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Introduction

A TRADITIONAL ETHIC IN AN UNTRADITIONAL AGE

He had only one object in view, the rule of good. (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *On Basil.*)[1]

What St. Gregory the Theologian said about St. Basil is also true of this work. It seeks to address the doing of the good. Its goal is the exposition of the "rule of good." In the same work, Gregory says of Basil that "he thought that the virtue of a private individual consisted in avoiding vice and being good in a certain measure."[2] That rather prosaic and commonplace observance also characterizes this book.

I am aware that much of the text of this book may appear to many readers as merely a listing of moral platitudes, "mere moralisms," that seem trite and uninspiring. Yet, we live in a time of rapidly changing values, perhaps better described as disintegrating moral perspectives with the behavior that inevitably follows them. The common and ordinary moral observations in this volume stand in sharp contrast with many prevailing end-of-the-twentieth-century criteria for behavior. These simple reaffirmations of the traditional ethic of the Orthodox Christian Church, I believe, offer hope to a disintegrating culture.

Others will see what is written here as "mere traditionalism," insensitive to the changing times in which we live. I do not. In my own purview, this book seeks to recover the ongoing tradition of the Orthodox Church on a wide range of ethical questions, reflecting not long-lost "human traditions"[3] but "Holy Tradition," which is the depository of divine truth. As will be soon evident, my authorities are primarily the Scriptures, the synodical, patristic, liturgical, ascetical, sacramental, canonical, historical and theological sources as witnesses to revelatory truth in Orthodox Christianity.

This book by-passes many contemporary authorities and discussions of moral questions because one of its purposes is to be a sourcebook of the tradition in its evaluation of practical moral questions. But this recounting of the moral tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy is not undertaken for abstract scholarly reasons, i.e., an account of the history of ethical ideas and concepts. The restatement of the ethical teachings of the Orthodox Church takes place with the conviction that its norms and guidelines are desperately needed by Christians as they seek to live their lives in an ever more alien and fallen world. But concurrently, these teachings are also offered to fellow Christians and members of other Faiths as a moral anchor for our times.

In spite of these practical goals offered for the life of the Church and the world,[4] the exposition of the *praxis* of Eastern Orthodox ethics points to a vision of the Good in its fullness. In another of St. Gregory Nazianzen's orations, he points his readers to the vision of truth and goodness in the *eschaton*:

> May we hereafter obtain the fountainhead of Good itself, looking with pure mind upon pure Truth, finding, as a reward of our zealous labor for the good here below, that more perfect sharing and contemplation of the Good on high which the divinely inspired books and minds prophesy to be the end of initiation in our mysteries.[5]

Though the goal of this volume is the exposition of the practical dimensions of personal and ecclesial ethics, it seeks to be reflective of the "fountainhead of Good itself." I invite the reader to accompany me in the development of some of the practical aspects of the Eastern Orthodox ethical tradition, in the conviction that following their precepts, indeed will keep us drinking from that fountainhead of Good now and until we obtain the "reward of our zealous labor for the good here below."

Consequently, prosaic and ordinary as these topics may be, their importance and value is significant. In the funeral oration on Basil, Gregory the Theologian spoke of Basil's exemplary character, his knowledge and his learning. He praised his friend's familiarity with the arts and sciences, his skill in rhetoric, his linguistic abilities, his expertise in philosophy, logic, astronomy, geometry, mathematics and medicine. "But," he added "what are these accomplishments, significant as they are, compared to his knowledge of moral science?"[6] What is covered in these pages records patristic "moral science." This book, reflecting the ethical teaching of the Greek Fathers,, it

addresses the issue of we seek to grow in God-likeness in personal and ecclesial Christian living.

It is a commonplace to speak of Orthodoxy as a "way of life." Most often Orthodox theologians use this phrase to distinguish Orthodox Christianity from an abstract intellectualizing of the Faith, or from a legalistic approach to it. More often than not, the description of this "way of life" tends to focus on the differentiating factors of the Orthodox life-style, with emphasis on mysticism, esoteric prayer life, and ascetic disciplines. Far more rarely is the Orthodox way of life described as a *politeia*, a life style that includes all of life's practical and routine dimensions, the "flesh" that incarnates the Spirit, the "body" that becomes the temple of the living God.

This work seeks to broaden the contemporary Orthodox understanding of the Orthodox Christian way of life, not by minimizing what others have focused on, but by providing a description of the manifold spheres in which the Christian *politeia* is lived. This is not the author's discovery; in this book he seeks to report on the Tradition, but concurrently to place it in the contemporary culture. This "placing," however, of necessity will also display the discontinuities between an Orthodox Christian *ethos* and *politeia* and much that passes for norms in this culture. For some, this may lead them to characterize this book as "out of date. If this means that it stands in contrast to much in our society that is at variance with the secularized culture of our age, so be it. As a result, the ethic described in this book is reflective of the Bible's sense of enmity between the things of God and the things of this world: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" [7] At the same time, it seeks to point to the God-like way of life that Jesus Christ invites humanity to walk: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" [8] The volume leaves it to the Tradition itself to persuade the reader.

In his work on Basil, the Theologian describes their friendship and their shared striving to grow in the Christian way of life when they were students in Athens. Their theology takes on flesh and practicality. Vividly, Gregory describes his companionship with Basil in ethical terms. This introduction concludes with a characteristic passage describing their relationship in the conviction that the experience of these two very human, yet saintly, figures provide a model for all who follow in their footsteps in seeking to live the faith according to Christ in their daily, ordinary, routine and workaday lives.

