nature, which is the "the nature of the Incarnate Logos.") Contrastingly, monophysitism is a doctrine that teaches the existence of a single nature.)
4. What is the doctrine of the Chalcedonian church? (A: They believe in the two natures of Christ.)
5. What is Arius heresy? (A: Arius denied the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; he considered that Christ was not consubstantial with the Father and that He was created. The roots of Arianism still exist until this day. Even after being condemned in 325 A.D. by the Council of Nicea, Arius and his followers caused trouble, dissension and suspicions within the Holy Church.)
6. What is Apollinarius heresy? (A: Apollinarius preached the Divine Nature of Christ, but did not believe in His complete human nature; he considered that the human nature of Christ was not in need of a soul and thus He was without soul because God the Logos provided the needed life. As this implied that the human nature of Christ was incomplete, the Holy Ecumenical Council of Constantinople held in 381 A.D. condemned Apollinarius and rejected his idea declaring it a heresy.)
7. What is Eutyches heresy? (A: Eutyches was an archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople. He zealously opposed the Nestorian heresy and was so highly concerned about the unity of the two natures in Christ, which Nestorus tore apart, that he fell into another heresy. Eutyches said that the human nature was absorbed and dissolved in the Divine nature as a drop of vinegar in the ocean.)
8. When did the Divine nature unite with the human nature? (A: At the first moment of

the Holy pregnancy)

9. To whom did St. Mary give birth? (A: Son of Man)
10. Does the term "Son of Man" refer to the human nature or to the one nature, the Incarnate Logos? (A: It refers to the one nature, as our Lord Jesus Christ used the term "Son of Man" on several occasions when He meant "Son of God.")
11. Who did suffer on the cross? (A: The human element of Christ, as his Divinity could not suffer.)
12. What did happen when Christ died on the cross? (A: No separation occurred between the Divine nature and the human nature at the moment of Christ's death.)
13. What did happen at the resurrection? (A: On the third day His soul, united with His Godhead, came to unite with His body which was also united with His Godhead; Thus resurrection took place.)



[The Nature of Christ](#)

# The Holy Spirit

## DOGMA & THEOLOGY

### Who is the Holy Spirit: A power or a person?

At the heart of Christian belief about God is the question of who the Holy Spirit truly is. Is the Holy Spirit merely a divine power or influence, or is He truly a Person? Can a mere power help or intercede? Can a power possess a mind or act with intention? Holy Scripture itself answers these questions with clarity.

The Apostle Paul writes:

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

*(Romans 8:26–27, NKJV)*

In this passage, St. Paul attributes to the Holy Spirit actions that presuppose personal agency. The Spirit helps, intercedes, possesses a mind, and acts according to the will of God. These are not the actions of an impersonal force. Intercession requires awareness, intention, and relationship. Scripture therefore presents the Holy Spirit as a living Person who actively participates in the life of believers.

This biblical witness is fully consistent with the faith of the Church. In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we confess:

*We believe, “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, ... who, **with the Father and the Son.**” (The Creed)*

This confession, in the creed, places the Holy Spirit not among created forces, but within the very life of God Himself. Scripture describes the Holy Spirit in personal terms, not as power, when it says that He teaches, guides, comforts, and intercedes (John 14:26; Romans 8:14). He possesses emotions, intellect, and will (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 2:10–14; 1 Corinthians 12:11). The Holy Spirit spoke to Philip and gave counsel to the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:29; Acts 15:28). He was sinned against and lied to (Acts 5:3–4).

Each of these testimonies leads to the same theological conclusion. The Holy Spirit does not act as an impersonal force, but as a Person. He is the Third Person (Hypostasis) of the Holy Trinity, one in essence with the Father and the Son.

For the servant of the Church, this truth is not merely theoretical. To believe in the Holy Spirit as a Person is to recognize that the Christian life is lived in real communion with Him. He teaches, guides,

sanctifies, and intercedes, and He calls believers to holiness, obedience, and deeper participation in the life of God.

### **Can a mere power be a witness?**

This question follows naturally from the previous observations. Can the Holy Spirit, often described as the power of God, truly function as a witness? This question follows naturally from the scriptural testimony concerning the personal nature of the Holy Spirit.

Witnessing is not a mechanical act. Witnessing typically involves perception, understanding, and the ability to communicate. Can a force or power possess these qualities? These are qualities that belong to a personal subject, not to an impersonal force.

Holy Scripture explicitly identifies the Holy Spirit as a witness. The apostles declare:

“And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

(Acts 5:32, NKJV)

In this passage, the Holy Spirit is presented alongside the apostles as a witness to the saving work of God. The Holy Spirit is not described as a passive power operating through them, but as one who actively bears witness together with them.

The Holy Spirit’s role as a witness is closely connected to His mission to reveal Christ. Our Lord Himself teaches that the Spirit bears witness to Him:

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

(John 15:26, NKJV)

Here, Christ attributes testimony directly to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit “testifies” of Christ, revealing the truth of who Christ is and what He has accomplished. This witnessing role is not limited to the apostolic age but continues in the life of the Church, as the Spirit enables believers to confess Christ faithfully before the world.

It is therefore theologically inaccurate to describe the Holy Spirit merely as a power of God. Scripture reveals Him as the divine Person who knows, testifies, and participates in God’s saving work. He is not a separate being alongside God, but a distinct divine Person (Hypostasis) within the one Holy Trinity, who shares fully in the divine knowledge and will.

For the servant of the Church, this reminds us that Christian witness is never merely a human effort. When the Church proclaims Christ, she does so in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, who bears witness from within her. True testimony to Christ depends not on human persuasion alone, but on fidelity to the Spirit who reveals the truth and confirms it in the hearts of those who hear.

### **Can a mere power experience grief?**

If witnessing presupposes awareness, grief presupposes something even deeper.

Can the Holy Spirit, as the power of God, experience emotions such as grief? Grief is a complex emotion requiring substantial self-awareness and relational capacity.

Holy Scripture speaks with clarity on this point. St. Paul exhorts believers:

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

(Ephesians 4:30, NKJV)

This command would be unintelligible if the Holy Spirit were merely an impersonal force. Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit the capacity to be grieved, which reveals His personal and relational presence within the life of the believer. The Holy Spirit seals believers for redemption and remains actively involved in their journey toward salvation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ further explains the guiding role of the Holy Spirit:

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

(John 16:13, NKJV)

The Spirit’s guidance is not coercive, but faithful and patient. He leads believers into truth and remains at work even when they stumble. The reality of human weakness does not negate God’s love. Rather, God continues to call His people to repentance and restoration.

