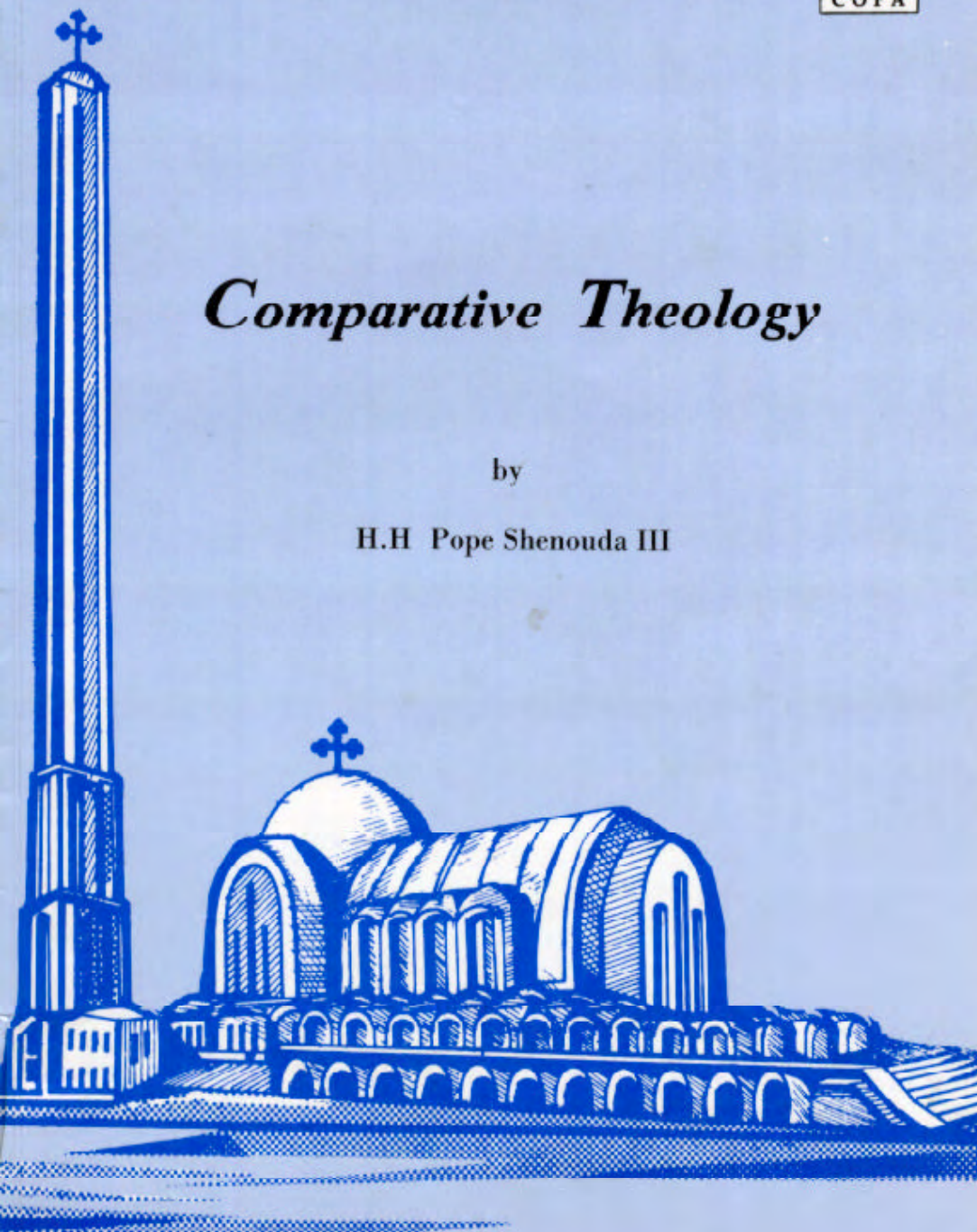




# *Comparative Theology*

by

H.H. Pope Shenouda III





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**By**

**H.H. Pope Shenouda III**

**Translated by**

**Mary & Amani Bassilli**

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*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

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## Forward

We are in an age in which Ecumenical work and attempts towards the recovery of the Christian Unity have flourished. The meetings between the Churches, in councils, conferences and symposiums have increased, and the fields of co-operation and co-working have multiplied.

However, unity is in a much higher level than cooperation. The Christian Unity should be built on the foundation of the “One Faith”. Thus began the theological discussions between the Churches.

This book in your hands is a step in this theological discussion between our brethren the Protestants and us.

Our brethren the Protestants comprise numerous denominations. There are partial variances between them, but as a whole they are enclosed within one frame. We will try in an atmosphere of love to discuss the points they have in common.

Here we do not include our brethren the Anglicans, as most of the topics in this book apply to other denominations of the Protestant Church.

In our discussion we have taken care to depend exclusively upon the Holy Bible, quoting none of the sayings of the Church Fathers or Tradition.

We shall speak with absolute frankness in handling the points of variance between Protestantism and Orthodoxy. We shall analyse them and see the opinion of the Holy Bible on them.

This book is the first volume of our discussion. It will be followed by others to cover the remaining points of difference, with the aspiration that this may bring us to a dogmatic and intellectual understanding.

We are prepared to reply to all the comments that we may receive.

Lastly, we pray that the Lord may preserve our discussion in the atmosphere of love of which we are circumspect.

**August, 1988**

**Pope Shenouda III**



## **Introduction**

### **One Faith and Sound Doctrine**

Theology is the discourse about God, blessed be His Name. Only those who have known God, and their disciples, are able to speak about Him.

Theology needs accuracy of expression and interpretation, and knowledge of the reliable sources believed in by all Christians. We, as a traditional and conservative Church, maintain the Apostolic Faith that was once entrusted to us by the saints (Jude 1-3). We do not introduce any innovations in religion, nor do we move an ancient boundary marker set up by our forefathers (Prov.22: 28).

The faith of the Church is "*one faith*" (Eph.4: 5). The Church reminds us every day of this *one faith*, in a reading we pray in Matins from chapter four of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. This *one faith* is the faith of every member of the Church. Whoever did not believe was isolated by the Church and forbidden to mix with others lest he corrupt their faith. Therefore, our teacher St. John the Evangelist says: "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds*" (2John. 10, 11).

The basic source of the *one faith* is the Holy Bible. The other sources are the sayings of the saints, the authenticated creeds of the holy councils, and what was recorded in the

Church books, especially the ritual books. All these are in accord with the Holy Bible and are called as a whole 'Church Tradition'.

The criterion by which we validate the accuracy of Tradition is the important condition that it complies with the Holy Bible. Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle says: *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed"* (Gal.1: 8). He also says: *"As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed"* (Gal.1: 9).

That was why, in the Apostolic era and thereafter, during her early stages, the Church was extremely circumspect to safeguard the teaching and thus safeguard the faith. For this reason, St. Paul the Apostle says to his disciple St. Titus the Bishop of Crete: *"But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine"* (Titus 2: 1). This sound doctrine was commanded to the first bishop fathers directly by the Apostles, and then from the bishops to other generations through honest teaching. Thus the sound doctrine was handed down from one generation to the next. St. Paul the Apostle says to his disciple Bishop Timothy: *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2Tim.2: 2) and *"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith"* (2Tim.1: 13).

## Teaching Is the Task of the Clergy

Teaching was the task of the Apostles and then of their disciples the bishops, priests and deacons. It was never the work of the laity. The Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the task of teaching to the Apostles when He said to them: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Matt. 28:19,20) and *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark.16: 15). He did not say this to others.

The Apostles considered preaching, teaching, ministry of the word and entrusting the faith to others, their main task. On the occasion of ordaining the seven deacons, St. Peter the Apostle said: *"...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"* (Acts 6: 4) and he said about the Lord: *"...He commanded us to preach to the people"*(Acts 10: 42). St. Paul the Apostle said about the Gospel: *"...to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles"* (2Tim. 1: 11). Thus this Apostle lived preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31).

St. Paul the Apostle entrusted the task of teaching and preaching to his disciples the bishops. He said to his disciple St. Timothy: *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and*

*teaching" (2Tim.4: 2). And to his disciple Bishop Titus, he said: "Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you" (Titus 2:15).*

The task of teaching was entrusted to bishops, then to priests and clergymen in general, as we will mention in detail in due course, since the Law is sought from the mouth of the clergyman.

Holy councils of bishops were formed and had the authority to legislate laws and canons in the holy Church. The replies of many of the bishops on religious affairs were considered sacred canons recognised by the Universal Church. A vivid example of this is what occurred during the visit of Pope Timothy Alexandrus, the 22nd Pope of Constantinople, to the Ecumenical Council held in 381 A. D. All his replies were considered Church canons. (See Volume 14 of *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* series).

As for the laity, they were always in the position of learners. The clergymen became teachers not only because they preached from the Church pulpit but also because of them being spiritual counsellors in confessions and the like.

Faith and doctrine were the task of the Church, represented by her councils and bishops, and were interpreted by the clergymen to the people. Preachers are not entitled to teach their own opinions on the subjects of faith and doctrine but they must teach what is recorded in the Church doctrine entrusted to them. For if the freedom is given to every person to spread his own opinions, we will have differing dogmas and we cannot call this the Church doctrine.

Man has freedom of belief but he does not have the freedom to teach according to his own thoughts because heresies sprang from the different schools of teaching.

When Luther started to teach according to his own thoughts and was followed by Calvin, Zwingli and others, a new schism occurred in the Church. As time passed, many contradicting dogmas were formed, and what the Church knew as "*one faith*" began to fade away.

Everyone is free in his belief. But the freedom of belief might divert and turn into heresies and heterodoxies that are exterior to the one faith of the Church. The Church, who has been alert over the faith to maintain it, does not allow this to happen nor does she give the authority of teaching to everyone, but examines the sayings of the teachers against the faith entrusted to the saints. Thus the saying of St. Paul the Apostle (Gal. 1:9) remains a fixed criterion.

Sometimes the reason for an error in faith or teaching is due to mixing with different dogmas, or being influenced by them and their teachers, or by being disciples of such teachers or their writings. Sometimes the reason for an error in faith is due to one's sticking to one's own opinion, neither accepting any change nor obeying the Church. Most probably the reason behind this is pride in the heart convincing the person that he is right and whoever objects to his opinion is wrong, and that he understands what no-one else does.

Throughout her history, the Church has been cautious to safeguard the teaching from distortion. Just one wrong teaching of one ex-priest such as Arius, caused two popes, namely, Pope Peter the Seal of the Martyrs and Pope Alexandrus, to intervene. A council was held in Alexandria attended by a hundred bishops from Alexandria and Libya and another council was held at Nicea in 325 A.D. attended by 318 bishops from all over the world. All this was caused by one priest's error in

teaching. There was a danger of his teaching spreading and nobody said: "Leave the matter alone; there is freedom of belief "!