We seemed to have a single soul animating two bodies. And while credence is not to be given to those who claim that all things are in all, we at least must believe that we were in and with each other. The sole object of us both was virtue and thinking for future hopes, having detached ourselves from this world before departing from it.

With this in view, we directed our life and all our actions, following the guidance of the divine precept, and at the same time spurring each other to virtue, and, if it is not too much to say so, being for each other a rule and a scales for the discernment of good and evil.

For companions we consorted, not with the most dissolute but with the most modest, not with the most quarrelsome but with the most peaceable, and with those with whom association was most profitable. We knew that it is easier to be contaminated by vice than to communicate virtue, just as it is easier to contract a disease than to bestow health.

As for our studies, we found pleasure not so much in the most agreeable as in the most excellent, since this also is a means for moulding to virtue or to vice.[9]

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1. *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*. Tr. Leo P. McCauley, *et.al. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953, sec. 39. p. 61.*

2. *Ibid*, sec. 38, p. 60.

3. Colossians 2:8.

4. John 6:51.

5. *On His Brother Caesarius, Op. cit.*., Sec. 17, p. 18.

6. *Ibid.*, sec. 23, p. 47.

7 John 3:19.

8. John 8:12.

9 *Ibid.*, *Basil*, sec. 20, p. 44.

Chapter One

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

"Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. . . . What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do" (St. Paul).

"Virtue is really true, vice is falsehood . . . . 'Think on these things,' he says. Don't you see that he desires to banish every evil thought from our souls; for evil actions spring from thoughts. . . . 'These things do,' not only in words but do *them also." (St. John Chrysostom).*[1]

The lines from Paul's letter to the Christian community at Philippi, quoted above, can be seen as an outline of the discipline of Christian ethics. In this discipline we first need to think about the good ("whatever is pure . . . lovely . . . gracious . . . think about these things"). These concerns represent the foundational questions of ethics. They form the *theoria* of ethics, the theoretical underpinnings for the life to be lived in practice.

Without this *theoria,* directions about how the concrete aspects of life are to be lived take the form of moralizing. People draw this kind of moral counsel from personal experience and reflection -both wise and not so wise. The book of Proverbs in the Old Testament is an example of such guidance. Moralizing can influence conduct effectively, but an examination of a chapter or two of Proverbs shows clearly that the underlying *theoria* that justifies the precepts is not made clear. Proverbs assumes them. They are not articulated nor developed in a coherent and organized manner. There is no expression principles at all.

In contrast, the *theoria* of Orthodox Christian Ethics provides a perspective on the major foundations for ethical guidance. The reasons for the specific practical applications have to be made clear in times when ethical alternatives are wide-ranging and moral confusion reigns. Clarification of fundamental perspectives and contexts is essential in situations such as those which Orthodox Christians face at the intersection of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

These foundational topics can be developed in different ways. In another volume on the *theoria* of Orthodox ethics, these major themes of ethical theory are discussed at length from and Orthodox theological perspective.[2] Theology informs ethical presuppositions for Orthodox Christian thought. Some of these foundational themes are: the Good, Evil, the Moral Capacities of Human Beings, Freedom, Conscience, the Natural Law, the Evangelical Ethic and Character. The *theoria* of Orthodox Christian ethics also seeks to assist believers to make ethical decisions. Further, it describes the spiritual methods that contribute to avoiding evil and doing good. For purposes of introduction, this chapter briefly discusses the foundational ideas of Orthodox Christian Ethics.

In the passage from Philippians quoted at the beginning of this chapter, St. Paul refers to "excellence," to what is "worthy of praise" and to "what you have learned and received," as well as to his own personal example regarding Christian conduct. In his homily on this passage, Chrysostom simultaneously paraphrases and comments on it as he distinguishes between thinking about conduct and practicing it.

> And again here, "What things ye learned and received," i.e., have been taught by word of mouth, "and heard and saw in me": both in respect of my words and actions and conduct. Seest thou, how about everything he lays these commands on us? For since it is not possible to make an accurate enumeration of all things, of our coming in, and going out, and speech and carriage, and relationships (for of all things it is needful that Christians should have thought), he said shortly, and as it were in summary, "ye heard and saw in me." "I have led you forward both by deeds and by words." "These things do," not only in words but do them also.[3]

From this perspective, a Christian "should have thought" concerning "actions and conduct." The Christian mind should think through the practical dimensions of the Christian life. This is

the major purpose of this book. It seeks to lay out, in an orderly fashion, the teachings of Eastern Orthodox Christianity about the major areas of Christian living based on the foundational beliefs and traditions of the Eastern Orthodox faith.

An "accurate enumeration of all things, of our coming in and going out, and speech, and carriage, and relationships" was not possible to St. Paul in the context of his letter to the Philippians, nor to Chrysostom as he preached on the text. However, this "enumeration" is both appropriate and necessary today, because changed circumstances mean that these practical dimensions of life are not always clear to contemporary Christians.