Christ also teaches that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin:

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

(John 16:8, NKJV)

This conviction must be understood correctly. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is not intended to condemn, but to awaken the conscience, reveal the truth of our condition, and lead us back to God through repentance. When believers respond humbly to this conviction, the Spirit restores communion and strengthens them in righteousness.

It's crucial that we, as believers, remain sensitive to this inner voice and yield to His guidance. Resisting the Holy Spirit's promptings only leads to spiritual stagnation and a deeper entrenchment in sin.

### **Can a mere power guide or speak?**

The Bible provides numerous examples of the Holy Spirit's active role in guiding and directing God's people. The book of Acts provides clear examples of the Holy Spirit’s active guidance in the life of the Church. While the early Christians ministered and prayed, Scripture records:

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”  
(Acts 13:2, NKJV)

Here, the Holy Spirit **speaks, calls, and appoints**. The Holy Spirit specifically calls out Barnabas and Saul for the missionary work God had prepared for them.

Similarly, in Acts 20:22-23, the Holy Spirit compels Paul to go to Jerusalem, despite the dangers and hardships that awaited him.

“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”  
(Acts 20:22–23, NKJV)

The Holy Spirit does not promise Paul ease or safety, but truth and preparation. **His guidance is not meant to remove all suffering, but to strengthen believers to walk faithfully in God’s will**, even through hardship. In Acts 21:11, the prophet Agabus, through the Holy Spirit, foretells St. Paul's impending arrest in Jerusalem. This prophecy wasn't meant to discourage St. Paul but to prepare him for the trials ahead. It's a reminder that the Holy Spirit doesn't shield us from all difficulties but equips us to face them with faith and courage.

Similarly, in Acts 28:25, we witness the Holy Spirit speaking through the prophet Isaiah to a hardened and unbelieving audience. This illustrates that **the Holy Spirit's work** isn't limited to believers but **extends to those who are still far from God**. The Spirit's convicting power can penetrate even the hardest hearts, drawing them towards repentance and salvation.

The Apostle Paul further warns that discernment is necessary within the Church:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”  
(1 Timothy 4:1, NKJV)

This warning underscores the **importance of remaining attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit**, especially in times of confusion and false teaching. The Spirit is the source of truth and discernment for the Church.

### The Inspiration of Scripture and the Work of the Holy Spirit

When the Church speaks about the inspiration of Holy Scripture, she confesses a profound theological truth. The Bible is not merely a collection of human writings about God, nor is it the product of a blind or mechanical process. Rather, Holy Scripture is the Word of God given through the active and living work of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul writes:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

(2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV)

The affirmation that **Scripture is "God-breathed"** encapsulates this truth. The original Greek term "θεοπνευστος" portrays the Holy Spirit's active role in the formation of Scripture. It underscores that **the Bible's words are** not merely human thoughts about God but are, in a mysterious and profound way, **the very words of God Himself**.

At the same time, the Church rejects the idea that inspiration is a form of mechanical dictation. **The Holy Spirit did not erase the personalities, styles, or historical circumstances of the human authors**. Instead, He worked through their intellect, language, culture, and free will, guiding them so that what they wrote is truly God's word and faithfully communicates His saving truth.

St. Peter the Apostle confirms this understanding:

“For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

(2 Peter 1:21, NKJV)

This verse highlights the cooperation between divine action and human response. The prophets and apostles truly spoke and wrote, yet they did so under the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is therefore both divine in origin and human in expression.

Because the Holy Spirit is the primary author of Scripture, the Bible carries divine authority and reliability in matters of faith and salvation. At the same time, Scripture must be read within the life of the Church, where the same Holy Spirit who inspired the texts continues to guide their faithful interpretation.

### Is the Holy Spirit equal to the Father and the Son in Divinity?

Yes, the Holy Spirit is unequivocally equal to the Father and the Son in Divinity, according to a multitude of scriptural references and theological interpretations. This is a cornerstone of Christian belief, affirming the Holy Trinity—one God in three co-equal, co-eternal persons.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself reveals this equality when He commands His disciples:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

(Matthew 28:19, NKJV)

Notice here it is said, “in the name” and not the names (also 1 Jn. 5:7). His Divinity is proven also, that He is the Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:2; Ezek. 37:9, 10), capable of resurrecting the dead. Who can raise the dead except God alone?

The Creed confesses this same truth when it calls the Holy Spirit “the Giver of Life” and “the Speaker to the prophets.” This confession is grounded in Scripture, as the Apostle Peter writes:

“For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

(2 Peter 1:21, NKJV, see also 2 Tim. 3:16; Acts 28:25)

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is also revealed with particular clarity in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. St. Peter confronts Ananias, saying:

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’”

(Acts 5:3-4, NKJV)

In this passage, lying to the Holy Spirit is explicitly identified as lying to God. Scripture does not permit the interpretation that the Holy Spirit is merely a power or instrument of God. He is addressed as God Himself, worthy of reverence and fear.

### **The Holy Spirit exhibits attributes that are unique to God.**

#### ***Creator:***

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

#### ***Eternal:***

- “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14).
- Eternal existence belongs to God alone. Indeed, every other being has been created at some point in time. The fact that the Holy Spirit is eternal is further evidence of His deity. Origen asserts the divinity of the Holy Spirit, “*The Spirit Himself is in the Law and in the Gospel; He is ever with the Father and the Son; like the Father and the Son He always is and was and will be.*”

#### ***Unbounded:***

- “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10) (What bounded being could search the depths of God?).
- Since God’s ways are unfathomable to us, but known to the Holy Spirit, this is another indication that the Holy Spirit is God Himself.

#### ***Omnipresent:***

- “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalm 139:7) and “Because the spirit of the Lord has filled the world,” (Wisdom 1:7)
- The Spirit of the Lord is the same as the presence of the Lord. He is everywhere. We find that Jesus said the Holy Spirit would indwell all believers. We read the following in the gospel of

John, “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17). The fact that He can indwell each of us at the same time shows that He is everywhere present.

#### Omniscient:

- “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:11) (To know the things of God is to know the unknowable).
- Someone must be a human being to know things about humans. Likewise only God can know the intimate things pertaining to God. Since the Holy Spirit knows the things of God, He therefore must be God.