The first schism in the Church occurred in the middle of the fifth century, in 451 AD, due to the different teachings on the Nature of Christ. Another schism occurred in the 11th century between the Roman Catholics and the Byzantine Orthodox due to the different teachings on the procession of the Holy Spirit. A third major schism occurred in the 15th century caused by Luther, the establisher of Protestantism. Different dogmas sprang up afterwards within Protestantism.

Hence arises the necessity of presenting a comparative theology to compare the various beliefs attributed to Christianity, to study the points of differences, and to reply to every teaching that does not conform to the doctrine of the Church.

In this book, we are attempting to expound the main differences in belief which exist between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, to discuss them in the light of the Holy Bible and pray to God to unify our belief because. Especially that our main call with regard to Christian Unity we call for nothing less than "Unity of faith".

# **PART ONE**

# BAPTISM





# **Baptism**

- (1) The efficacy of baptism
- (2) Baptism is the task of the clergymen
- (3) The necessity of baptism
- (4) Baptism by immersion
- (5) Paedobaptism (Infant Baptism)
- (6) Objections and replies

# Baptism

The subject of baptism revolves around in five salient points:

## **(1) What is the importance of baptism and what are its efficacious?**

The Orthodox believe that baptism is the way to receive salvation, purification, justification, renewal of life and membership in the Body of Christ? While these things, according to the Protestant denominations, are only received by faith? If the latter is correct, what is then, the use of baptism? Is it just a sign of Christianity? Or is it merely an obedience to the Lord's commandment: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt.28: 19)?

## **(2) Should who administer baptism?**

Baptism in the Orthodox Church is administered only by the clergy. But our Protestant brethren do not, at all, accept human Priesthood. So in their churches, a minister and not a clergyman administer baptism. He could be an elder (or a lady elder in case of groups who allow women ministers). Anyhow, according to the Protestant belief, the elders or the ministers are not clergymen.

**(3) We believe that baptism is one of the Church Sacraments** but our Protestants brethren do not.

**(4) We baptise by immersion in water** whereas the majority of our Protestant brethren baptise by sprinkling water.

**(5) We baptise infants** on the belief of their parents, but our Protestant brethren do not believe in Paedobaptism since they condition the belief of the baptised prior to baptising him.

**Some of the objections raised by our Protestant Brethren:**

1. Isn't faith sufficient without baptism?
2. How was the Penitent Thief saved without baptism?
3. Does water have the property that gives birth and renewal?
4. Why a clergyman? What happens if the clergyman who administers baptism is a malefactor?
5. If baptism is renewal of life, why do we sin thereafter?
6. How does the infant inherit the sin of his parents who were previously baptised and whose sins were forgiven?
7. Is the water in baptism a symbol of the word? The Apostle says concerning the relationship of Christ with the Church: "*... that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*" (Eph.5: 26).

## **The Efficacious of Baptism**

### **(1) Salvation is completed through baptism**

This is pursuant to the Lord Jesus Christ's words: *"He who believes and is baptised will be saved"* (Mark.16: 16). The Lord did not say: "He who believes is saved", but He put the condition of baptism alongside the condition of belief.

### **(2) Through baptism we receive the Second Birth which is of water and the Spirit**

(a) This is pursuant to the Lord Jesus Christ's words to Nicodemus: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John.3:3). The Lord explained this to him, saying: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John.3: 5). Then He added *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows where it wishes... So is everyone who is born of the Spirit"* (John.3: 6,8). Thus the Lord considers that everyone who is born of water and the Spirit is born from above or born of the Spirit.

It also seems strange that some Protestant brethren want to water-down this text by claiming that the Lord did not say, "unless one is baptised of water and the Spirit", but, *"unless one is born"*! Of course there is no doubt that both express the same thing, because what is the other meaning of *"born of water"* except "to be baptised" since the baptised comes out of the womb of the font and moreover the Apostle St. Paul affirms the same meaning when he says:

(b) *"...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration"* (Titus 3: 5). And about the Church he said: *"... that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word"* (Eph.5: 26). The Apostle considered that the washing of water (in baptism) is the washing of renewal and the washing away of sins.

### **(3) Baptism washes away sins**

This is according to the last two verses and also according to Ananias' words to Saul: *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptised, and wash away your sins"* (Acts 22: 16). Here we see that one of the outcomes of baptism is the washing away of sins. We are surprised at Saul's case: He was called by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to be an Apostle to the Gentiles and a chosen vessel to bear His name and to suffer for the sake of His name (Acts 9: 15,16). Nevertheless, his sins were not forgiven by his encounter with the Lord or by his faith or by becoming an Apostle. He was still in need of baptism to wash away his sins. Probably the Apostle Paul always remembered that washing away of sins through baptism, so he said to the Corinthians: *"But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"* (1Cor.6: 11). This was because they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and received the forgiveness of sins as St. Peter -had said to the Jews.

### **(4) In baptism there is forgiveness of sins**

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Jews believed and were

cut to the heart, they said to St. Peter and the other Apostles: *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Then St. Peter and the Apostles replied: *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2: 37,38).

If the belief of the Jews was adequate for the forgiveness of sins, the great Apostles would not have instructed them to be baptised, especially on such an historical day; the day of establishing the Church; the day on which important principles were being set up for salvation.

One may ask: How are sins forgiven in baptism? We reply:

### **(5) Baptism is dying with the Lord Jesus Christ and rising with Him**

The Holy Bible says: *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Rom.6: 23). The way of salvation began by death: the Lord Jesus Christ died for us. It is necessary to die with the Lord Jesus Christ or at least to resemble Him in His death as the Apostle says: *"...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (Phil.3: 10). This is achieved in baptism. How?

The Apostle says: *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death"* (Rom.6: 3,4). And he continues to confirm this expression by saying: *"...we died with Him... we were buried with Him... we have been united together in the likeness of His death... our old man was crucified with Him."* Confirming the same meaning, the Apostle also says in his Epistle to the Colossians: *"...buried with Him in baptism"* (Col.2: 12).

But why all this? The Apostle says: *"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him"* (Rom.6: 8).

Therefore, baptism is essential for salvation because it is sharing in Christ's death. It is a belief in death as a means to life and it is a confession that the wages of sin is death. In chapter six of the Epistle to the Romans, we notice two important points:

(a) The phrase *"buried with Him through baptism"* means immersion as when the body is lowered into the grave.

(b) It appears that one of the results of baptism is the crucifixion of *our old self*.

### **(6) Another Result of baptism is newness of life**

The Apostle says: *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Rom.6: 4). The new life is the life we receive through baptism. Therefore our old nature is renewed in baptism. How?

### **(7) In baptism we put on Christ**

The Apostle says: *"For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal.3: 27). Is there a more

powerful phrase than this to signify the great efficacy of baptism?

We put on Christ... We put on His righteousness which He bestows upon us in baptism, we put on salvation which He bestows upon us in baptism by His blood, we put on God's image (Gen.1: 26) which we lost through the original sin.

### **(8) In baptism we become members of the Church**

There is no doubt that baptism was symbolised by circumcision in the Old Testament. The Apostle St. Paul says about the Lord Jesus: *"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Col.2: 11,12).

It is known that in circumcision a part of the body is cut off and it dies. This refers to the complete death in baptism.

Circumcision is a mark that can not be effected

Likewise, baptism can not be erased

As blood is shed in circumcision

likewise, the merit of the Blood shed on our behalf is received in the new life in baptism

As the circumcised was considered a member of God's people (Gen.17: 7)

likewise, the baptised becomes a member of the Church; of God's Body

As the uncircumcised was cut

likewise, he who is not born of



off from the community  
(Gen.17: 14)

water and the Spirit (John.3: 3,5) will not enter the kingdom of God because he was not baptised, he was not buried with Christ and did not rise with Him

As circumcision was a must and a necessity by God's command

likewise, baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and for the membership in Christ's Body

As man dies only once and then rises, and is circumcised only once, therefore baptism is performed only once: it is not to be repeated because the baptised does not die with Christ more than once.

As for the relation between circumcision and baptism and the forgiveness of sins, the Apostle expresses it in his discourse about the spiritual circumcision; circumcision made by Christ and not by the hands of men; circumcision in which the old sinful body is taken off. He refers to baptism when he says: *"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses"* (Col.2: 11,13).

**The symbols of baptism in the Old Testament give the same meaning**

Noah's Ark was a symbol of baptism

St. Peter the Apostle says: *"...while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved*

*through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism" (1Pet.3: 20,21). We explain that there is salvation in baptism with water. Similarly, in Noah's ark which is a symbol of baptism, all those who were in the ark were saved from the death of the Flood. This confirms what we have previously said about salvation through baptism according to the Lord's words in (M k.16:16).*

Circumcision is another symbol of baptism and we have already explained this point

Another symbol of baptism in the Old Testament is the crossing of the Red Sea

St. Paul the Apostle says: *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptised into Mosses in the cloud and in the sea" (1Cor.10: 1,2). It is known that the crossing of the Red Sea was salvation to the people from the slavery of Pharaoh. Here St. Paul refers to the salvation we receive in baptism from the slavery of sin*

and death. The element of water is clear in both examples. Here Moses resembles priesthood in the same way that Noah resembles priesthood in the symbol of the Ark in the Era of the Patriarch Fathers.

Another symbol of baptism in the Old Testament is found in (Ezek.16: 8,9) where the Lord says to the sinful Jerusalem which here resembles the human soul in its fall: "*When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love. I entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,' says the Lord God. 'Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil.'*"

This water and this washing are symbols of baptism and the ointment is a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "*you became Mine*" means that Jerusalem (the human soul) became a member of Christ's Body (the Church).

Therefore, in baptism there is salvation and forgiveness of sins, not only according to the teaching of the New Testament but also according to the symbolic references in the Old Testament: circumcision, the Ark and the Red Sea.

The remission of sins we obtain in baptism is explicitly professed in the Creed by the phrase "We believe in one baptism for the remission of sins".

## **Baptism Is the Task of the Clergymen**

Baptism should be administered by a canonical clergyman. The Holy Bible shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ did not commend the task of baptism to the public but commanded it to His pure Apostles. Before His ascension, He said to them: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt.28: 19). This is also confirmed in (Mark.16: 15,16).

It is very clear that it was the Apostles who undertook the task of baptism as we read in the Book of Acts in the spread of the Early Church. Then the Apostles commanded the task to their disciples the bishops who in turn commanded it to the priests.

For these reasons we do not accept a baptism which was not administered by a clergyman. The clergyman should be an canonical clergyman in the sense that the laying on of hands was carried out by an apostolic and a canonical bishop. He should not be an expelled nor an anathematised priest, but a priest who has the Presbyterian to administer the Sacraments.

The above reasons are our answers to the question, repeatedly asked of us: "why do the Orthodox Church re-baptise the converts from the Protestant denominations"?

We could also say that we adorn them with all the spiritual treasures which they did not receive when accepted their

Protestant baptism. We usually ask of them: "Have you received salvation in your baptism? Have you received righteousness, newness of life and the forgiveness of sins? Have you been clothed with Christ in baptism? Have you been born anew? Especially that you did not consider baptism to carry with it any of those graces

We also repeat the non-Orthodox baptism as a canonical priest did not conduct it, while our Protestant brethren refute human priesthood, as well as the teaching of the holy sacraments.