THEORIA AND PRAXIS

It has been a teaching of Christianity throughout its history that the faith is to be applied in life. In this sense, given the Gospel accounts of His teaching, Jesus Christ was the first Christian ethicist. The Gospel of Matthew profoundly witnesses to the concern of Christ that His teaching be applied in practice. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Matthean account says of "the least of these commandments," that whoever "does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."[4]

The concluding words of the Sermon emphasize the "doing" (the *praxis*) of His teaching. Putting the words into practice determines how solid the foundation is: "Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock." Evidently, teaching means little unless it is followed by *praxis*: "And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand."[5]

In the Gospels, Jesus is especially hard on the teachers of righteousness, who themselves did not do what they taught. He hated the hypocrisy that this lifestyle displayed. "The Scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice."[6]

In the New Testament letter to the Colossians, similar expectations exist for followers of Christ. Christ's disciples should "put to death" in practice things such as "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire . . . covetousness . . . anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, and lies."[7] In Baptism, the Christian's "old nature with its practices" is "put off." Christians are instructed to act according to the "new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."[8] This means Chris-

tians should be motivated by "compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience," forbearance, forgiveness, and "above all these, love." Colossians admonishes the Christian: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus."[9]

The patristic tradition is no less concerned with *praxis*. The early (100-125 A.D.) Christian manual, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (also known as the *Didache*)[10] directs that "your word should not be false" . . . "but rather it should be filled with deeds,"[11] implying that it is the deed that makes the words true. The early biblical commentator, Origen (185-254) argues that it is the "deed" that leads to true knowledge: " . . . first there is *praxis* . . . for it is necessary to regulate the things concerning deeds and to arrive at the practice, and only then do we travel from experience to its *theoria*."[12] Elsewhere he teaches in an opposite fashion that *praxis* is the elevation of theoria."[13]

In this same vein, Clement of Alexandria (150-215) teaches that "the works (*erga*) which participate in true knowledge (*gnosin*) are good and beautiful deeds (*agathe kai kale praxis*)." Origen laconically summarizes the whole meaning of Orthodox Christian ethics: "deeds characterize the image of God in us" (*to kat' eikona ai praxeis haraktirizousi*).[14] Thus, also, St. Mark the Ascetic (c. 431) instructs, "Do not think or act without having before you the goal which is according to God. He who travels without a goal, works in vain."[15]

Deeds, consequently, reflect the truth of faith, yet it is through these deeds, as well, that the knowledge of God is gained. St. Maximos the Confessor (580-662) put it well: "He shall be praised . . . who had committed his life to God and who fulfills the assurances of the good promise (of God to us)."[16]

It is evident that *praxis* is an integral part of the Christian life. Yet we do not always understand how we should act. It is one thing to wish to do what is right. It is another to know precisely what the commandment requires. "Praxis is not simply to do the good one is able to do, but how one ought to do it, for he who acts needs to bring to bear both time and measure to the deeds which are done (*ta praktika*)", says one of the spiritual Fathers of the Orthodox tradition.[17] *Praxis* must be informed, clarified and guided by *theoria*. And the *praxis*, in turn, enlightens and enriches *theoria*. Thus, the same writer instructs:

> . . . neither is that praxis sure which is separate from theoria, nor is theoria true without praxis. For it is necessary for praxis to be informed (*ellogimon*), and for theoria to be put into practice (*emprakton*) so that in the one, evil will be found without influence and in the other virtue be powerful in the completion and fulfillment of goodness.[18]

THEOLOGY AND THE *THEORIA* OF ETHICS

We see that two levels of foundational realities are needed to sketch out an "informed praxis" of the Christian life. The first, expressed by theology, consists of the beliefs and doctrines that form the Orthodox Christian view of reality in its ultimate sense. This gives meaning to human existence and illuminates the divine-human context in which all human beings and the world as a whole exist.

The second level for determining how we are to act is the *theoria* of ethics. This aspect of ethical thought seeks to describe the foundational perspectives which inform ethical questions. It fulfills this task by drawing from the faith of the Church and its general understanding of the creation and human condition. These two foundational approaches form the primary presuppositions of a "Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics."

In this introductory chapter then, we first review the framework provided by "Orthodox Christian Doctrine" and then the "Theory of Orthodox Christian Ethics." In this manner the stage is set for explicating the "Praxis of Orthodox Christian Ethics" within its own pattern and world-view. Without this preparation, the bulk of the teaching presented in the subsequent chapters may appear disjointed and arbitrary.

In this section, there is a summary statement of Orthodox doctrine. Clearly, it could be written in several different ways. This one seeks to capture the core understandings of Eastern Christian doctrine, articulated with ethical issues in mind.

Growth and Last Things

Growth toward God-likeness is never-ending, never complete, never realized fully. The *eschatological vision* of the Church, which sees the Kingdom as "now, but not yet," pertains to both the personal and corporate life. Worship makes this truth a lived experience, as does the life of disciplined growth toward theosis (*askesis*).

Only in the end, when Jesus Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, will the Kingdom be established in its fullness. Meanwhile, the Lord and His Apostles, the Martyrs, Saints, Ascetics and "every righteous spirit made perfect" intercede for the rest of the Church. In addition, *the saints* provide a living example for imitation and serve as living proof that God-likeness can be realized in practice.

St. Irenaeus, a Church Father who lived from about 130 A.D. to about 200 A.D., spoke of the life of the Church and the moral life of Christians. His words in the "98th Proof" of his book *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* " summarize well what has been said so far.

> This, beloved, is the preaching of the truth, and this is the manner of our salvation, and this is the way of life, announced by the prophets and ratified by Christ and handed over by the apostles and handed down by the Church in the whole world to her children. This must be

> kept in all security, with good will, and by being well-pleasing to God through good works and sound moral character.