### What is the role of the Holy Spirit and how does He interact with us?

The Holy Spirit actively works within the life of every believer and within the life of the Church. His work is not limited to a single function, but encompasses a unified and life-giving ministry that leads humanity into communion with God. Scripture reveals the Holy Spirit as Intercessor, Helper, Comforter, Advocate, Convictor, Sanctifier, and the One who leads people to Christ. These roles are distinct in expression, yet inseparable in purpose.

| <i>Role of the Holy Spirit</i>                | <i>Description</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Biblical Reference</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Intercessor</b>                            | the Holy Spirit functions as our Intercessor. Recognizing our human limitations and the inherent struggle to articulate our deepest needs and desires in prayer, the Spirit intervenes. He bridges the gap between our fallibility and God's omniscience, interceding on our behalf with "groanings which cannot be uttered."                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <i>“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession.” - Romans 8:26</i>                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Helper/Comforter/Advocate (παρακλητος)</b> | The Holy Spirit is seen as a source of comfort and assistance to believers. In times of trouble or need, the Holy Spirit is believed to come alongside believers to provide guidance, strength, and support.<br><br>The Holy Spirit's role as Comforter is particularly significant. In a world filled with trials and tribulations, the Spirit provides a wellspring of peace and consolation. He empowers believers to navigate life's challenges with resilience and hope, reminding them of God's unwavering love and faithfulness. | <i>“But the [παρακλητος], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” - John 14:26</i><br><br>(N.B. The Greek word παρακλητος is alternatively translated as intercessor, helper, comforter, or advocate.) |

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Convicts</b>                      | The Spirit's conviction centers on sin, righteousness, and judgment. He exposes the reality of sin, leading individuals to repentance and a recognition of their need for a Savior. Furthermore, the Spirit illuminates the standard of righteousness established by God, revealing the disparity between human efforts and divine perfection. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is not intended to condemn but to lead individuals to repentance and transformation. It is a vital aspect of the role of the Spirit, prompting a change of heart and a turning towards God. | <i>"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"</i> - John 16:7-8 |
| <b>Strengthens against the Flesh</b> | In our flesh (our human nature) there are forces that are much stronger than ourselves. The Holy Spirit will strengthen us, so that every time we are tempted, we do not yield to the lusts of the flesh.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <i>"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh ... those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."</i> - Galatians 5:16-25                                                      |
| <b>Leads to Christ</b>               | One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to lead unbelievers to the faith. This happened to Cornelius the Gentile when God's Spirit worked in him and even gave him gifts and led him to faith. So, unless the Holy Spirit works in an unbeliever, he cannot attain faith. It is up to the individual to accept or to quench the Holy Spirit and His work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>"no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"</i> - 1 Corinthians 12:3                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father only or from the Father and the Son?

The question of the procession of the Holy Spirit touches the inner life of the Holy Trinity and must therefore be addressed with precision, reverence, and fidelity to Scripture and the faith of the Church. The Church distinguishes carefully between the **eternal procession** of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity and the **temporal mission** of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches explicitly concerning the Spirit's eternal origin:

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."  
(John 15:26, NKJV)

In this verse, Christ reveals two distinct truths. First, the Holy Spirit **proceeds from the Father**. This refers to the Spirit's eternal origin within the Holy Trinity. The Father alone is the source and origin (arche) within the Godhead. Second, Christ says that He will **send** the Spirit to the disciples. This refers

not to the Spirit's eternal origin, but to His mission in time for the salvation and sanctification of the Church.

The Church therefore confesses that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father alone, while being sent into the world by the Son from the Father. This distinction safeguards the unique personal property of the Father as the source within the Trinity, while also affirming the Son's active role in the revelation and sending of the Spirit in history.

This understanding is reflected in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which confesses the Holy Spirit as the one "who proceeds from the Father." The Creed does not speak of procession from the Son, but consistently maintains the Father as the source of the Spirit's eternal being

At the same time, Scripture affirms the intimate relationship between the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit is sent in the name of the Son (John 14:26), testifies of the Son (John 15:26), and glorifies the Son by revealing His truth to the Church (John 16:14). These statements describe the Spirit's work in the economy of salvation, not His eternal origin within the Trinity..

## Patristic Teaching on the Holy Spirit

The teaching of the Church concerning the Holy Spirit is not a later theological development, but is deeply rooted in Scripture and faithfully articulated by the Fathers of the Church. Among the most important patristic witnesses to the divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit are St. Basil the Great and St. Athanasius the Apostolic. Their writings provide clarity and guidance, especially in response to early misunderstandings that attempted to reduce the Holy Spirit to a created power.

### St. Basil the Great: The Holy Spirit in Doxology and Worship

In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* (c. 375 AD), St. Basil addresses objections raised against the Church's liturgical language, particularly the use of doxologies that glorify the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son. His concern is not merely linguistic, but deeply theological. How the Church prays and glorifies God reflects what she believes about God.

St. Basil writes:

"But finally let us look, one by one, at the references to the Holy Spirit in the divine Scriptures, and, like good bankers, let us judge whether He has anything in common with the creatures, or whether He pertains to God... that we may call Him either a creature or else other than the creatures, pertaining to and one with the Godhead which is in the unoriginated Triad."

St. Basil's argument is clear. If the Holy Spirit shares the works, attributes, and worship proper to God, then He cannot be a creature. Basil insists that Scripture itself provides the standard by which the Spirit must be confessed as divine.

He further explains his concern regarding liturgical expressions:

"Lately when praying with the people, and using the full doxology to God the Father in both forms, at one time with the Son together with the Holy Spirit, and at another

through the Son in the Holy Spirit, I was attacked by some of those present on the ground that I was introducing novel and contradictory terms.”

St. Basil clarifies that these doxological forms do not contradict one another. Rather, they express the same Trinitarian faith from different perspectives. To glorify the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit is to confess the equality of the three divine Persons. To glorify the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit is to confess the order revealed in salvation without diminishing divinity.

St. Basil reminds us that Orthodox worship is not accidental or poetic excess. It is theology expressed in prayer. To worship the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son is to confess that He is true God and worthy of glory.

### St. Athanasius the Apostolic: The Holy Spirit Is Not a Creature

St. Athanasius, in his *First Letter to Serapion* (late 330s AD), addresses those who accepted the divinity of the Son but denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He responds by returning consistently to Scripture and to the Church’s rule of faith.

St. Athanasius writes:

**“The creatures came from nothing, having a beginning from which they came into being.** For, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’ and all that is in them. **The Holy Spirit is said to be from God.** For no one, it says, ‘knoweth the things of man save the spirit of the man which is in him. Even so, the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. But we received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God.’ **What kinship could there be, judging by the above, between the Spirit and the creatures? For the creatures were not; but God has being, and the Spirit is from Him.** That which is from God could not be from that which is not, nor could it be a creature; lest, by their judgment, he also from whom the Spirit is should be considered a creature.”