While it may have been administered in the Name of The Holy Trinity , we tend not to call the baptism of a Protestant convert "a re-baptism" as it lacks three important qualities:

- (a) It was not administered by a clergyman
- (b) It was not considered a Sacrament
- (c) It was not considered to carry any spiritual efficacious

## **The Necessity of Baptism Ever Since the Establishment of the Church**

Since the beginning of Christianity, baptism has been an inseparable part of accepting the . Especially that it is an undisputed commandment by Christ Himself.

His Holy and imperative commandment is *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt.28: 19). He also commanded: *“He who believes and is baptised will be saved”* (Mark. 16:16). If baptism were meant to be only a sign, the Lord would have not given it all that importance.

Regarding the practical administration of baptism, when the Jews believed on the Day of Pentecost, St. Peter immediately called them to baptism. He said: *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38). On that day 3000 believers were baptised. Undoubtedly, baptising that multitude was a tedious and difficult task and must have taken a long time. Unless baptism was so important for Salvation the Apostles would of bypassed it, avoiding the hassel of baptising all these thousands. It would have been easier for the Apostles to say: *“Since you now believe, brethren, you have received salvation. Go, the Lord's blessing be with you.”*

We find the same situation with the Ethiopian eunuch who himself asked to be baptised immediately after he had believed. He was baptised by Philip and went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8: 36-39).

Saul of Tarsus was called to be baptised to wash away his sins after he had believed (Acts 22:16). Lydia, the woman dealer of purple cloth was baptised together with all her household after they had believed. When Cornelius believed, Peter the Apostle baptised him together with all those who heard the message, after saying: *"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"* (Acts 10: 44,47)

If salvation was to only be attained through belief, why were all those who believed baptised?

## **Baptism by Immersion**

(1) It is clear from the Holy Bible that baptism was by immersion and not by sprinkling, even at the time of John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus Himself was baptised by immersion. That is why the Holy Bible says: *"Then Jesus, when He had been baptised, came up immediately from the water"* (Matt.3: 16); (Mark.1: 10). Our Church names the Day on which the Lord Jesus Christ was baptised *"Immersion Day"* to confirm this meaning in our minds.

(2) The same meaning of the expression *"came up immediately from the water"* is used in the event of Philip baptising the Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Gospel says: *"And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptised him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away"* (Acts 8: 38,39). This proves that baptism was by immersion. If it were by sprinkling, it would have been adequate for Philip to sprinkle water on the eunuch while he was in the chariot without the necessity for both of them to go down into the water.

(3) The word 'baptisma' means dye. Dyeing cannot be done without immersion.

(4) Baptism is the action of being buried with Christ and tasting death with Him, as the Apostle says: "*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death*" (Rom.6: 4) and we were "*buried with Him in baptism*" (Col.2: 12). The action of burying cannot be achieved except by immersion. The coming up out of the font signifies rising with Christ after having died and been buried with Him, whereas sprinkling does not express the action of dying and rising.

(5) Baptism is a rebirth. Birth is the coming out of a body from another body. This is manifested in baptism when the body of the baptised comes out of the font, whereas sprinkling does not express the action of birth at all.

(6) Baptism is the washing away of sins as said to St. Paul (Acts 22:16) and as St. Paul said in his Epistle to Titus: "*He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3: 5). The action of washing needs dipping into water which is represented by immersion but not by sprinkling.

(7) Whoever looks at the buildings of the early churches will notice the existence of immersion fonts which are proof that baptism was by immersion and not by sprinkling because the action of sprinkling does not need a deep font.



## **Paedobaptism (Infant Baptism)**

Our Protestant brethren do not baptise little children, insisting on the necessity of belief before baptism and depending on the Lord's saying: "*He who believes and is baptised will be saved*" (Mark. 16:16) and also on the fact that little children do not comprehend what is happening in baptism. So how can baptism be administered without belief or without comprehension?

But we insist on paedobaptism for the following reasons:

(1) We are concerned about the eternal life of children because the Lord says: "*...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (John.3: 5). So how can we prevent children from being baptised and expose them to God's Judgement as long as the Lord did not exempt children when He said the above words?

(2) Through baptism, little children are given the opportunity to practise the life of the Church and enjoy the divine Sacraments therein together with all their efficacious. They can also enjoy all the means of Grace in the Church and their effects on their lives. In this way, we practically prepare the infants for the life of faith. If we excluded them from the Church we would be depriving them of faith and of the means of Grace.

(3) The Lord's saying: *"He who believes and is baptised will be saved"* is meant for adults who are capable of comprehending the meanings of faith. That is why we cannot baptise adults unless they believe, according to the Lord's words in (Mark.16: 16). As for infants, we apply the Lord's saying: *"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 19: 14).

(4) From the point of view of faith, little children are in the stage of believing and accepting everything; they do not refuse or reject faith; the doubt, inquiring, questioning and reasoning of adults have not yet entered their sphere. There is nothing in them to prevent them from the kingdom of heaven. Baptising them conforms to the principle of "Free Salvation" which is believed in and strongly propagated by our Protestant brethren.

(5) If we were utterly strict on the condition of belief, we would have forbidden from baptism many adults who were not mentally mature to comprehend the facts and depths of belief, such as the peasants, labourers, illiterates, the poorly educated and those of too limited understanding to get into the depth of the theological facts. May we ask: What would be the extent of those people's belief? Should we prevent them from being baptised, as little children should be?

(6) Some ask: What happens if the little child refuses the faith when he grows up?

He will be considered an apostate. He may refuse the grace he received in baptism by his own free will. We had done our

duty towards him and the matter is left to him. He will be like a person who, after having begun in the Spirit, is now trying to be made perfect by the flesh (Gal.3: 3).

Probably the little children who are baptised and live in the Church, tasting all the means of Grace therein, are less liable to perversion than those who are left without baptism until they grow up.

(7) Those who deny paedobaptism are in fact denying the necessity of baptism for salvation (Mark. 16:16); because if they believe in the necessity of baptism for salvation, it would be a serious matter to deprive little children of salvation.

Since our Protestants brethren hold that belief is a condition for salvation and that little children have no belief, what then, from their point of view, is the destiny of little children who are unbaptised and have no belief? Will they be saved without belief and baptism? The question remains unanswered.

(8) We baptise little children because the Holy Bible indicates this. The Holy Bible mentions baptisms of whole families or of a person with his entire household, and there is no doubt that there must have been children in those families.

The following are a few of numerous examples:

(a) The baptism of the jailer at Philippi: St. Paul and St. Silas said to him: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household*" (Acts 16: 31). This means that the jailer's belief would be the first step which would lead his household to salvation. That is why it is said after that: "*Then*

*they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" and then "immediately he and all his family were baptised" (Acts 16:32,33). The Holy Bible did not exempt little children from the household of the jailer at Philippi but said about their baptisms: "...he and all his family", of course including little children.*

(b) In the event of baptising Lydia, the dealer of purple cloth, it is written: *"And when she and her household were baptised" (Acts 16: 15).*

(c) St. Paul the Apostle said: *"Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas" (1Cor.1: 16).* Could all these households have been without little children?

(d) The Holy Bible does not mention that there were no little children among those who were baptised on the Day of Pentecost.

(9) Paedobaptism was practised in history. Here we remember the disagreement between St. Augustine and St. Jerome on the origin of the soul: whether is it born or created?. St. Augustine said that it is born with man and St. Jerome said that it is created. St. Augustine asked: "If it is created, it does not inherit Adam's sin. Why then do we baptise infants?" St. Jerome could not reply to this question.

(10) There is not a single verse in the Holy Bible that forbids paedobaptism.

(11) With regard to belief, we baptise little children on the belief of their parents which in essence has many examples in the Holy Bible:

(a) Circumcision in the Old Testament symbolised baptism as we have previously explained. The circumcised was considered a member of God's people according to the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen.17: 11). It is known that circumcision was to be done on the eighth day after birth, according to God's command (Gen.17: 12). What understanding did the eight-day old baby boy have regarding the covenant between God and Abraham? To what extent was he aware of this membership in God's people? Undoubtedly, he had nothing of the sort, but he was circumcised on his parents' belief in such a covenant; he became a member of God's people and was entitled to the promises which God endowed upon our father Abraham. The baby attained all these through the belief of his parents.

(b) The crossing of the Red Sea was a symbol of baptism or a baptism itself as St. Paul the Apostle explained in (1Cor.10: 2). It represented salvation from the slavery of death, Satan and sin. Adults who were aware of God's promise to the Prophet Moses crossed the Red Sea; they knew that they were slaves to Pharaoh; they knew the meaning of salvation from slavery by the Mighty Hand of God and when they crossed the Red Sea (baptism), they were saved. What was the position of the little children who were carried by their mothers and fathers across the Sea? Of course they received salvation from slavery; they were baptised, not on their own faith but on the faith of their parents because those children were not aware of any of the occurring events.

(c) Another important and very strong example is the

salvation of the little children, through the blood of the Passover lamb, from the hand of the Angel who killed every firstborn son. The Lord commanded Mosses to kill a one-year-old male goat or sheep without any defect and put its blood on the sides and tops of their doors, and said: *"And when I see the blood, I will pass over you"* (Ex. 12:13).

The blood of the Passover lamb was a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ's Blood through which we have received salvation, as St. Paul the Apostle said: *"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"* (1Cor.5: 7).

And the question now is: What was the belief of the little children who were saved by the blood of the Passover lamb? What did they know about the covenant between God and Mosses or of the Passover and the salvation from death by the blood of the Passover lamb? Undoubtedly they were not aware of anything but they were saved by the faith of their parents; the parents who believed in the blood, its effect and the importance of the blood of the Passover lamb for salvation from death.

These little children who were saved by circumcision, by the blood of the Passover lamb and by the crossing of the Red Sea, came to know the meaning of all these things later on when they grew up. Nevertheless, they received salvation freely in their childhood through the belief of their parents in God's promises and covenants with men. When the children grew up, they entered into this belief practically.

## QUESTION 1

**If baptism is renewal of life, why do we sin after being baptised?**

Baptism is renewal of life according to the teaching of the Holy Bible (Rom.6: 4), but it does not bestow infallibility. We receive new birth, new life and new graces in baptism, and we take a new nature. The Apostle says: "*...according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5). This nature has the capability and the potentiality of a spiritual life. Nevertheless we are not infallible as long as we are still in the flesh. Here we are in a test, we still possess our freedom to do good or bad because the grace of renewal we received in baptism does not eliminate the grace of freedom which we possess and with which we were created after God's image. That is why a virtuous person falls seven times a day and rises again. But we shall receive infallibility and the crown of righteousness in the life to come. Our teacher the Apostle Paul said effusively when his hour came: "*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me **on that Day***" (2Tim.4: 8).