Ethical Instruction

Committed believers find themselves within this framework of belief, worship and practice. The doctrinal affirmations stated here are far from systematic or complete. There are many variations of the "salvation story" as perceived, taught, and lived by Eastern Christianity. Some accounts are mystical, others systematic, others catechetical, others eschatological and liturgical, others ethical and practical. None, perhaps, can stand alone as completely reflective of the fullness of Holy Tradition. It is best not to expect any to do so, because the Christian truth is not a compilation of ideas and concepts, but rather, a reality experienced in the Christian community which reflects the mystical life of the Holy Trinity.[20]

Nevertheless, the need to articulate the faith for the instruction of the faithful and the protection of the Church from heresy, as well as to assure the Church of the Orthodoxy of candidates for Baptism, demanded a "coherent and orderly statement of faith." At times it took the form of the creed, at other times it was embodied in prayers and also articulated in longer or shorter forms as systematic (orderly) teaching. The early baptismal creeds and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed are examples of the first. The Anaphora Prayer of the Liturgy of St. Basil contains a truly beautiful version of the "salvation story." Orderly (systematic) presentations of the faith abound in the patristic corpus, exemplified by St. Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures*. A brief statement of the faith in the fourth Lecture, titled, "On the Ten Points of Doctrine," provides such a short summary of the faith in a few pages.[21] The following section seeks to do something similar regarding the ethical principles of the Christian life from an Eastern Orthodox perspective.

ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The *Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a mid-fourth century work (c.347), shows the place of ethics in the faith pattern of the Church. St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed his catechumens about the relationship of belief and behavior.

> For the method of godliness consists of these two things, pious doctrines, and virtuous practice: and neither are the doctrines acceptable to God apart from good works, nor

> does God accept the works which are not perfected with pious doctrines. For what profit is it, to know well the doctrines concerning God, and yet to be a vile fornicator? And again, what profit is it, to be nobly temperate, and an impious blasphemer? A most precious possession therefore is the knowledge of doctrines: also there is need of a wakeful soul, since there are many "that make spoil through philosophy and vain deceit."[22]

The "knowledge of doctrines" most certainly includes the foundations of faith that impinge upon "virtuous practice." Because "vice mimics virtue," as Cyril says, there is need in addition to divine grace, "of a sober mind and eyes that see" so as to counteract the "many 'that spoil through philosophy and vain deceit'."[23]

The most important point, however, is that the ethical theory of Eastern Christianity is drawn precisely out of the doctrinal basis of the Church. They are not two separate realities though, of course, they may be distinguished from each other for study and exposition. Ethical behavior is inextricably bound up with belief, piety, worship, and the sacramental life. It is also inextricably bound up with growth toward God-likeness. As such, the various diminsions of the faith govern living the faith and they form a coherent whole. So it is that the *theoria* of Orthodox Christian ethics may be sketched out in summary form, in the same manner as are the core doctrines of the faith.

This *theoria* of Orthodox Christian ethics does for the believer and the Church regarding practice, what the exposition of the doctrines does for the whole of the Christian life. Both direct discernment, protect from error, and guide the Church and the individual Christian in living the life of God-likeness. Since faith and practice are inextricably bound together, Orthodox ethics can be understood as "Living the Faith."

The Good God

The starting point of the *theoria* of Orthodox Christian ethics is the central question of all ethical reflection, i.e., *the nature of the Good*. Orthodox Christian ethical theory identifies the source of all that can be identified as good with God. But the Triune God transcends in His being all human concepts. This affirmation is an aspect of the Orthodox Church's fundamental approach to the transcendence of God. Because God is uncreated (and all else is created), what we say about God is limited and conditioned by our created existence. The most

honest and accurate way for human beings to speak about God is to speak negatively, that is, to say what God is not, rather than what He is. For example, God is infinite: He is *without* limits. This is described in Orthodox theology as the "Apophatic" approach. In this sense, God's goodness is above and beyond all human concepts of the Good. Therefore God is "not good", but "above goodness" (*hyperagathos*).

However, in addition to this deeply Apophatic approach, which is mystical and transcends all human thought, concrete things can still be said. The New Testament and the catechetical instructions of the Fathers witness to this positive understanding of the faith and its ethical application. In its earliest and most direct form, it is the Gospel message itself. So long as we understand the conditioned character of this positive language, it not only *can* be used, but it *must* be used if God's plan of salvation for humanity is to be realized. Theological language calls this positive way the "Kataphatic approach."

This positive theological approach understands the Triune God as "THE Good." God is thus repeatedly described in the patristic literature as the "good itself" (*autagathos*). St. Gregory of Nyssa (330-395) teaches that God "is the primary and main good, whose very nature is goodness." The belief that God is a Trinity of persons is central to the *theoria* of ethics because the good is thus understood not as an abstract principle or logical construct, but as a community of persons in an ordered relationship, existing in loving communion.

Because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, the goodness of God is not alien, or unrelated to the human condition. The good is not some sort of externally imposed law or rule. Rather, goodness in human life is iconic (reflective) of the divine goodness. By its very nature as the goodness of God who is a Trinity of persons, the good is never only privately or individualistically encountered and realized; it always has its corporate dimensions. Manifesting God-likeness (i.e., the "glory of God") is the purpose of all creation, including humanity. Consequently, all good in the created sphere gets its content, inspiration, direction, and force from God. It follows that, there is no independent or autonomous good. There is no good that is "secular" in substance. The good of human beings is to achieve God-likeness and in the process, to realize the human potential in its fullness.