Athanasius draws a sharp distinction between creation and the Holy Spirit. All created things come into existence from nothing. The Holy Spirit, however, is said to be “from God.” That which is from God cannot be counted among created things, for otherwise God Himself would be reduced to the level of a creature.

St. Athanasius further emphasizes the Spirit’s unique capacity to know and reveal God:

“Even so, the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God... That which is from God could not be from that which is not, nor could it be a creature.”

By appealing to 1 Corinthians 2, Athanasius shows that the Spirit’s knowledge of God is not external or partial. The Spirit knows God as God knows Himself. Such knowledge belongs only to God and therefore confirms the Spirit’s full divinity.

## The Holy Spirit in the Liturgical Life of the Church

The Church does not merely speak about the Holy Spirit in theological terms; she lives by the Holy Spirit and confesses Him continuously in worship. The Holy Spirit gives life to the Church, and through the Church He grants the holy Mysteries. As St. Augustine teaches, "What the soul is to man's body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Church. The Holy Spirit does in the whole Church what the soul does in the members of the one body."

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit are evident in every sacrament of the Church. Nothing in the sacramental life is accomplished apart from Him. Through His descent, invocation, and indwelling, the Holy Spirit makes the saving work of Christ effective in the lives of the faithful.

### The Holy Spirit in the Eucharist

In the Divine Liturgy, the Church explicitly calls upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish the mystery of the Eucharist. During the epiclesis, the priest asks for two inseparable works: the sanctification of the gifts and the sanctification of the people.

The priest prays:

"We ask You, O Lord our God, we Your sinful and unworthy servants, that Your Holy Spirit may descend **upon us and upon these gifts** set forth, and purify them, change them, and manifest them as a sanctification of Your saints."

Following the Fraction, the Church proclaims:

"The Holies for the holy. Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; the sanctification is by the Holy Spirit. Amen."

These prayers reveal the Church's faith that the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, as well as the sanctification of those who partake, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is therefore both a revelation of Christ's real presence and a work of the Spirit who unites the faithful to Him.

### The Holy Spirit in Baptism

Holy Baptism is the sacrament of new birth, regeneration, and incorporation into the Body of Christ. This new life is granted through the Holy Spirit. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

"But according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."  
(Titus 3:5, NKJV)

In the baptismal prayers, the Church repeatedly invokes the Holy Spirit upon the water and upon those who are to be baptized. The priest asks that the water may become living water, water of purification, water of renewal, and water of sonship through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The Church prays over the water:

“And upon the descent of Your Holy Spirit on it, **grant it the blessing of the Jordan.** Amen. Give it power that it may become **water of life.** Amen. **Holy water.** Amen. **Water that purifies from sins.** Amen. **Water for the washing of the new birth.** Amen. And **water of sonship.** Amen....And that the light of the truth may shine within them [who are baptized] through the Holy Spirit, and that they may gain the eternal life and the blessed hope.”

Through the Holy Spirit, ordinary water becomes a means of divine life. The baptized are cleansed from sin, illumined, and reborn as children of God.

Similarly, the prayer over those approaching to be baptized, that they may receive the Holy Spirit, become temples of the Holy Spirit, be guarded through the grace of the Holy Spirit, be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, receive the “gift of Your Holy and co-essential Spirit...” “...through [the waters] and Your Holy Spirit, You may renew the birth of Your servants, who have presented themselves...”

### The Holy Spirit in Chrismation (Myron)

Immediately following Baptism, the newly baptized receive the sacrament of Holy Chrismation. In this mystery, the believer is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and becomes a dwelling place of God. The Apostle Paul teaches:

“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?”

(1 Corinthians 6:19, NKJV)

Through the anointing with the holy Myron, the Church confesses that the faithful receive the same Holy Spirit who descended upon the apostles at Pentecost. This is not a repetition of Pentecost as a historical event, but a personal participation in the same divine gift.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains:

“Christ bathed in the river Jordan, imparting to its waters the fragrance of His divinity, and when He came up from them the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, like resting upon like. **So we also, after coming up from the sacred waters of baptism, were anointed with chrism, which signifies the Holy Spirit, by Whom Christ was anointed** and of Whom blessed Isaiah prophesied in the name of the Lord: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor.”

Chrismation is therefore the believer’s personal Pentecost, empowering him or her to live a life of holiness, witness, and obedience to God.

“O Lord who alone are mighty, who performs every wonder and nothing is impossible for You, rather by Your will, Your power works in all things. Grant the Holy Spirit in the pouring out of the holy Myron. Let it be a life-giving seal and a confirmation to Your servants, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

During the anointing, the priest proclaims:

- **While anointing the head and face:** “An unction of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
- **While anointing right leg:** “The perfection of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the breastplate of the faith and the truth. Amen.”
- **After anointing the priest breathes in the face of the newly baptized saying:** “Receive the Holy Spirit and be a purified vessel; through Jesus Christ our Lord, To whom is the glory...”
- **While clothing the child:** “...send down upon them the grace of Your Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.”
- **While tying the zunnar:** “Grant Your servants that they may be filled with the grace of Your Holy Spirit.”
- **After the “ΑΧΙΟC...” chant:** “Receive the Holy Spirit, O you who have received the holy Baptism....Receive the Spirit of Comfort. Receive the Spirit of joy through the powerful King. Receive the Spirit of rejoicing through Immanuel our God...Receive the Spirit that is full of glory...You have become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.”

The Church further prays consistently that the newly baptized may be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, strengthened in faith, and preserved in purity.

### The Holy Spirit in Confession and Repentance

The sacrament of Confession is an encounter with the forgiving and healing work of the Holy Spirit. The authority to forgive sins was given by Christ through the outpouring of the Spirit. Scripture records:

“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

(John 20:22–23, NKJV)

Through the Holy Spirit, sins are forgiven, consciences are cleansed, and communion with God is restored. The Spirit works both in the penitent, who is moved to repentance, and in the priest, who pronounces absolution in the name of Christ.

### The Holy Spirit in Matrimony

In the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the union of a man and a woman and establishes their communion in love. The couple, already temples of the Holy Spirit, are united not only in one flesh but also in one spiritual bond sealed by the Spirit.

During the crowning prayers, the Church asks:

“Sanctify them, O Holy Spirit. Amen.”

And during the command to the Bridegroom:

“My blessed son, who is supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you are required to

receive your wife...”

Marriage thus becomes a path of holiness, where love, fidelity, and sacrifice are sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling within both spouses.