## QUESTION 2

**Does baptism still carry its efficacious if the clergyman who administers it is a malefactor?**

The graces we receive in baptism are from God and not from the clergyman who is but a minister of the Lord the Giver. The graces are based on the true promises of God and not on the deportment of the clergyman.

The clergyman is like the postman who carries a joyful letter to

you; whether he is handsome or ugly does not affect the joy your letter brings.

We can also compare the clergyman to the gardener sowing seeds in the earth to bring forth fruits. Whether he is sinful or virtuous does not matter; what matters are the seeds themselves and the life therein, not the hands of the gardener who sows them.

You may drink water from a gold or copper cup, yet the water itself remains the same irrespective of the kind of cup you drink from.

In our discourse about baptism and its efficacious, we shall discuss the dogma objectively. We shall not touch any subjective issue as this leads to judging others and to disregarding what the Lord endowed upon human beings in baptism according to His true words in the Gospel.

### **QUESTION 3**

#### **How was the Penitent Thief saved without baptism?**

When we reply to this question we say that this thief received the best baptism after whose example we all wish to be baptised. What is baptism but dying with Christ, as our teacher St. Paul says (Rom.6)? The Penitent Thief actually died with Christ and his death became a baptism. Similarly is the baptism by blood attributed to the martyrs who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were killed at the time of persecution before they had received the grace of baptism by water. Their death became a baptism because they died with Christ like the Penitent Thief. (We have explained this point in our book entitled *Salvation*).



## QUESTION 4

If baptism is essential, why did the Apostles Paul and Silas say to the jailer at Philippi: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*" (Acts 16: 31) and not: "Believe and be baptised", which is proof that belief is adequate for salvation?

The reply to this is that the two Apostles were talking to an unbeliever. No matter what he did, he could not be saved without faith. Therefore, they first had to direct him to faith so that he could be saved. If he accepted the faith then they would explain to him the necessary matters. That is why the following two things happened after they said those words to him:

(a) "*Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house*" (Acts 16: 32).

(b) "*And immediately he and all his family were baptised*" (Acts 16: 33).

Thus we should not put before us just one verse and forget all the other verses connected with the same subject. Alongside the belief of the jailer of Philippi, we have to put the baptism of the jailer of Philippi. Alongside the words of the two Apostles: "*Believe... and you will be saved*", we also have to put before us the words of the Lord Himself: "*He who believes and is baptised will be saved*" (Mark.16: 16) and in addition, all the verses that are related to salvation through baptism such as (1Pet.3: 21) and (Titus 3: 5).

## QUESTION 5

### **If baptism is so important. were the prophets of the Old Testament baptised?**

If the commandment of baptism had existed in their days, they would have been baptised. But this commandment is laid down in Christianity. Why? Because baptism is dying with Christ and Christ had not died in the Old Testament.

The prophets of the Old Testament practised what they could in their days: the symbols of baptism such as circumcision and crossing the Red Sea. They also celebrated the Passover lamb, which symbolised the Blood of Christ. We should not expect people to have obeyed a commandment, unknown to them, as it succeeded their time/s.

## QUESTION 6

### **Is salvation through the word and not through water?**

Do the Apostle's words about the Church: *"...that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word"* (Eph.5: 26) mean that cleansing is through the word, that is, salvation is through the word? What about the other verses which signify the necessity of the word for salvation such as: *"...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1Pet.1: 23) and *"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth"* (Jas.1: 18), and which did not say: "having been born again... through baptism" and "saved us through baptism"?

What is the importance of water for salvation? Since the

Lord says: "*He who believes and is baptised will be saved*", then salvation will be attained this way. But the phrase "*He who believes*" should be preceded by teaching or preaching, because the Apostle says: "*And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*" (Rom.10: 14) The importance of the word arises from here.

The word, which results in belief, comes first and then after belief baptism is administered, the result of which is salvation and renewal of life. Although salvation and renewal of life are received through baptism, yet the word should come first because it leads to faith and faith leads to baptism. That is why the Apostle says: "*...He brought us forth by the word of truth*" and "*...having been born again through the word of God*", on the assumption that the 'word' is the origin that led to all these.

The Apostle's words about the Church: "*...that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*" (Eph.5: 26) means that cleansing is completed by baptism (the washing of water) through the word, that is, through preaching and the ministry of the word which result in faith and then in baptism.

Here we observe that the Apostle says: "*with the washing of water by the word*" and not "with the washing of water which is the word". If the washing of water means the word there would have been no need for this repetition. But "*the washing of water by the word*" means the washing of water which takes place following the effect of the word. Without the word and its effect the people could not have come to the washing of water, that is, to baptism.

We observe that the word 'belief' is not mentioned in the

phrases *"having been born again... through the word of God"* (1 Pet.1: 23) and *"brought us forth by the word of truth"* (Jas.1: 18). Is the word without belief sufficient for the new birth? This is impossible. The word 'belief' is not mentioned because it is obviously implied.

There is no need to repeat on every occasion words whose meanings are obviously implied. We cannot on every occasion repeat the words: word - belief - baptism rebirth.

Preaching has its importance; nobody can deny the importance of the ministry of the word. Nevertheless, we can never say that some people are *'brought forth by the word of truth'* whether they believe or not. This also applies to baptism.

The phrase *'washing of water by the word'* implies two things: the word and baptism. We notice that the word 'belief' is not mentioned since it is implied.

Our Protestant brethren are constantly concentrating on faith. Does the absence of the word 'faith' in (Eph.5: 26); (Jas.1: 18); (1Pet.1: 23) mean that it is not important or necessary? Of course not. Sometimes the absence of a word does not render it unnecessary, but that its meaning is implied. This applies to the word 'baptism'.

## QUESTION 7

**What is the position of water in salvation and the second birth?**

(a) Although the word 'water' is not mentioned in the phrases: *"brought us forth by the word of truth"* and *"having been born again... through the word of God"*, yet it is

mentioned plainly in the Lord's saying: "...*unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (John.3: 5). In this verse, it is clear that rebirth is from water. The water meant is real water and not symbolic.

(b) This is clear when Cornelius and his Gentile followers accepted the faith and were joined to the Church. In this case righteous persons were called to the faith by God: An angel appeared to Cornelius and Peter saw a vision; a Divine command. Then St. Peter preached to them the word of God and the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message (Acts 11: 1) and they spoke in tongues.

Was that sufficient for their second birth? Could St. Peter tell them: "Blessed is this second birth to you all"? Obviously this was not the case, as St. Peter, after he had witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit on them, said: "*Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*" And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10: 47,48).

The writer of the Book of Acts comments immediately on this event by saying: "...*the Gentiles had also received the word of God*" (Acts 11: 1). Here the importance of water goes alongside the importance of the word, and the word 'water' does not mean 'the word' as some interpret it in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph.5: 26).

(c) Another clear example is the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. When he believed, the Holy Bible says: "*Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'*" And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus

*Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptised him" (Acts 8: 36-38).*

This was a baptism of water, exactly the same as the baptism of Cornelius and his followers; baptism of actual water was necessary immediately after the preaching of the Word. In this case the water was not the word. If the eunuch were born of the word and washed by the word what then was the need for water?

Concerning this, I would like to speak about an important subject:

### **The importance of water and its symbols in the Holy Bible**

In order to understand why water was chosen for washing and renewal in the Sacrament of Baptism, we should remember that ever since the beginning, in the story of creation, there has been a association between water and life.

The Holy Bible says: *"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen.1: 2).* And God said: *"Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Gen.1: 20).* Thus life sprang out of water and we can see the connection between water, life and the Spirit of God.

We also read in the Old Testament that God likens Himself to water when He reproached the people saying: *"They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer.2: 13).* This correlation is also mentioned in the words of

the Lord Jesus Christ: " *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* ' By this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John.7: 38,39).

These words are similar to the Lord's words about Himself in His discourse with the Samaritan woman about living water, when He said that He is the Giver of living water. He said: "*But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John.4: 10-14).

Therefore, water is a symbol of life and sometimes of the Holy Spirit Himself. How beautiful are the Divine Inspiration's words in the First Psalm about the virtuous man: "*He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season*" (Ps.1: 3). The fruit is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The connections between water, life and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Bible commence from Genesis (Gen.1: 2) and continue until the end of the Book of Revelation: "*I will give the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts*" (Rev.21: 6), "*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb*" (Rev.22: 1) and "*...let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev.22: 17).

In the crossing of the Red Sea, the water symbolised life and death together; death of the servile man and life of the free man who came up out of the water.

On Maundy Thursday, the water symbolised purification. That is why, after washing the feet of His Apostles, the Lord said: "*...and you are clean*" (John.13: 10). The Psalmist says:

"I will wash my hands in innocence" (Ps.26: 6). This cleansing is the washing of the new birth with the word; the cleansing which we receive in the bath of the new birth and the cleansing obtained in baptism referred to by the Apostle's words: "...and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb.10: 22).

## **Water and Blood**

On the Cross, when one of the soldiers pierced the Lord Jesus' side with a spear, "*immediately blood and water came out*" (John.19: 34). What is the Divine wisdom thereof?

From His side blood came out to give us the meaning of redemption. But how do we receive this redemption?

We receive it through water in baptism. Therefore, the emergence of both water and Blood from the side of Christ showed us the means of redemption. We receive the Blood of Christ which purifies us from every sin through water. How beautiful it is when, in the Eucharist, we blend the Blood with water!

St. John the Beloved, who witnessed the incident of the coming out of the blood and water, clarified this subject when he said: "*And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood,. and these three agree as one*" (1John.5: 8). This verse explains the redemption, we receive.

Redemption was given to us by Blood (the Blood of Christ) and we receive the merit of this Blood through the birth of water and the Spirit. Therefore the three elements: Blood, water and the Spirit, gather in baptism.



## QUESTION 8

### **Does water have all these efficacious?**

(a) This question reminds me of the rage of Naaman the Syrian when Elisha asked him to wash in the Jordan to be cleansed. He could not believe that the matter was as simple as just washing in water, especially as he had better rivers in Damascus than those in Israel (2Kin.5: 10-12). But when he obeyed and washed, he was cleansed by his belief.

The prophet ordered Naaman to wash in the River Jordan in which John the Baptist was to baptise later (Matt.3: 6). Shall we be like Naaman and think it too much for water to have these efficacious? God gives grace in the way He wishes. The grace in this case was not in the water of the River Jordan itself but in the power to cleanse which God endowed upon that water. The same is said about baptism, as we will explain later.

(b) When the Lord healed the man born blind, He put mud on his eyes and said to him: *"Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing* (John.9: 6,7). With his mere belief, the blind man could have seen, but God wished to enlighten him (baptism is spiritual enlightenment) through water. Let God's will be done the way He wishes; we do not design plans to be carried out by God, blessed be His name.

(c) In addition, we say in reply to this question that the water of baptism is not just ordinary water and the baptised is not only born of water but of water and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the water of baptism, giving it a special nature so that whoever is submerged in it is born of water and the Spirit. Thus the baptised receives the merit of the redeeming

Blood of Christ. When he is submerged into this water, he is buried with Christ and shares in the fellowship of His death in order to merit the fellowship of sharing in His resurrection. That is why, in sanctifying the water of baptism, we pour into it the Holy Chrism, the ointment of the Holy Spirit. Thus the water is sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Whoever is born of this water is born of water and the Spirit.