The *good of the Holy Trinity* is a living reality. When human beings are in living communion with God, they realize human good. There are two dimensions of the life of the Holy Trinity,

as revealed, that have special application to ethics. In the first case, the relationships of the Holy Trinity are revealed as having a certain structure and order. The Father is the source and "chief principle" (the *Arche*) of the Trinity. The Son is eternally born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

This Eastern Christian perspective on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity rejects the Western *filioque* ("and the Son") doctrine regarding the Holy Spirit, which teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. Eastern Orthodox theology holds that the *filioque* distorts the relationship of the persons of the Holy Trinity, tending to depersonalize the Holy Spirit particularly, and the Holy Trinity as a whole.[25]

From the Eastern view, the significance of this controversy for ethics is that there are inherent and *patterned relationships* appropriate to the persons of the Trinity. This means that human beings are created in the image and likeness of a God who is a Trinity of persons in concrete and specifically defined relationships. Consequently, an ethic based on becoming "God-like" must be firmly grounded in patterned relationships that indicate the appropriate behavior of human beings relative to God, neighbor, self, and the rest of creation.

Significant for ethics, as well, is the relationship of the persons of the Holy Trinity, which are described by the term *Love*. Here, too, we deal with a mystery. "Love" is best apprehended by the human soul only in the experience of loving God and knowing His love for us. To say "God is love" is to make, at once, a statement about the Holy Trinity and about God's energies (grace) toward His creatures.

According to the Scriptures, the three persons of the Holy Trinity relate to and among each other in love. Because of this, God is love. Additionally, because God relates to us, His creatures, in a loving way, God is love. Because we are created in the image of a loving God, and we are called to achieve the fullness of life by becoming increasingly God-like, the ethical requirement exists for us to love. Thus, there is a love-ethic for human beings, based on the goal of God-likeness. Humans have a moral imperative to love God, our neighbors, ourselves, and all creation in appropriate and fitting ways. In this basic framework will be found all the rest of the Christian ethic.

Evil and Sin In The Human Condition

If God is the good, then its opposite, *evil*, is the absence of God from created life. The Eastern tradition rejects the idea that evil exists as some separate, co-eternal power, principle, or

being. Evil is the absence of good. But the absence of good, which is the absence of communion with God, creates not a vacuum, but a serious corruption and deformation of created existence. Evil is, in an ultimate sense, non-existent ("meonic" from *me on*, non-being). But in empirical reality, creation experiences evil and its disastrous impact.

When we experience the consequences of evil as harmful in the structures of the world and human nature, we usually refer to them as evils. When we perceive similar effects on a personal or interpersonal level, we tend to refer to them as sins. The term "evil" has a structural, systemic connotation. The term "sin" is more personal. In any case, evil and sin are understood as both the cause and the result of the creature's separation from God. When submitted to, evil and sin achieve a force of their own that pervades our existence, though never to the point where the potential for good is completely obliterated.

In the Orthodox perspective, a measure of good remains no matter how deeply sin and evil overwhelm human existence. As a result, Orthodox ethics is neither easily optimistic nor fatalistically pessimistic. Instead, with ever-enduring *faith and hope* in the ultimate triumph of God, the Orthodox Christian faith is realistic about human failure and sinfulness. Eastern Christianity sees in human beings the inherent results of the disruption of our relationships with God, and uses the term "ancestral sin" (*propatorikon amartema*) to describe it. This term does not refer primarily to inherited guilt, but to the condition of broken relationship between created life and God. Ancestral sin describes the out-of-order relationships between humanity and God, among neighbors, within and outside of our empirical selves, and in the rest of the created natural world.

Yet in spite of this brokenness, in spite of the condition of ancestral sin, genuine elements of the image of God remain in humanity. They function adequately enough for human beings to have some experience of God. As a result, all human beings have some knowledge of the good, ethically speaking. These *human moral capacities* have been identified in some Orthodox ethical thought as the moral drive, the ethical sense, and self-determination. The "moral drive" is the universal capacity and practice of human beings to perceive events and experiences in ethical categories; the term "ethical sense" is used to describe our penchant for making ethical judgments. The two together (in practice they are indistinguishable) describe human beings as essentially endowed with a moral life, which helps define our very humanity.

To perceive and judge events from an ethical perspective implies and gives birth to the capacity to choose between ethical alternatives. An important and significant aspect of human moral capacities is the ability to be ethically self-determining. The term used by Church Fathers to describe this capacity is *autexousion* or *self-determination*. In the patristic tradition "freedom" (*eleutheria*) does not refer to self-determination in the fallen condition, or even in the life of the redeemed person. Rather, it refers to the stage of God-likeness when there is no longer any significant conflict when we act in harmony with the divine image in us.

The meeting place of human moral capacities and the standards of morality is the *conscience*. The whole human being is brought to focus in the conscience, which deals with all manner of experiences as ethical questions. The conscience is inborn, but it is cultivated or deformed as one grows. It can function before, during, and after an act. It may produce a sense of praise or it may provoke a sense of condemnation for what is contemplated, is being done, or has been done. The conscience appropriates for the self the "objective" moral standards, personalizing them and adopting them as one's own; or, contrarily, rejecting or modifying them. The conscience, however, is more than a mere processor of moral information. Not only is it the expression of the moral "ought", but it also stands as an inner judge of one's motives, intents, values, and deeds.