### The Holy Spirit in the Priesthood

The priesthood is the vehicle that God, through His Son, chose to maintain the regular flow of His grace and blessings through the sacraments. The Divine power and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, was first given to the Apostles.

“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit...’  
(John 20:22, NKJV)

The sacrament of the Priesthood is accomplished through the descent and working of the Holy Spirit. Through ordination, the Spirit grants authority, grace, and responsibility to serve the Church and minister the holy Mysteries.

During ordination, the Church prays:

“**Fill him with the Holy Spirit** and grace and counsel, fearing You, so that he may shepherd Your people...just as you looked over Your people whom You chose and commanded Your servant Moses to choose for himself presbyters whom You ordained by an uncreated Holy Spirit which proceeds from You.”

“...may this ordination to the presbyterate be pleasing to You which has been performed on this your servant **through the coming of Your most-holy Spirit.**”

The laying on of hands is accompanied by prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who consecrates the ordained and enables him to serve faithfully in the apostolic ministry. In the final exposition, the church confesses:

“Truly great is the gift which you have received from Jesus Christ through laying the hand of priesthood, which was laid upon you and the blowing of the Holy Spirit.”

“**The Holy Spirit the paraclete descended upon you** and now you are worthy to carry the awesome and holy and blessed mysteries of Immanuel our Lord in your hands.”

### The Holy Spirit in the Unction of the Sick

The sacrament of the Unction of the Sick is a ministry of healing and consolation through the Holy Spirit. The Church prays for both spiritual and, if God wills, physical healing.

The prayer proclaims:

“That the grace of Your Holy Spirit may dwell on him; cleanse him from all his sins; forgive

all his transgressions; and deliver him from every affliction.”

Through this sacrament, the Holy Spirit strengthens the sick, forgives sins, and grants peace, enabling the faithful to unite their suffering with the saving Passion of Christ.

### Concluding Liturgical Perspective

Through the Church’s worship and sacraments, the Holy Spirit is continually confessed as the Giver of Life and the Sanctifier of the faithful. What the Church believes, she prays. What she prays, she lives. The Holy Spirit is not an abstract doctrine, but the living God who acts within the Church, transforms the faithful, and leads them into communion with the Father through the Son.

For servants of the Church, this liturgical confession is foundational. To serve faithfully is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, to minister with reverence, and to live in obedience to the divine life given through the Mysteries.



### *Review Questions*

1. **Why is it theologically incorrect to describe the Holy Spirit as merely a power or force?**  
[Because Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit personal actions such as interceding, speaking, guiding, willing, and being grieved, which require personhood, not impersonal force.]
2. **Which biblical passage explicitly speaks of the Holy Spirit having a “mind,” and why is this significant?**  
[Romans 8:26–27; it shows that the Holy Spirit possesses intellect and personal agency, confirming His personhood.]
3. **How does the Creed affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit?**  
[By calling Him “the Lord, the Giver of Life,” and confessing that He is worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son.]
4. **What does Acts 5:3–4 teach us about the Holy Spirit’s divine nature?**  
[That lying to the Holy Spirit is identified as lying to God, which affirms the Spirit’s full divinity.]
5. **Why is the Holy Spirit’s ability to be grieved important for understanding our spiritual life?**  
[Because it shows that the Holy Spirit is personally and relationally present within believers, and that sin damages communion with Him.]
6. **How does the Holy Spirit act as a witness to Christ according to Scripture?**  
[He testifies to Christ (John 15:26) and bears witness together with the apostles (Acts 5:32).]
7. **What is meant by the Holy Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment?**  
[The Spirit reveals the truth about sin and calls people to repentance, not condemnation, leading them back to God.]
8. **Why must inspiration of Scripture not be understood as mechanical dictation?**  
[Because the Holy Spirit worked through the free will, language, and personality of the human authors while preserving divine truth.]
9. **What is the difference between the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit and His temporal sending?**

[The Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father within the Trinity, but is sent by the Son from the Father in time for salvation.]

10. **How do St. Basil and St. Athanasius defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit?**  
[By showing that the Spirit is not a creature, is worshiped with the Father and the Son, and possesses divine knowledge and attributes.]
11. **How does the Holy Spirit work in the sacrament of the Eucharist?**  
[Through the epiclesis, He sanctifies the gifts and the faithful, making communion with Christ possible.]
12. **What role does the Holy Spirit play in Baptism and Chrismation?**  
[In Baptism, He grants regeneration and new birth; in Chrismation, He seals the believer with the fullness of His gifts.]
13. **How does the Holy Spirit act in Confession and Repentance?**  
[He grants forgiveness, healing, and restoration through the authority given by Christ to the Church.]
14. **How does the Holy Spirit operate in the Priesthood?**  
[Through ordination, He grants grace, authority, and responsibility to minister the Mysteries and shepherd the Church.]
15. **What does the Unction of the Sick reveal about the Holy Spirit's work?**  
[That the Spirit brings healing, forgiveness, strength, and peace, according to God's will.]



*Books*



*Supplementary Material*

[Patristics](#)

[Origen and the Holy Spirit](#)

# Divine Providence and Theodicy

## DOGMA & THEOLOGY

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### Divine Providence and Theodicy

God actively cares for, guides, and oversees the world He created. He, in His love for His creation, provides. This is Divine Providence, which teaches us that God is not distant from human life, nor is He uninvolved in what happens to us. Instead, God is present, attentive, and working wisely, even when His work is not immediately visible.

To understand divine providence, it helps to begin with how God acts in real human situations, not with abstract ideas. One clear example is Christ's encounter with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11). This was a moment filled with danger, injustice, fear, and human cruelty. The woman was surrounded by accusers and faced certain death according to the law as it was being used against her.

Christ's response shows divine providence in action. He does not react impulsively. He does not deny justice, nor does He abandon mercy. Through wisdom, silence, and authority, He guides the situation toward repentance and life rather than condemnation and death. The outcome is not accidental. It is the result of God's wise and deliberate involvement in a human crisis.

This example helps us understand an important truth: divine providence is not simply about God controlling events from a distance. It is about God **guiding situations toward what leads to life**, even when circumstances seem chaotic or unjust.

Once we see providence at work in concrete situations, deeper questions naturally arise. People often ask:

- If God is guiding the world, how do our choices still matter?
- If God is good, why does He allow suffering and injustice?
- If God already knows everything, does prayer truly make a difference?

These questions are not signs of weak faith. They are honest questions that arise from real life. Divine providence does not ignore these questions, nor does it give shallow answers. Instead, it teaches us how to live faithfully while holding together two truths at the same time: God is in control, and human responsibility is real.