In sanctifying the water of baptism, the clergyman prays the litanies of sanctifying the water and of invocations the Holy Spirit. He also reads certain passages from the Holy Bible. Thus the water of baptism which cleanses us is sanctified by the word.

## QUESTION 9

**Would it not be better if we say that baptism is rising with Christ and not dying with Him because death is harmful and not beneficial whereas rising is beneficial?**

Baptism is dying with Christ and rising with Him as the Apostle explained in his Epistle to the Romans: "*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection*" (Rom.6: 5) and "*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him*" (Rom.6: 8). In this matter no one may depend on his own thoughts and stray from the Church's teaching, saying that death is useless but resurrection is beneficial. The Holy Bible says: "*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory*

*of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*"(Rom.6: 3,4). The Apostle repeats this in his Epistle to the Colossians, saying: "*...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*" (Col.2: 12). From these verses we see that baptism is both death and resurrection. Truly, those who despise dying with Christ cannot receive the blessing of His resurrection.

Here we ask: Why is there death in baptism? And what is its importance?

(a) To have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle did not say that he only enters into the power of His resurrection, but he said: "*...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*" (Phil.3: 10) and "*I have been crucified with Christ*" (Gal.2: 20). The phrase *dying with Christ* is repeated many times in his Epistle to the Romans (Rom.6).

(b) Man's corrupted nature (the old man) must die in baptism so he may receive the new nature. This is what the Apostle express in his words about crucifying the old self in baptism. In the same chapter of his Epistle to the Romans he says: "*...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin*" (Rom.6: 6,7). Here is the benefit of death. Death is not harmful as some think. It is better for us and for our old self to die so that we can rise with a new nature after the image of God. As for the corrupted nature, it does not have the power to rise with Christ. It is essential for our old self to die in order to live.

(c) The fellowship of His death implies that we profess that we were under the penalty of death; we were *dead in trespasses*. Christ died for us and was buried. That is why we are baptised into His death. As long as the wages of our sin is death, we are buried with Him in baptism. In this way we receive the merit of the blessing of rising with Christ.

(d) It is common sense that resurrection means rising from the dead. Whoever rises with Christ in baptism must have died with Him in order to rise. If he did not die, how then will he rise?

## QUESTION 10

**Why should a person whose parents were baptised and saved from Adam's sin, be baptised as well?**

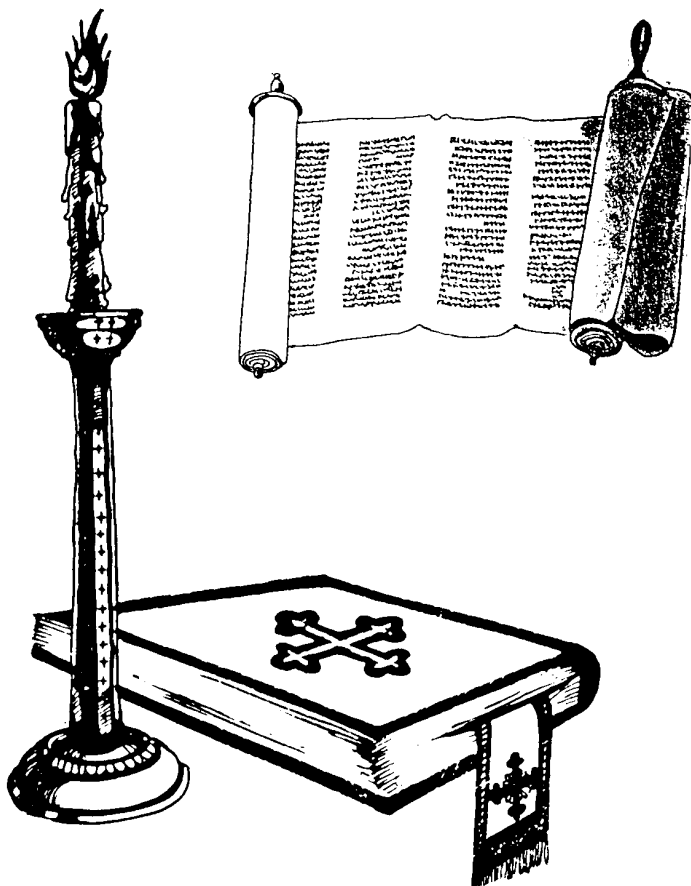
We did not inherit the penalty of death from our immediate parents so that we are saved if they are baptised, but we inherited it directly from Adam and Eve: the first of the human race. We were in Adam's loins. When Adam's nature sinned and he was condemned to death, everything in his loins became mortal. We came out of Adam's loins under the penalty of death. Therefore the sentence of death was passed on Adam and all his offspring; not only on Cain, Abel and Seth. Concerning this, the Holy Bible says: "Therefore, *just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Rom.5: 12) and also "*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive*" (1Cor.15: 22). Hence death was a judgement on the entire human race, being the offspring of Adam. Every born human being is condemned to death because He was in Adam's loins when Adam was condemned to death.

Salvation from death is an individual salvation, whether or

not the parents received it. This salvation needs repentance and belief in baptism and in Christ's Blood as well as in all the means of Grace. There are no parents without sin. The Psalmist says: *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me"* (Ps.51: 5).

We are born in sin until liberated from the bondage of corruption (Rom.8: 21). When are we going to be liberated from this corruption? The Apostle says about our bodies: *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1Cor. 15: 42,53). When will this be? When the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised.

# *TRADITION*



# TRADITION

1. Tradition is older than the Holy Bible
2. The Holy Bible does not mention everything
3. What were the Lord's words about the kingdom of God?
4. Tradition is taken from the teachings of the Apostles
5. The Apostles laid down disciplines for the Church
6. The Apostle Paul received teachings from the Lord
7. The Apostles recorded in their Epistles things they received through Tradition
8. Benefits of Tradition
9. Valid and invalid tradition
10. Church authority in teaching and legislation
11. Conditions of sound Tradition
12. The Apostles commanded that Tradition be preserved

## **Tradition**

Tradition is every teaching, other than the words of the Holy Bible, that was entrusted to us, by the Apostles and the Fathers. This teaching constitutes subjects that might not be included in the Holy Bible but in no way contradict it.

Our Protestant brethren do not believe in Tradition. They only abide by the Holy Bible. In this way they exclude the heritage which the Church received from the previous generations: the writings of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, the decisions of the holy councils, the Church Canons and regulations, the Church rituals and the oral Tradition.

**Tradition is older than the Holy Bible. It goes back to the time of our father Adam.**

The earliest written Law that reached us was written by Moses the Prophet who lived in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. However, Tradition is much older than that. Thousands of years had elapsed before there was any written Law. Who led the thoughts of human beings? Their conscience (the moral law) on one hand, and Tradition, which is entrusted from one generation to the next, on the other.

We will try to give some examples of Tradition that preceded the written law:



(1) In the Book of Genesis it is written that Abel the righteous man brought fat portions of his flock (Gen.4: 4). The Apostle explains this, saying: "*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*" (Heb.11: 4). Here, we ask: How did Abel know the idea of offering sacrifices to God? From where did he get that faith? There was no written Law at his time. Undoubtedly, he received this idea through Tradition from his father Adam who had received it from God Himself. This took place fourteen centuries before Moses wrote about sacrifices and burnt offerings.

(2) The same applies to the burnt offerings which were offered by our fathers Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They knew about the idea of sacrifices through Tradition entrusted to them. The same is said about the idea of building altars. After the Flood, our father Noah "*built an altar to the Lord*" (Gen.8: 20), and our father Abraham built an altar at the great tree of Moreh (Gen.12: 7). The idea of building altars continued thereafter although there was no Holy Bible at the time to command them to do so.

(3) It is written in the Holy Bible that our father Noah took some of the clean animals and birds and sacrificed a burnt offering on the altar and the Lord smelt the soothing aroma (Gen.8: 20,21). How did Noah know the idea of offering sacrifices of clean animals? He must have taken it directly from the Lord and then entrusted it to the generations after him, before Moses explained the idea of clean animals in the Torah.

(4) In the event of our father Abraham meeting Melchizedek, it is written that Melchizedek *"was the priest of God Most High"* (Gen.14: 18). How was this priesthood instituted. Who gave Melchizedek the authority to bless Abram and what law made Abram offer Melchizedek the tenths of everything he had (Gen. 14:20)? Thus Melchizedek was considered greater than Abraham (Heb.7: 6,7).

At that time there was no written Law explaining priesthood, its honour, duties and blessing to others. In the previous chapters of Genesis there is no mention whatsoever of the words 'priest' or 'priesthood'. From where did the knowledge of priesthood come except through Tradition?

(5) In the same episode of Abram's meeting with Melchizedek, we hear that Abram *"gave him a tithe of all"* (Gen.14: 20). How was it known, at the time of our father Abraham, that the tenth were to be given to priests, except through Tradition? The Law of tithing had not yet been received in the written Law.

This also applies to our father Jacob: How did he know the idea of giving the tithe when he said to the Lord: *"... and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You"* (Gen.28: 22)? There is no doubt that he received the Law of tithing through Tradition, from his grandfather Abraham who offered the tithe to Melchizedek without receiving it from a written Law at all. It is obvious that Tradition was the teacher of all human beings before the written Law and remained so thereafter.

(6) We read that when Jacob was fleeing his brother Esau that he saw a ladder extending from earth to heaven, while the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and the Lord talked to him and gave him a promise. The Holy Bible says that Jacob said: *"Surely the Lord is in this place... This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"* And he called that place Bethel, which means 'House of God'. He took the stone he had placed under his head, set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

How did our father Jacob know the phrase 'House of God'? How did he know the idea of consecrating God's houses by pouring oil on them since nothing of this sort had been given in a written Law? No explanation can be given except that it was through Tradition.

(7) When God gave the written Law He willed Tradition to remain as well. He commanded the fathers, on various occasions, to commend and entrust the teachings to their children. The Lord ordered them to inform their children of the occasion of sacrificing to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb (Ex. 13: 14-16). The Lord also said to the people: *"Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren"* (Deut.4: 9).

(8) Even in Christianity, we find that some of the writers of the New Testament wrote information about events in the Old Testament which they had received through Tradition. For

example, St. Paul the Apostle mentioned the names of the two witches who resisted Moses the Prophet. He said: "*Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth*" (2Tim.3: 8). We cannot find the names of these two witches either in the Books of Moses or in the rest of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul must have known these names through Tradition.

(9) The entrustment of Tradition which occurred in the Old Testament recurred in the New Testament but to a lesser extent. A long time elapsed before there was any written gospel or epistle. For a period of approximately twenty years people received the entire faith, the entire story of Christ together with His teachings and His redemption, through Tradition.