A Universal Moral Standard

Arising out of our creation in the image and likeness of God, two major standards of morality present themselves to the human conscience. The first reflects the "structure" of the good as seen in the relationships of the persons of the Holy Trinity, described above. The second reflects the relationship of love in the Holy Trinity. Thus the conscience is the place where both basic ethical norms as well as more elevated ways of interpersonal relationships are processed in the Christian moral life. The first of these norms is the natural moral law. The second is the evangelical ethic.

Part of the "given" of our common and shared humanity is the *natural moral law*. The Eastern Orthodox tradition holds that there is a pan-human moral standard of behavior, recognized by all peoples and formulated in numerous ways. One of the best and most complete formulations of the natural moral law is the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments, as found in the Old Testament, embody the basic idea of equity (equal or fair usage)

in reference to some of the most basic and elementary human relationships.

These moral insights form essential standards for the existence of all human life in society. If the prohibitions of the Decalogue were to be reversed so as to make what they prohibit into positive moral requirements, any one of them alone would cause the dissolution of social life as we know it. Thus, if "Thou shalt not steal" were to be transformed so as to become the moral command "Thou shalt steal," we would soon see the destruction of our whole economic system.

There is a certain self-evident character to the natural law when it is understood in this fashion. It is, however, only an elementary ethic that cannot address the more refined and complex issues of life. Further, it is a low-level ethic which serves to sustain the basic institutions of inter-personal and societal living, but does not address the more sensitive and ethically important issues of motive and intent, i.e., the inner life and the development of God-like character.

The Evangelical Ethic

The ethical norm that does address motive and intent, pointing to the fullest possible human expression of the divine-like life, may be called the *evangelical ethic*. Seen in the larger context of the Christian understanding of existence, the evangelical ethic is the standard that not only identifies concrete motives, intents, and purposes, but also overt behavior. All of these ethical dimensions are "fitting and appropriate" to the life growing toward God-likeness. The evangelical ethic fulfills and completes the low-level ethic of the natural moral law, transcending it as a reflection of the divine life of the Holy Trinity in the life of created reality.

The evangelical ethic demands, in the first place, a coherence between inner dispositions and overt behavior. Purity of the heart should express itself in appropriate deeds. Deeds, otherwise praiseworthy, alone do not make an act good. Nor do otherwise praiseworthy motives and intents make an evil act good. Both deed and inner disposition must be good and in harmony with each other to make an act good.

This "methodological" concern of the evangelical ethic finds its content in the focus of the evangelical ethic on *agape*-love. *Agape* in the Christian sense reflects the love of God for humankind and the life of divine love in the Holy Trinity. God loves His creatures through His divine energies (grace), showing concern and bestowing blessings on humanity for the sake

of the well-being of humanity and of all creation. God does this without ulterior motive. The realization of our own God-likeness depends on a similar exercise of *agape*-love.

This love for others and self, however, not only reflects our love for God, but also depends on our love for God for its effectiveness. Love for God is first expressed as a reflection of the divine love of the persons of the Holy Trinity. It is a mutual, interpenetrating, unifying communion of persons. The Fathers of the Church, therefore, did not hesitate to call it "divine eros" (in Greek, *theios eros*), characterizing it as the highest spiritual and moral activity of which human beings are capable. Love for God is not reducible to an intellectual exercise, nor to moral commitment alone, but is all-consuming.

Hence, we are to love God with every aspect of our being: all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength.[26] This love concurrently expresses our communion with God, restoring us to full relationship (as far as possible for created beings) with Him in whose image we have been created. Love for God is, as well, the motive that leads human beings to "take diligent heed to do the commandment" of the Lord, "to work in all His ways," and to "serve Him."[27]

The Moral Life

Growth in God-likeness manifests itself in a transfiguration of our life, in ethical decision-making, and in a way of life that struggles against sin and evil. Thus growth toward *theosis* includes the actual doing of the good. It also includes the idea of "being moral." This refers to developing a stable *character*, firmly rooted in communion with the source of all good, God. A good character realizes in our inner being the dictum that "God is the ethos of man," in the apt phrase of philosopher-theologian Christos Yannaras.[28]

Character may be described in general terms ("good, pious, moral, upstanding, righteous," etc.). It may also be more concretely described in terms of specific and regular modes of being and acting, i.e., virtues and vices. Virtues and vices are formed slowly and reflect dimensions of our self-understanding as persons who may or may not be in communion with the source of the good who is God, or with the embodiment of that communion in the Church, family and society. "Being" addresses the question, "What kind of person am I?" And it is answered in terms of good-bad values.

Ethical decision-making becomes significant when situations arise for which our moral traditions do not provide immediate, clearly evident responses. We take numerous factors into consideration when we make a moral decision, including rules, laws, consequences, intents, motives, means, values and disvalues, the situation, and corporate social existence. The question, "what shall I do?" is answered in terms of right-wrong acts.

The moral life expresses itself, as well, in the *struggle* (*agona, askesis*) against evil, sin, fallenness and for the good. This struggle for growth toward God-likeness in both our "being" and our "acts" is accomplished in many ways. It requires, on the one hand, a certain exercise of will and self-determination (*voule, autexousion, thelesis, gnome*) and commitment (*pistis, orkos, agape, aphosiosis*). The moral life expresses itself in a disciplined way that seeks diligently to maintain communion with the source of the good, God.

This disciplined life (or perhaps better put, this "disciplining life") utilizes traditional means found in the life of the Church to achieve the goal: prayer, study, spiritual illumination, relationship with a spiritual counselor (usually a Father Confessor), knowledge of Scripture and Holy Tradition, theology, love, worship, obedience, sacramentals, mission outreach, philanthropy, social concern, etc.