The Church therefore teaches divine providence in a balanced way. God does not force human beings to do good, nor does He abandon the world to chance. He governs wisely, patiently, and lovingly, working even through human weakness and failure, without becoming the cause of evil Himself.

At its core, divine providence answers a very practical question:

**How should we live, knowing that God is present and active, even when we do not fully**

**understand what He is doing?**

## Is God in Control?

After understanding that God is actively involved in human life, a natural question follows: **Is God in control of everything?** This question matters because it shapes how we understand responsibility, suffering, prayer, and trust.

Many people imagine God's control in an extreme way. They picture God directing every moment like a pilot steering an airplane, controlling every turn, every movement, and every outcome. If this were true, human freedom would be only an illusion, and personal responsibility would have little meaning.

One helpful distinction is between **sustaining** and **micromanaging**. God is the Sustainer of creation. He upholds existence itself and preserves the order of the world He created. At the same time, God has granted human beings real freedom and responsibility within that created order.

God is truly in control, but His control is not the same as constant interference. God created the world with order, purpose, and structure, and He continues to sustain it at every moment. Nothing exists apart from Him. At the same time, God has given human beings real freedom. Our choices are not imaginary. They shape our lives and affect others in serious ways.

This relationship can be described through analogy. God is like a perfect engineer who designs and sustains a system with wisdom and purpose. Human beings operate within that system, making real choices that can either align with or deviate from the Creator's design. When we live according to God's design, life grows healthier and more ordered. When we reject it, confusion and harm follow, not because God has lost control, but because freedom has been misused.

This explains why consequences exist. If a person repeatedly makes harmful choices, the damage that follows is not proof that God is absent. It is proof that freedom is real. God allows human beings to experience the weight of their choices, while still remaining present and able to guide, correct, and restore.

Several important clarifications help prevent misunderstanding:

- God's control does not mean He approves of everything that happens
- Human freedom does not mean life is random or outside God's care
- God remains able to bring good even out of human failure

Divine providence teaches that God governs wisely, not forcefully. He does not remove freedom in order to prevent every mistake. Instead, He patiently works within history and human lives, guiding all things toward what leads to life.

This understanding protects us from two dangers. It protects us from blaming God for evil, and it protects us from believing that everything depends entirely on us. God is in control, yet our choices matter. Both truths stand together.

## God's Guidance, Prayer, and Our Response

If God is present and involved in our lives, then prayer naturally becomes important. Prayer is not a way to give God information He does not have, and it is not a method for forcing God to do what we want. Instead, prayer is how we learn to listen, to trust, and to respond to God's guidance.

God knows our needs before we speak, yet He still calls us to pray. This shows that prayer is not mainly about changing God, but about changing us. Through prayer, our hearts become more open to God's wisdom, and our choices become more aligned with His will.

Scripture expresses this relationship clearly:

“In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.”  
(Proverbs 3:6, NKJV)

This verse does not promise that life will be easy or free of difficulty. It promises direction. Acknowledging God means seeking Him before acting, trusting Him during uncertainty, and returning to Him when we fall.

When prayer is neglected, life does not suddenly stop working. People may continue their routines and responsibilities. However, over time, life becomes disconnected from its deeper purpose. Confusion increases, peace decreases, and decisions are made without spiritual clarity. This does not happen because God has withdrawn His care, but because the person has stopped listening.

It is important to clarify what prayer does and does not do:

- Prayer does not force God to change His plan
- Prayer does not remove human responsibility
- Prayer does not guarantee immediate solutions

At the same time:

- Prayer opens the heart to God's guidance
- Prayer strengthens us to endure what we cannot change
- Prayer helps us recognize when God is calling us to act

God's providence does not depend on human prayer in order to function. God is always at work. Yet God chooses to involve us in what He is doing. When we pray, repent, and seek His will, we become willing participants in His guidance rather than resistant ones.

Divine providence, then, is not fate. It is a living relationship. God guides, and we respond. God calls, and we choose whether to listen. Prayer is where this relationship becomes real in daily life.

## St. Augustine Regarding the Wholehearted Confession

Trust in divine providence is most severely tested in the presence of suffering. St. Augustine addresses

this challenge by linking faith in providence with wholehearted confession. To doubt God's providence in particular circumstances is, for Augustine, to hold a divided heart.

*“Whoever entertains doubts about God's providence in any particular way does not confess to God with a whole heart. Wholehearted confession is, rather, the mark of the person who already discerns the hidden things of the wisdom of God, and how great is His invisible reward, the person who says, 'We even rejoice in our sufferings.' Such people understand that all the hardships that are imposed on the body either offer training to those who have turned to God, or warn them to turn or else prepare the stubborn for the final and just judgment; and so they see that all things that the foolish think happen somehow by chance and at random, without any divine direction, are to be referred to the guidance of divine providence.” St. Augustine*

St. Augustine teaches that those who truly trust in God's providence learn to interpret suffering within a larger framework of divine wisdom. He echoes the apostolic teaching:

“We even rejoice in our sufferings.”  
(Romans 5:3, NKJV)

This rejoicing does not deny pain or trivialize loss. Rather, it expresses confidence that suffering is not meaningless. St. Augustine explains that hardships serve different purposes depending on the spiritual condition of the person:

- For the faithful, suffering may function as spiritual discipline
- For the wavering, it may serve as a call to repentance
- For the stubborn, it may prepare for just judgment

In every case, he insists that events are not governed by chance. What appears random to human perception is, in fact, ordered within divine providence, even when its purpose remains hidden.

A vivid illustration of this trust is the priest who must proclaim the resurrection while grieving the loss of his own child. Such an act does not erase grief, but it anchors grief in hope. The doctrine of providence moves from theory to lived confession in precisely these moments.

Divine providence, therefore, does not promise the absence of suffering. It promises that suffering is never outside God's wise governance. This conviction forms endurance, humility, and hope, and it guards believers from both despair and accusation against God.

## God or Chance?

If God is sovereign, is anything by chance? What about coincidences? The Gospel's answer is unmistakable: God is passionately involved in the details of our lives.