(10) The Lord Jesus Christ did not write a gospel Himself nor did He leave a written gospel, yet He was preaching and teaching, leaving His words as spirit and life (John.6: 63) for the people who later spread them. When the Lord began His teaching and preaching, He said to the people: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*" (Mark.1: 15). There was no written gospel (Good News) but there was preaching of the Good News representing the oral Gospel or the Divine teaching which was taught through entrustment. The same meaning applies to the Lord's words to His disciples: "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark. 16: 15). That command was not within the written boundary.

11) Here I shall state an important fact. **The Holy Bible does not mention everything:**

(a) It does not mention all that the Lord Jesus Christ did or all that He said. What happened was that the Evangelists chose parts of the Lord Jesus Christ's sayings and parts of His works, recorded them at a certain time for the people and left out the rest. This is obvious from the last written Gospel. St. John the Apostle says: *"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written"* (John.21: 25) and also *"...truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"* (John.20: 30,31).

Do not think that the miraculous signs which the Lord Jesus Christ did are only those mentioned in the Bible; thousands of miracles were not recorded. To prove this, it is sufficient to mention the words of St. Luke the Evangelist: *"Now when the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them"* (Lk.4: 40).

How many were those sick? They were too many. Not all the healing miracles are recorded. Our teacher St. Matthew the Evangelist says: *"Now Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people"* (Matt.4: 23).

What are the details of the incidents of healing every disease? They are not recorded. What about the Lord's teachings in the

synagogues and His preaching? They are not recorded either. Our teacher St. Mark the Evangelist says that when the Lord Jesus went to Capernaum, He went into the synagogue and *"taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"* (Mark.1: 21,22). What was that teaching which astonished them? It was not recorded.

In the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes, the Lord Jesus was teaching the people from morning until late in the afternoon. What did He teach them? Nothing was recorded in the Gospels. What were the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ on the shore of the lake, on the seashore, in the boat and on the roads? We do not know; as nothing was detailed about it in the Gospels.

(b) After the Lord's resurrection, we find the same situation. The Lord met the two disciples of Emmaus, *and "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Lk. 24: 27). All these teachings, and others, were not recorded in the Gospels. But undoubtedly they, or some thereof, have reached us through Tradition.

(c) What about the forty days which the Lord spent with His disciples after His resurrection, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1: 3)?

### **What were the Lord's words about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God?**

Undoubtedly His words were of such great importance that they were worth Him having many meetings with His Apostles after His resurrection. Yet despite their great importance, His words were not recorded in the Holy Bible. Most probably they were matters that concerned the leaders of the Church, for

them to understand and teach, following the Lord's saying: "... *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*" (Matt.28: 20), without mentioning what His commandments to them were.

Have the teachings and commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ been lost or have they reached us? It is far fetched to believe that they have been lost since they are so important. How did they reach us then? With the exception of the Apostle Paul who was not one of the eleven Apostles and did not attend the meetings of the Lord with His Apostles after His resurrection, the eleven Apostles with whom the Lord spent forty days after His resurrection, wrote too little and what they wrote does not comprise all the Christian teachings. There is one explanation and it is that the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings to His Apostles have reached us through Tradition, that is, through the Apostolic Entrustment.

The Church has been living these teachings according to the Lord's saying: "*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*" (John.6: 63). The Apostles understood the spirit of the words and transcribed them into life, and these words have reached us in the life of the Church.

Therefore, we can say that Tradition is the life of the Church or it is the living Church. The Apostles entrusted this life together with all that they had learnt and received from the Lord, to the saints in the Church. However, they did not write them in the Gospels or in the Epistles, but they left them as living practices and teachings in the life of the Church. Among those teachings are the Church discipline, rituals and Sacraments.

Do you think that the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7) is

the only sermon of the Lord during over three years? This is unbelievable. The Lord's words have not gone astray; the disciples kept them in their hearts, ears and minds. From the treasure of their good hearts, from their sacred memories, they brought out the Lord's sayings and entrusted them to the Church under the heading of '*Tradition*' or '*The Apostolic Entrustment*'. The Holy Spirit taught them everything and reminded them of everything the Lord had said, according to His true promise (John.14: 26).

### **Tradition is taken from the teachings of the Apostles**

Many Apostles did not write epistles. Where are their teachings? Where is the work of the Divine Inspiration in them? Where is the work of the Holy Spirit who speaks through the prophets? It is not possible that some of the Apostles taught only what they wrote. It is not possible that James the Apostle's teaching was only limited to one Epistle nor is it possible that Jude the Apostle taught just one chapter. What about the rest of the eleven Apostles of whose teachings we have received no word? What did they preach? What did they leave for the Church? Most probably those teachings, or some thereof, have reached us through Tradition.

The Apostles used to enter synagogues teaching and disputing against the opposition, however none of this was written. They preached in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria until everyone believed, but only a little of what they preached was recorded in writing. The Apostle Paul entered a house in Rome where he stayed for two years preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and without hindrance (Acts.28: 30,31). None of that preaching has reached us in a written form. Where did it all go?



## **Undoubtedly the Apostles laid down disciplines for the Church. What are they?**

Is it not reasonable to assume that the Lord's Apostles, after having received all those teachings from the Lord, left the Church without any disciplines or laws to direct her affairs. They did not write these in their epistles either because such things were not for the public or because they would be known to all through practice. Undoubtedly, those disciplines have reached us through Tradition and Entrustment.

St. John the Apostle says in the epilogue of his second Epistle: *"Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face"* (2John. 12). He repeated the same words in the epilogue of his third Epistle (3John.13, 14). What was the content of this face to face dialogue? And why was it not written down? How has it reached us?

From the above quotation in the two Epistles, we notice that the Apostolic Fathers sometimes preferred speaking to writing whenever it was convenient for them. Their verbal teachings were entrusted from one generation to the next until they have reached us today.

Probably the Apostles concentrated in their Epistles on the main principles of faith as much as they could and left the details of the Church disciplines and rituals to the practical arrangements in the churches. People were learning them not from written books but through practising the sacramental life

St. Paul the Apostle says in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: *"And the rest I will set in order when I come"* (1Cor.11: 34). What were these apostolic instructions? Have

we received them through Tradition? St. Paul the Apostle said to his disciple Titus, the Bishop of Crete: *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you"* (Titus 1: 5). He did not spell out in his Epistle how to appoint priests, with regard to the prayers, rituals and the necessary conditions thereof. How did St. Titus know about this matter other than by verbal instruction? That is why the Apostle said to him: *"...as I commanded you"*. The details of this command were not recorded in the Epistle but the disciple the bishop learnt them verbally, *'face to face'*, and they reached us through Tradition.

The same applies to what St. Paul the Apostle said to his disciple Timothy, the Bishop of Ephesus: *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2Tim.2: 2). Here the Apostle refers to the word 'hear' and not 'write'. He did not tell us what his disciple heard from him. But undoubtedly, that teaching was entrusted from St. Paul to St. Timothy then to faithful and reliable persons who in turn entrusted them to others. Thus the entrustment continued successively until it reached us.

Those who insist on proving everything by a verse from the Holy Bible disregard what the Apostle said about *'face to face'* (2John. 12), the Apostles' instructions concerning the churches, which they did not record (1Cor.11: 34), the Apostles' commands to their disciples (Titus 1: 5) and the Apostolic teachings which turned into life and practice in the Church without being a verse from an Epistle or the Gospels.

## **We mention, to illustrate this point, the consecration of Sunday as the Lord's Day**

All Christians who only believe in the Holy Bible and oppose Church Tradition, consecrate Sunday instead of Saturday as the Lord's Day and do not adhere to the literal meanings of the verses: "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*" (Ex.20: 8) and "*Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*" (Deut.5: 12). From where do they derive the teaching of consecrating Sunday instead of Saturday? Is it from the Holy Bible or from Tradition? Undoubtedly, it is from Tradition because there is not one single verse which says: "Remember Sunday, to keep it holy" or "Observe Sunday, to keep it holy. In it you shall do no work".

The consecration of Sunday has been a Church Tradition, observed by the Apostles who took it from the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is not mentioned plainly in the Gospels but there are references in the Book of Acts that imply this Divine entrustment. So the matter changed to a professed practice of the Church without the need for a written commandment. A proof of acknowledging Tradition is the unanimity of all Churches in keeping Sunday holy.

## **There is a reference in the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle that he received teachings from the Lord**

Regarding the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Apostle says: "*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread*" (1Cor.11: 23). Here the Apostle speaks about the entrustment he received from the Lord and which he commanded to the church in Corinth. The Holy Bible does not

tell us how and when the Apostle Paul received it from the Lord. He is giving us an idea about the Church dogmas and how they entered the Church through entrustment.

We know from the Gospels that the Apostles received the Sacrament of the Eucharist from the Lord. But the Apostles did not tell us how they entrusted it to the Church. It was not necessary to write it down but what matters is that the Church lives and practises this Sacrament. However, St. Paul mentioned this entrustment.

### **The Apostles recorded in their Epistles things they received through Tradition**

(a) We have previously mentioned some of them and now we shall add what Jude the Apostle mentioned in his Epistle regarding the dispute between Archangel Michael and Satan about the body of Moses. He said: *"Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' "* (Jude 9). None of this was mentioned in the Old Testament, so Jude probably knew it through Tradition.

(b) When the Apostle Paul was describing the fear of the people on receiving the Law, he said: *"And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling' "* (Heb.12:21). This phrase attributed to Moses was not recorded either in the Book of Exodus or Deuteronomy. So probably the Apostle Paul knew it through Tradition.

(c) We also add what is mentioned in the Book of Revelation about Balaam's perversion, the details of which are

not recorded in the Book of Numbers (Num.24: 25). In the Book of Revelation, it is written: *"...because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality"* (Rev.2: 14). In the Book of Numbers it is mentioned that the people did that but not that it was Balaam's doctrine. So probably St. John the Visionary who wrote the Book of Revelation knew it through Tradition.

Also on the subject of Balaam is what the Apostle Peter mentioned: *"They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness"* (2Pet.2: 15), and also what the Apostle Jude mentioned: *"...they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error o Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah"* (Jude 11).

(e) Likewise, St. Jude spoke about Enoch's prophecy which is not mentioned in the Old Testament. He said: *"Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him'"* (Jude 14,15). The source of this prophecy must have been Tradition.

(f) We notice that the commandment of circumcision was entrusted to our father Abraham by God (Gen.17) and commanded to people through entrustment before the existence of a written Law commanding it.

## **Benefits of Tradition**

(1) Through Tradition, we came to know the Holy Bible itself. Through entrustment the Divine Books reached us and we would not have been able to know or distinguish them except through Tradition. The holy councils defined the books of the New Testament to us.

(2) Through Tradition, the Church heritage, rituals and disciplines have reached us.

(3) Tradition preserved for us the sound faith that was handed down from one generation to the next. If the interpretation of the Bible were left to the comprehension of each individual, we would have various groups and denominations fragmented by the one faith, because the Holy Bible is one thing and the way of interpreting it is another.