But such discipline may also require more than character development, more than cultivation of the virtues, more than ordinary obedience, more than hard and honest decision-making. There will come times when the expression of love will also require voluntary *sacrifice*.

All love may be seen as costly in one way or another. But in every life seeking to grow in God's image, the way of the Cross can at times demand sacrificial and heroic acts of love. This behavior transcends the ordinary rules of conduct and lends a dimension to Christian ethics that never allows it to become merely a routine and "established" ethic.

Love itself, as an ethical norm, finds satisfactory rationale only within the framework of the Christian faith and within the experience of the Holy Trinity. The model of sacrificial love is the Incarnation. God the Father sends His Son to take on human nature and to suffer death for the sake of humanity. God's salvation for the fallen world became a series of acts of "self-emptying" and "self-sacrificing" love.

Because of all these things, doing the good and growing toward God-likeness is never a private affair; it is always a *communal and ecclesial* experience. Since the whole world, because of Christ's redeeming work, is no longer under the inevitable dominion of sin and death, and because it is straining

for its own redemption, nothing in it can find fulfillment except in communion with God, the source of the good. Therefore all that exists in the world -fallen though it be- is included, not only in the Christian vision of things, but also among the objects of Christian moral concern.

The Ecclesial Nexus

Even more evident is the requirement of Christians to be in appropriate moral relationships with the "members of the household of faith."[29] The transfigured life of persons who have made the transition from hostility to friendship with God,[30] seeks inevitably to find special embodiment in relationships with the brothers and sisters of the household of faith. Christians growing in God-likeness seek to live in mutual love with fellow-believers, thus reflecting in the life of the Church the divine life of love of the Trinitarian God.[31]

There is, as well, a wholesome understanding of love for self terms of our proper responsibilities to ourselves. This is because Christians ought to act toward themselves in the light of those values that are in their own true interests as persons growing in the divine image.[32]

All these relationships that are appropriate to persons growing in God-likeness find their root, their impetus, and their fulfillment in the created being's relationship with the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of life, the Holy Trinity. It is the view of Eastern Orthodox Christianity that this relationship can take place in its fullness only within the Church. The power of God, as it is communicated and experienced through the panoply of *moral resources* in the Church, makes growth toward God-likeness a real possibility for humanity and for the created world. We now turn to see how the Orthodox Church understands the relationship of Church life to the doing of the good.

4

TOWARD A PRAXIS OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The method followed in this book on ethics is based on the eminently Eastern Orthodox conviction of the normative character of the tradition of the Church. Determining the good, the right, and the fitting thing to do in generally defined situations takes place in the light of the whole of the Church's tradition. This approach, while not a rigid, legalistic, code-approach to morality, assumes that there are values and patterns in human relations that do not change fundamentally, regardless of circumstances. Though not absolutes in a philosophical sense (God alone is absolute), the truth of God, the nature of humanity, the essentials of the fundamental social institutions of human community, the natural moral law, and the requirements of the evangelical ethic, converge to form a describable normative ethical teaching regarding the Christian life, and hence of human life in general.

Unchanging Values

This normative ethical teaching, in its general prescriptions, reflects unchanging truths and values insofar as they touch on human life. As such, these general moral approaches may be thought of as "relative absolutes"; i.e., relative to the general human situation they are unchanging moral norms and stan-

dards. Eastern Orthodox Ethics contends that these norms are embodied in the tradition of the Church and can be drawn from it for appropriate realization in given times, places, and circumstances.

Thus, values such as honesty, respect for life, and love (which "never fails") do not change. They are essential to conformity with the divine image in us. Their opposites, vices and sins such as dishonesty, unjust taking of life, and hatred, are in themselves destructive of the image and likeness of God in us. As such, they will always be wrong.

This does not mean, however, that simple values and norms can be applied uncritically and cavalierly. Changing circumstances and social conditions will always impact on specific decisions and courses of action. The more complex a situation is, the closer one comes to particulars, the more mixed the motives and intents, the more difficult it is to be sure that a given course is correct.

Yet, against relativistic views, Eastern Orthodox Ethics holds that there is a "most fitting," "most appropriate," "more clearly right," or "best" or "least evil" course of action in any given situation.

Applications

In *simple and general situations*, the Tradition -as embodied in Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers, the ethos of the Church, canon law, the decisions of the Councils, the spiritual writings of the Church, the liturgical and sacramental practice, the doctrine of the Church, and the principles of ethics- suffices to clarify the appropriate praxis. In these cases a marshalling the Tradition is adequate to present the norms with which members of the Body of the Kingdom will seek to conform. This approach will cover the majority of issues.

Changing circumstances, however, may radically reverse the empirical situation. These changed circumstances may warrant new judgments, though even those will be changes in specific norms rather than changes in basic values. Or, they may present totally new circumstances which need to be addressed by the Church.

The clearest cases of the latter are recent developments in the area of biological technology. Some argue that because they are not addressed in the Tradition, they are beyond the concerns of the Orthodox Church. This understanding of Holy Tradition is not only backward-looking, but, concurrently, denies that Holy Tradition is the living presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of

the Church. Yet even in these situations, the received deposit of Holy Tradition, of necessity, will be the first source to draw upon in order to formulate a position on these new issues.