*“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not*

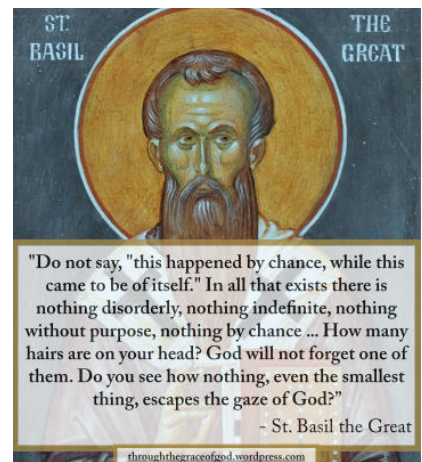
*fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:29-31, NKJV*

A second passage drives the point still deeper. When the collectors of the temple tax approached Peter, the Lord anticipated the need even before Peter spoke of it, and He ordered a detail so small and so specific that it could only belong to the realm of providence:

*“Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.” Matthew 17:27, NKJV*

Nothing is by chance. All things have reason. We must not reduce events that appear to be luck to mere accident without recognizing divine purpose or future implications. Consider a person who walks along and notices a hundred-dollar bill on the ground. To one mind, this is only luck. To one who has the word of God ingrained in his heart, this finding comes with purpose - perhaps to return it to its rightful owner, perhaps to give it to the Church, perhaps to support someone in need. Or consider a more common occurrence: a person sees an accident and thinks, 'Thank God, I am so fortunate, while that person is so unfortunate.' Yet perhaps the Lord is calling that witness to be a good Samaritan.

Divine providence does not erase chance by denying human freedom; it shows that what human beings call chance is in fact woven into a divine purpose. The belief in providence does not flatten the mystery of our existence. It invites us to discern God's presence in everyday experiences and to respond with faith, compassion, and a sense of purpose. Each detail of our lives — the interruption, the encounter, the lost item found, the unexpected call — may be the very place where God is at work.



## Cause of Evil/ Tribulations

There are three causes for the afflictions we meet on earth: ourselves, God, and the devil. There is a story that is said of the Desert Fathers, regarding how not to blame the devil for everything that happens. A novice monk during the Great Fast was bound by the rule to keep the fast, but he decided instead to break it by boiling an egg in secret. He hid in his cell, took a candle and an egg, placed the egg on a spoon, and held it over the flame to cook it so that no one would notice. At that very moment another monk passed by, saw him through the window, and entered the cell to speak with him. Caught in the act, the novice reflexively claimed the devil had made him do it.

The story says that the devil himself then appeared to both monks and declared, 'I am innocent of this sin. I am actually standing here learning from him, so that I may tempt other monks in the same way, that they too may fall during the Great Fast.' The moral is clear: we cannot always blame the devil or our circumstances. Each person makes his own decisions, and we are responsible for our own choices. If we cannot shift blame to others, we must acknowledge and own our faults.

This tripartite understanding of causality gives us a framework for interpreting events and actions within a spiritual context. It acknowledges both divine and demonic influences while emphasizing the central role of human free will.

- Us — the significance of personal agency and the capacity to make choices that either align with or deviate from the life of grace.
- God — the divine presence and the possibility of guidance, consolation, and correction in human life.
- The Devil — the reality of temptation and the existence of forces that seek to lead souls astray.

Every effect follows from a previous action. Lung cancer is most often caused by smoking. Unhealthy diets lead to heart disease and diabetes. The most common cause of liver cirrhosis is alcohol consumption. Environmental hazards spring from reckless behavior. These consequences happen because of disordered choices, and our bad choices help the enemy's warfare against us without him having to work very hard. Other calamities, however, may simply be tests of faith.

*“For You have given us the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy.”* Prayer of Thanksgiving (cf. Luke 10:19, NKJV)

This powerful petition is an antidote to every pain and affliction we may encounter, whether instigated by the enemy's envy or permitted by God as a summons to return. If we turn to God in such moments, we will endure and overcome.

St Basil says “it is impious to say that evil has its origin from God, because nothing contrary is produced by the contrary. Life does not generate death, nor is darkness the beginning of light, nor is disease the maker of health ... Accordingly, they say, if it is not uncreated, nor created by God, whence does it have its nature? No one who is in this world will deny that evil exists. What, then, do we say? That evil is not a living and animated substance, but a condition of the soul which is opposed to virtue and which springs up in the slothful because of their falling away from good.”...Evil is not a living and animated substance, but a condition of the soul which is opposed to virtue. (St Basil the Great – Hexaemeron, Homily 2:4-5)

## Did God Create Evil?

Having seen that we must take honest stock of our own responsibility, the next question demands an answer: what, then, is evil, and where does it come from?

God does not interfere with our abuses of the freedom He has given us. He has granted us the ability to choose between what is of Him, and therefore good, and what is not of Him, and therefore evil. Evil is real. Suffering is real. Death is real. These are all part of the world in which we live. We do not yet dwell

in the Kingdom of Heaven in its fullness; we live in a world where evil, sin, and death are a regular part of our experience.

The Church, through St. Basil the Great, teaches a doctrine that protects us from two errors at once — blaming God for evil, and imagining evil as a rival creation standing over against Him.

*“It is impious to say that evil has its origin from God, because nothing contrary is produced by the contrary. Life does not generate death, nor is darkness the beginning of light, nor is disease the maker of health... No one who is in this world will deny that evil exists. What, then, do we say? That evil is not a living and animated substance, but a condition of the soul which is opposed to virtue and which springs up in the slothful because of their falling away from good.”* St. Basil the Great — Hexaemeron, Homily 2:4-5

St. Basil's distinction is one of the most important safeguards in Orthodox teaching. Evil is not a thing. It is not a substance that God created and then released into the world. Evil has no independent existence of its own. It is a condition, a privation, a turning away. It arises where creatures who were made for the good withdraw themselves from the good. Darkness is not a thing that fights light; darkness is the absence of light. So too evil, as the Fathers teach, is not a creation standing beside God's creation; it is the distortion and disfigurement of what God made good.

This teaching shields us from despair. If evil were a substance, it could in principle be stronger than God. But evil has no being apart from the wills it corrupts. It depends on the good it parasitizes, and it has no independent force. This is why the Resurrection of Christ is the definitive answer to evil: evil has no foothold in the risen Lord, and therefore it has no final word over those who are in Him.

It also shields us from a second error: blaming God. If evil is a condition of the soul springing up through the misuse of freedom, then God is not its author. He creates freedom; He does not create the corrupt uses of freedom. Evil enters the world where the soul falls away from the good. God remains the source only of good, and even within the world that has been wounded by evil, He continues to work toward the restoration of all things.

Evil, suffering, and death are undeniable realities of the human experience. They are not illusions or figments of our imagination. They are stark reminders of the fallen nature of a world marred by sin and its consequences. We are called to acknowledge the existence of evil and suffering not as a cause for despair, but as a call to action. We are summoned to confront evil, to alleviate suffering, and to bring hope to a world often shrouded in darkness — to be agents of God's love, beacons of light in a world often consumed by shadows.