(4) Tradition has kept for us certain beliefs and teachings such as the consecration of Sunday, the making of the sign of the cross, the law of monogamy, prayers for the departed and the work of each order of priesthood.

## **Valid and invalid Tradition**

Those who reject Tradition build their objection on the pretext that the Lord Jesus Christ rejected Tradition when He reproached the scribes and Pharisees, saying: "*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?*" (Matt.15: 3), and when He condemned some of the wrong traditions (Matt.15: 4-6).

They also use the pretext of the Apostle's words, "*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ*" (Col.2: 8).

In our discourse about Tradition, we do not mean the vain traditions laid down by men or do we mean those traditions which are not in accord with the doctrine and spirit of the Holy Bible such as the traditions whose voidness the Lord Jesus revealed. But we mean the sound Tradition which conforms with

(1) The teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was transmitted to us through Tradition.

(2) The Apostolic Tradition, that is, the teachings of the Apostles, transmitted to us through entrustment from one generation to the next.

(3) The Ecclesiastical Tradition, decreed by the holy Ecumenical councils regarding the Church canons and disciplines

and what we received from the fathers, teachers and heroes of faith of the Church.

This leads us to the next point:

### **Church authority in teaching and legislation**

This authority was given to the Apostolic Fathers by the Lord Himself when He said to them: "... *whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matt.18: 18). The Church commenced this duty of hers by holding the first Church Council in Jerusalem in 45 A.D. The Council discussed the acceptance of faith by the Gentiles, and the Apostles decided not to make it difficult for them, saying: "*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality*" (Acts 15: 28.29).

Therefore, holy councils, local and ecumenical, were held consecutively through the authority of teaching, legislating and canonising which the Lord endowed upon priesthood. These councils have laid down teachings, decisions and disciplines for the Church which have been included in Church Tradition.

### **Conditions of sound Tradition**

- (1) It should not be incompatible with the Holy Bible (Gal. 1:8)
- (2) It should not contradict other Church traditions
- (3) The Churches should accept it



It is known that in every generation, new matters arise which had not existed in the previous generations. The point of view of Religion about such matters is sought so as not to perplex people's thoughts or make them confused between right and wrong, because not all people know the rules of Religion or what is written in the Holy Bible.

Hence the Church, through her teaching and legislative authority, presents the opinion of Religion in such matters, because the Holy Bible says that the Law is sought from the mouth of the priest. Through the succession of generations the Church teachings have become Tradition to be inherited by all generations.

### **The Apostles commanded that Tradition be preserved**

St. Paul the Apostle said: *"Therefore, brethren, standfast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle"* (2Thess.2: 15). He also said: *"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"* (2Thess.3: 6), He also said to the Corinthians: *"Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you"* (1Cor. 11: 2).

We regret to say that our brethren the Protestants, in their translation of the Holy Bible (Beirut Arabic Translation), substituted "Traditions" with "Teachings", in matters which confirm the teaching of Tradition. But kept 'tradition' for incidents relating to repugnant traditions, obviously rejected by the holy Church.

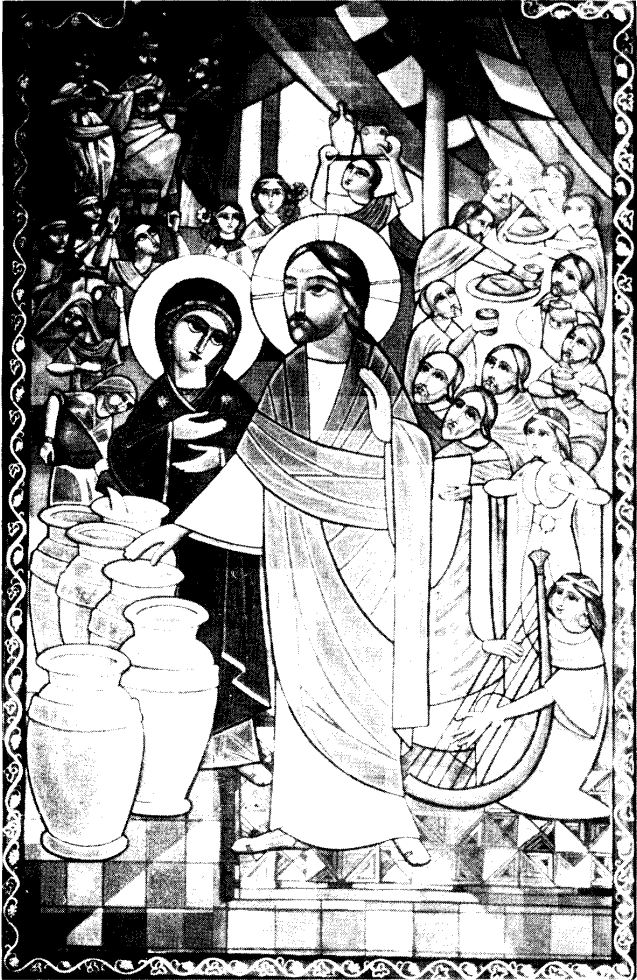
Anyhow, although our Protestant brethren deny Tradition, they themselves instituted their own traditions. They maintain their own rituals although they deny rituals. They have recited

prayers and fixed readings on ordinations, matrimony, baptism and funerals although they do not acknowledge recited prayers. They keep their own tradition but deny any tradition that does not agree with theirs. It goes without saying that Tradition is a precious heritage and it would be a great loss for any Church to be devoid of it, such becomes a Church without history and without any rules to protect against people interpreting or teaching things according to their own preferences.

# INTERCESSION

1. The difference between the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the intercession of the saints
2. The intercession of the saints is merely praying for us
3. God requests people to ask the intercession of the righteous
4. Do angels and saints know our condition on earth?
5. The greatness, knowledge and ministry of the saints
6. Other examples of the greatness of the saints
7. The saints who have departed are still living
8. Examples of the intercession of the angels
9. The saints' favour with the Lord
10. Objections and replies
11. The spirituality of asking the prayers of the saints
12. Intercession is a living reality

# Intercession



# Intercession

Our Protestant brethren reject intercessions of the Virgin Mary or of the angels or of the saints they base their rejection on Saint John the Apostle: "... *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1John.2: 1) and the words of the Apostle Paul: "*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*" (1Tim.2: 5).

## **(1) In fact there is a fundamental difference between the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the intercessions of the saints**

The mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ is an atonement, which means that He mediates for the forgiveness of our sins, being the Atoner who paid our debts on our behalf. His mediation means that He says to the Father: "*Do not count their transgressions because I have carried their iniquity*" (Is.53: 6). Thus He stands as a Mediator between God and men; or rather, He is the only Mediator between God and men; He fulfilled God's Divine Justice and granted people the forgiveness of sins, by dying for them.

This is what St. John the Apostle meant when he said: "*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*" (1John.2: 1,2). Here, the atoning mediation is very clear. It is a

mediation for the sinner: *"If anyone sins"*, and this sinner needs atonement. The only One who offered this atonement was Jesus Christ the righteous. Hence He can mediate for us through His blood which was shed for us.

The same meaning is given in the words of St. Paul the Apostle about the Lord Jesus Christ being the only Mediator between God and men. He says: *"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all"* (1Tim.2: 5,6). The Lord Jesus Christ mediates for us as the Redeemer who sacrificed Himself and paid the price of our sins.

This type of mediation is utterly unquestionable. It is attributed to Christ only, whereas the intercessions of the saints has no connection with atonement or redemption. It is intercessions for us to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

**(2) The intercessions of the saints for us are merely praying for us; they are of the pleading type, which is completely different to Christ's atoning mediation**

This is sanctioned by the Holy Bible which says: *"...pray for one another"* (Jas.5: 16). The saints themselves asked people to pray for them. St. Paul said to the Thessalonians: *"...pray for us"* (2Thess.3: 1) and asked the Hebrews the same request: *"Pray for us"* (Heb.13: 18). He also said to the Ephesians: *"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - and for me"* (Eph.6: 18,19). The request to pray for one another is countless in the Holy Bible. If the saints ask us to pray for them, shall we not ask

them to pray for us? If we ask the prayers of those who are still in their spiritual combats, 44 subject to sufferings like ourselves", shall we not ask the prayers of the saints who completed their striving and departed to Paradise, living with Christ? Or have these saints been demoted after their departure from earth to Paradise so that we are only allowed to ask their prayers when they are on earth and forbidden to do so when they are in Paradise close to God? If we ask the prayers of human beings, is it too much to ask the prayers of the angels?

### **(3) God requests people to ask the intercession of the righteous**

God Himself asks that, accepts it and paves the way for it to happen. I will give you some examples of such intercessions that God accepted:

**(a) The story of our father Abraham and King Abimelech.** Abimelech made a mistake and took Sarah, Abraham's wife, into his palace. He did so with a clear conscience because Abraham said that she was his sister. The Lord came to Abimelech in a dream, threatened him with death and said to him: *"Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live"* (Gen.20: 7). God could have forgiven Abimelech as soon as he returned Sarah to her husband. However, He put a condition for His forgiveness: Abimelech would be forgiven and would live provided that Abraham would pray for him. Thus God asked for the intercession of Abraham and made it a condition for forgiving Abimelech.

**(b) The story of Job and his three friends.** In the same

way, the Lord conditioned the intercession and prayer of Job for his three friends so that He would forgive them. Concerning this, the Holy Bible says: "*...the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly' "* (Job.42: 7,8).

In both events God Himself spoke to the erring person. However, He did not grant him forgiveness directly but conditioned the forgiveness to the prayer of the saint for the sinner so that the sinner might receive forgiveness and the saint would be venerated in the eyes of people. God not only accepts this mediation but rather asks for it.

**(c) The intercession of Abraham for Sodom.** God could have punished Sodom without letting Abraham know about the matter. Abraham did not intervene on his own accord, but the Lord revealed the matter to him, involved him in it, gave him an opportunity to plead for the people of Sodom and accepted his intercession. God willed that this event be recorded to exalt Abraham in the eyes of all people and to show us how He venerates His saints. The Holy Bible says: "*And the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing' "* (Gen.18: 17). Then the Lord presented to Abraham the subject of Sodom, gave him the opportunity to intercede for its people in the hope that there existed in the Country fifty or forty or thirty or twenty or ten righteous persons for whose sake the Lord would not destroy the whole Country.



The mere fact that the Lord would not destroy the Country for the sake of the righteous who lived in it gives us an idea not only of Abraham's dignity but also of the dignity of those righteous in front of the Lord. The Lord said: *"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes... If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it... I will not do it for the sake of forty... I will not do it if I find thirty there... I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty... I will not destroy it for the sake of ten"* (Gen.18: 26-32).

The phrase *'for the sake of'* has its divine value which signifies that God saves persons for the sake of others and it is also a clear proof of the mediation of the righteous for the sake of sinners. The Lord accepts this mediation without the beneficiaries asking for it.

**(d) The intercession of Mosses for the people of Israel.**

God willed to destroy the people because they worshipped the golden calf. Yet He did not do it directly but revealed the matter to Mosses the Prophet, gave him a chance to intercede for the people and accepted his intercession.