Others may argue that new issues ought not to be addressed by the Church because Orthodox Christianity in its very spirit (which is imbued with freedom and respect for the person) should not be trying to impose additional restrictions on the faithful. The charge is that "developing positions" is an non-Orthodox, western-influenced practice that violates the true spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy.

It should be first noted that this understanding of the Tradition is theologically inaccurate and a denial of the way Holy Tradition has functioned historically in the Church. The Church has dealt concretely with moral issues from the beginning and throughout the centuries.

The New Testament discloses that the Lord Himself frequently gave moral directives. This dominical moral teaching is clearly rooted in the moral teaching of the Old Testament, upon which the New Testament, as a whole, is based. The transfiguring moral teaching of Jesus is also embodied in the Epistles, where concrete ethical proscriptions and prescriptions abound, many of which treat situations not addressed in the Gospels.

This occurs, also, in the patristic and canonical corpus. The tradition of Chrysostom and other biblical exegetes and homilists was clearly oriented toward practical ethical living. A study of the ethical teaching of St. John Chrysostom illustrates this as follows. In the words of an historian of ethics, for Chrysostom

> it is the task of the preacher to encourage men and women to use their power as free moral agents to choose righteousness. For this reason he added a moral application at the end of his sermons. Again and again he emphasized the importance of works validating faith: "Though a man believe rightly on the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, yet if he lead not a right life, his faith will avail nothing towards his salvation." Or, "Faith is not sufficient to bring men to the Kingdom, nay, it even hath power in this way most to condemn those who exhibit an ill life." While he praises "right faith," he is convinced "unless we add also a life suitable to our faith we shall suffer the extremest punishment." Or in commenting on Ephesians 1:4, "That you may not then, when you hear that 'He hath chosen us,' imagine that faith alone and on this condition,

'that we should be holy and without blemish.' And so formerly he chose the Jews . . . . Now if men in their choices choose what is best, much more doth God. And indeed the fact of their being chosen is at once a token of the loving kindness of God, and of their moral goodness."[47]

Chrysostom himself applied his ethical precepts to the situation of his own time, opposing vigorously a corrupt imperial court, as well as dissolute clerical leaders within the Church. If it is true that the Christian as a free moral agent must "choose righteousness," then each new circumstance he or she faces demands fresh moral choice.

The second argument against an unresponsive passive moral traditionalism addresses the responsibility of the Church to provide pastoral guidance. For example, in the past it was clear to the Church that abortion was an act not in harmony with growth in the image of God. This view was expressed in the patristic writings and conciliar canons repeatedly.

Similar questions, of necessity, arise regarding issues such as artificial insemination, nuclear war, or sex-change operations in today's modern, technologically advanced world.

If it is true that "Chrysostom's ethic was designed for all Christians and was to be practiced by everybody in order to change the world according to God's purpose,"[48] then from a genuinely Eastern Orthodox perspective, the Church's teaching is not limited to a few "holy" Orthodox, nor even to all Orthodox, but is a message for the world as well. The whole cosmos needs to be transformed "according to God's purpose." The pastoral concern of the Church requires, then, that it speak to its own and to those outside of it on matters of moral concern. This is especially the case as believers and unbelievers alike face unprecedented moral problems, replete with new temptations, as well as new opportunities.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The goal, then, of this book is to clearly describe from the perspective of the Eastern Orthodox theological world view an authentic, contemporary, practical and livable Christian lifestyle in the areas of personal and ecclesial ethics. Consequently, the moral norms presented here will seek to reflect the doctrinal and theoretical ethical positions of the Orthodox Church in practical life as they have been articulated in the Eastern

Christian tradition. The norms presented will be illustrated and supported by sources in the Orthodox Tradition, i.e., The Bible, the Fathers, Doctrine, Hagiography, Liturgy, Canons, and recent theological and ethical opinion.

The reader should expect at the outset, that these norms of Christian ethical behavior will not mirror current values of contemporary America or modern pluralistic secular society. In many ways, the Orthodox Christian values presented here stand in contrast to the the currently dominant political, economic, social and cultural values. In other situations, the Orthodox tradition supports and validates some of the values of this culture. The point is that this book seeks to be a faithful presentation of the tradition of Eastern Orthodox ethical thought, with the belief that it can serve as a guide for living the Christian faith.

Our culture is sensitive to the ethical dimensions of nearly all aspects of private and public life. Likewise, this volume seeks to restate the ongoing Tradition of Eastern Christianity as it applies to a wide range of moral questions. It seeks, as well, to address several as yet undefined moral questions as a contribution to their final formulation in the consciousness of the Church. In this effort, the book tries to take account of contrary views in the western world as well as those of ecumenical significance, but it is not written primarily to contribute to the current debates, other than by making known the traditional Eastern Christian perspectives on issues of moral *praxis*. Consequently, this organized, topical approach strives for a measure of comprehensiveness and balance, to provide an overview of the whole range of Orthodox Christian personal ethics and the major social institutions within which Christians live today.

In all, this book holds that this Orthodox Christian approach is in harmony with the general well-being of human life. As a result, it is a most appropriate and harmonious ethic for Church people, pointing to a fitting ethic for humanity as a whole.

The method of this volume was long ago expressed by the third century Christian author, Clement of Alexandria:

> For this reason, then, we require greater attention and consideration in order to investigate how precisely we ought to live, and what is true piety. For it is plain that, from the very reason that truth is difficult and arduous of attainment, questions arise . . . . With the greater care, therefore, are we to examine the real truth, which alone has for its object the true God. And the toil is followed by sweet discovery and reminiscence.[49]