While we may not fully understand the reasons for the existence of evil and suffering, we can trust in God's ultimate plan for redemption and restoration. We can have faith that even in the midst of darkness, His light continues to shine, and we can hold onto the hope that one day evil will be vanquished, suffering eradicated, and death defeated. Until that day, we must continue to strive for a world that reflects God's love, justice, and mercy — choosing good over evil, love over hate, hope over

despair. We are not citizens of this world alone; we are also citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, called to live as such even now.

## Providence and Freedom

God saves only the willing. This is one of the most important phrases in Orthodox soteriology, and it clarifies the relationship between divine providence and human freedom. Providence does not override the will; it cooperates with it. To save the unwilling would be an act of compulsion — and God does not compel the soul. To save the willing, however, is the act of One who shows grace.

St. Clement of Alexandria expresses this with a striking image: God provides a fairer wind for more willing souls. The sail is set by the soul; the wind is given by God. And if the soul abandons its eagerness early, the wind which God provides is thereby obstructed. The wind still blows, but the sail no longer catches it. We may picture humanity as a child seeking to hold his Father's hand in the midst of adversity, the Father's hand is outstretched, but the child must reach out in turn. This is the very heart of the Proverb:

*“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* Proverbs 3:6, NKJV

St. Anthony the Great distilled the synergy of human effort and divine grace into a brief and powerful rule. To those who desired salvation, he counseled three things:

- Always have God before the mind — a constant remembrance of God that permeates every aspect of life and fosters unbroken spiritual awareness.
- Do all things according to the Scriptures — grounding every action and decision in the revealed Word of God rather than in the shifting impulses of the heart.
- Wherever you are, do not leave that place easily — steadfastness and perseverance, resisting the restless movement of the soul that wants to escape the work of repentance.

These three counsels, practiced in tandem, create fertile ground for grace to operate. They are the human response to God's initiative of love and mercy. Salvation, then, is not the passive reception of divine favor; it is an active participation in God's redemptive work.

## On Worry and Providence

St. John Chrysostom returns to the theme of providence in his commentary on the teaching of our Lord concerning worry. He takes the Lord's simple analogy — can anyone, by worrying, add a single cubit to his stature? — and draws out its far-reaching implication for the life of prayer and labor.

*“Do you see how Jesus clarifies what has been obscure by comparing it to what is obvious? Can you add one cubit, or even the slightest measure, to your physical lifespan by worrying about it? By being anxious about possessions can you add one moment to your life? And so it is clear that it is not our diligence but the providence of God, even where we seem to be active, that ultimately accomplishes everything. In the*

*light of God's providence, none of our cares, or anxieties, or toils — or any other such things — will ever come to anything, but all will utterly pass away.” St. John Chrysostom — Homily 21.3*

Even in areas where we perceive ourselves to be actively in control, it is ultimately God's plan that prevails. Our efforts, while important, are not the sole determinants of outcomes. This understanding should lead us to a place of surrender and trust in God's wisdom and timing. Our worries, anxieties, and tireless efforts, when viewed through the lens of providence, are seen as fleeting and ultimately inconsequential — like dust in the wind.

This is not a call to passivity or inaction. Rather, it is a call to a shift in perspective. We are summoned to act with diligence and faith, but also to relinquish the need for control and to surrender our anxieties to God.

Similarly, St. Augustine, in his treatise on the two cities, describes how the devil, the prince of the impious city, stirs up his own instruments against the City of God that sojourns in this world — and yet, providence will not allow any lasting harm.

*“And thus the devil, the prince of the impious city, when he stirs up his own vessels against the city of God that sojourns in this world, is permitted to do her no harm. For without doubt the divine providence procures for her both consolation through prosperity, that she may not be broken by adversity, and trial through adversity, that she may not be corrupted by prosperity; and thus each is tempered by the other, as we recognize in the Psalms that voice which arises from no other cause, 'According to the multitude of my griefs in my heart, Thy consolations have delighted my soul.' Hence also is that saying of the apostle, 'Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation.'” St. Augustine — City of God 18.51*

What appears accidental is rarely accidental; what feels meaningless rarely is. The Church calls us to shape our lives in light of this truth, cultivating the virtues that correspond to providence: faith that God is at work, hope that He is working toward our good, and love that answers His governance with grateful obedience. In this threefold life we find the peace that the world cannot give — the peace of those who know themselves to be held, in every circumstance, by a loving and all-powerful God.

## God's Providence is Marvelous

St. John Chrysostom, in contemplating the providence of God in the life of Sarah before Pharaoh, is moved to wonder — a wonder that invites us to see how God acts especially where human strength has run out.

*“What imagination could adequately conceive amazement at these events? What tongue could manage to express this amazement? A woman dazzling in her beauty is closeted with an Egyptian partner, who is king and tyrant, of such frenzy and incontinent disposition, and yet she leaves his presence untouched, with her peerless chastity intact. Such, you see, God's providence is always marvelous, and surprising.*

*Whenever things are given up as hopeless by human beings, then He personally gives evidence of His invincible power in every circumstance.” St. John Chrysostom*

The situation, humanly speaking, appeared hopeless. Yet it is precisely when human efforts and expectations falter that divine providence reveals its fullest strength. His reflection is a reminder that God's ways are not our ways, that His plans transcend our limited understanding, and that the moments in which we feel most powerless are often the very moments in which He is most gloriously at work.



### ***Review Questions***

1. True or false? God saves only the willing. (A: True )
2. True or false? God interferes with our abuses of freedom. (A: False)
3. What does St Augustine say about the temptations placed before us? (A: He explains that the devil stirs up his own vessels against the city of God is permitted to do her no harm)
4. What is the wholehearted confession? (A: It is the mark of the person who already discerns the hidden things of the wisdom of God, and how great his invisible reward will be.)
5. What is an analogy to explain God's providence? (A: The pilot and engineer.)
6. True or false? God offers us guidance, rather than controlling our affairs. (A: True)
7. What is one, of many, rewards of belief in God's providence? (A: None of our cares, anxieties, or toils—or any other such things—will pass away.)
8. Define divine providence. (A: God's sovereign guidance and control, allowing omniscience as well as privacy.)
9. True or false? Some things happen by chance. (A: False)
10. What is the effect of the Prayer of Thanksgiving? (A: It is an antidote to every pain and affliction, whether instigated by Satan or a direct message from God.)