In the same way that Abraham said to God: *"Far be it from You"*, Mosses said to Him: *"Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self. "* Then the Bible says: *"So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people"* (Ex.32: 7-14).

**(e) The departed have greater favour with God.** The above are examples of prayers of living persons for the sake of living persons. As for the departed, they have greater favour

with God to the extent that He has mercy on people for their sake even without them praying. How much more then if they do pray for someone?

Examples of this are the merciful and compassionate works God did for the sake of His servant David. When Solomon sinned, God decided to tear his kingdom away from him, but He said about the division of the kingdom: *"Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen"* (1Kin. 11: 12,13).

The Lord repeated the same words in His speech to Jeroboam: *"Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel). However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes"* (1Kin.11: 31,32,34).

In one chapter the Lord repeats the phrase *'for the sake of My servant David'* three times. That is why the Psalmist prayed to Him, saying: *"For Your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed"* (Ps. 132: 10).

If David has such favour with God, how much more has the Virgin Mary, the angels, John the Baptist who is the greatest born of women, and the martyrs who were tortured and tasted death for the sake of the Lord?

Therefore, since we ask the prayers of our fellows on earth, why do we not ask the prayers of those whom "*shine like the brightness of the firmament*" (Dan.12: 3)? And why do we not ask the prayers of those who fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith (2Tim:4: 7)?

**If intercession, which is prayer, is considered mediation, and if every mediation is unacceptable, then every man's prayer for the sake of another is an unacceptable mediation since we have only one Mediator!**

In refusing the mediation in prayers, on the pretext that the relationship between God and man is a direct one which in the Divine love does not need the prayers of others, then the Apostle would be wrong (far from it) in saying, "*pray for one another*" (Jas.5: 16)!

**Accordingly, prayers for the sake of others which are mentioned in the Holy Bible are meaningless and not in accord with the Divine love!**

Because God loves people, He does not need others to pray to Him for the sake of His children to remind Him of His Providence and Paternal love!

Those who think in this way misunderstand the Divine design when God asked Abimelech to let Abraham pray for him (Gen.20: 7) and when He asked Job's friends to let Job pray for them (Job.42: 8).

**The prayers of men for each other (whether they have departed or are still striving in the flesh) is a manifestation of the mutual love which exists between humans; a proof of man's belief that those who have departed are still living and that their prayers are accepted by God, and an**

## **indication that God venerates His saints.**

God permits intercession for the benefit of men and this intercession rears a bridge between the inhabitants of heaven and those on earth. Heaven is no longer an unknown and frightful place to people but they have come to believe in the work and love of the saints' souls.

The following are important questions frequently asked by those who deny intercession:

### **(4) Do angels and saints know our condition on earth?**

Do the souls of the saints know our condition? Do our prayers reach them?

We reply in the affirmative. The proofs are:

**(a) There is no doubt that knowledge in heaven is greater than that on earth.** It is surprising that someone asks: Do saints in heaven know our news and our prayers on earth? The Apostle Paul replies, saying: *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"* (1Cor.13: 12).

So in the next world our knowledge will increase and many secrets will be revealed to us when we take off this body which binds the soul. There, the knowledge of the soul will expand and go beyond the sphere of limited knowledge to a wider sphere. To this knowledge will be added the knowledge revealed by God to the souls, namely, anything that is enclosed within the sphere of the Divine Revelation.

**(b) The knowledge of the angels is shown clearly in the Lord's words: "...there will be more joy in heaven over one**

*sinner who repents* than over ninety-nine just *persons who need no repentance*" (Lk.15: 7).

This means that the news of the earth reaches the inhabitants of heaven, whether the angels or the souls of the saints. They know who repents and who needs repentance, and they rejoice over the repentance of one sinner. Unless they know the news of the earth, how could they rejoice?

**c) The angels know our prayers because they carry them to God's throne.** There are numerous text-proofs in the Book of Revelation. It is written: *"Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of all the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand"* (Rev.8: 3,4). Here we see the prayers of the saints ascending before God from the angel's hand and censer. So how can the angels not know our prayers?

**Likewise, the twenty-four priests know our prayers and ascend them before God. In the Book of Revelation, it is written:** *"...the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints"* (Rev.5: 8). This is proof that they know the prayers which they ascend to God.

Similarly are the angels of little children of whom the Lord Jesus Christ said: *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven"* (Matt.18: 10).

**d) The story of Abraham, the rich man and Lazarus** (Lk.16). Our father Abraham said to the rich man: *"Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise*

*Lazarus evil things"* (Lk.16: 25). How did our father Abraham know the evil things which Lazarus endured? How did he know the good things the rich man received? How did he know that the rich man's family "*have Mosses and the Prophets*", when he had departed from earth hundreds of years before Mosses and the rest of the prophets? How did he know all that? How could Abraham, of whom the Lord said: "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad*" (John.8: 56), not know?

**(e) A testimony from the souls of the martyrs:** St. John says in the Book of Revelation: "*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony for which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'* And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Rev. 6: 9-11). Therefore the martyrs know, after their death, that the Lord has not yet avenged their blood. They cried with a loud voice to God, saying: "How long will You let the evil prevail on earth? Until when are You going to let the strong in body destroy Your children? Until when will they keep on shedding this blood?" How do they know all these things? They do know, and when the number of their fellow servants are completed, they will know.

**(f) The amazing story about the Prophet Elijah** (2Chr. 21): It is written in the Book of Chronicles that King Jehoram killed all his brothers, walked in the ways of King Ahab, built high places on the hills of Judah, caused the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves and led Judah astray. Then he received a letter from the Prophet Elijah who had departed from earth and ascended to heaven many years before. The letter he received from the Prophet

Elijah read: *"Thus says the Lord God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel... the Lord will strike your people"* (2Chr.21: 12-14). How did that happen? How did Elijah, after his departure from earth, know what was happening? How did he send his letter to Jehoram?

### **(5) The greatness, knowledge and ministry of the saints**

(a) During his lifetime, Samuel the Prophet was consulted about a lost donkey. It was said about him: "...there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he says surely comes to pass. So let us go there; perhaps he can show us the way that we should go" (1Sam.9: 6). If the man of God, while he was on earth, knew the unseen, how much more would his soul know in heaven!

(b) When Elisha was on earth, he perceived what Gehazi did in secret when he accepted the gifts from Naaman the Syrian (2Kin.5: 25-27).

(c) One of the officers of the King of Aram said about Elisha to his master the king: *"...but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom"* (2Kin.6: 12).

(d) Elisha perceived, at the time of the famine, that the King of Israel had sent a messenger to kill him (2Kin.6: 32). If Elisha, while still in the flesh, had the gift of knowing secret things, how much more would he know in heaven after putting off his body?

(e) Likewise, St. Peter the Apostle knew what Ananius and Sapphira did in secret. He disclosed it to them and punished them (Acts 5: 3,9).

(f) Also, St. Paul knew that after he would leave, savage wolves would come in among the Ephesians and would not spare the flock (Acts 20: 29).

If the Apostles knew that much while they were still in the flesh, how much more would the Lord reveal to them in heaven!

**These saints have knowledge and have a message for people. Their life, which started on earth did not end with their departure to heaven.** We ask them to intervene more than we ask those who are still striving on earth like ourselves and have not yet departed.

#### **(6) Other examples of the greatness of the saints**

(a) The bones of the Prophet Elisha were capable of performing a great deed. They were a blessing and brought a dead person back to life by mere contact, without prayer; they were only bones with no life in them (2Kin.13: 21). How much more effect would Elisha's soul have in heaven? Undoubtedly his soul is more powerful than his bones; having more knowledge and having more favour with the Lord! How much more effect would the souls of saints similar to Elisha, have in heaven?

(b) If the handkerchiefs and aprons which touched Paul's body had the blessing of healing many sick and of driving out many demons (Acts 19:12), how much more blessing would his soul and the souls of saints similar to him, have in heaven?



## **(7) The saints who departed are still living**

The Lord explained this fact when He said: "...*have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*" (Matt.22: 31,32). Therefore those saints are still living. Why should we consider them dead and not ask their prayers?

We should not forget as well the appearance of Moses and Elijah with the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses died fourteen centuries before the birth of Christ and is still living just as Elijah who was taken up to heaven. Their souls did not die; they are in Paradise and they see more than we do.

## **(8) Examples of the intercession of the angels**

There are two examples in the Book of the Prophet Zechariah:

(a) The intercession of the angel for the sake of Jerusalem: The angel prayed and said: "*O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?*" (Zech.1: 12) If the angel interceded for Jerusalem even without the latter asking him to, how much more will he intercede if you ask him for his prayers?

(b) The intercession of the angel of the Lord for the sake of Joshua the high priest: The angel stood against Satan who was going to bring an accusation against Joshua, and said to him: "*The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?*" (Zech.3: 1,2)

(c) Another example is in the Book of Genesis: An angel of

the Lord guarded and saved Jacob. Jacob talked about him when he was blessing Ephraim and Manasseh and said: *"The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads"* (Gen.48: 16).

(d) We should not forget that the Holy Bible said about the angels: *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"* (He.1: 14) This means that they have a work to perform for the people on earth.

### **(9) The saints' favour with the Lord**

(a) We ask the intercession of the saints because of the great favour they have with the Lord who loves them and puts them in charge of merciful deeds for the sake of men. Also because of the greater knowledge and extensive capabilities their souls enjoy after leaving their bodies.

(b) Whilst talking about the saints' favour with the Lord, we mention that God sometimes associated His name with their names. He said: *"I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"* (Ex.3: 6).

(c) That is why the saints used to remind the Lord of His saints so that His compassionate and merciful heart would be moved immediately on hearing their names and remembering His promises to them. In interceding for the people of Israel to be saved from perishing, Moses the Prophet said to the Lord: *"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven' "* (Ex.32: 13).

(d) We recall that when King Hazael of Syria oppressed the Israelites, the Holy Bible says: *"But the Lord was gracious to*

*them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence"* (2 Kin. 13: 23).

(e) On the subject of the saints' favour with the Lord, we present the example of God's reproach to Aaron and Miriam when they criticised Moses. The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and said to Aardn and Miriam in front of Moses: *"If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"* (Num.12: 68)

(f) Another example of the saints' favour with the Lord is the Lord's words to His Apostles: *"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me"* (Lk.10: 16) and *"If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour"* (John.12: 26).

## **(10) Objections and replies**

(a) It is said that in asking the intercession of the saints, we pray to them. We reply that we do not pray to the saints; we only ask their prayers and their support for us. Our talk to the Virgin Mary is not a prayer to her but it is a filial talk from children to their mother; a sort of confiding the secrets of our hearts to her and not praying to her. We kindly request her intercession for us as she is the Queen who sits at the right hand of the King.

(b) It is said that intercession is a sort of mediation. We see

nothing wrong with that, as God Himself accepted mediation and He demanded it. He asked Abimelech to let Abraham pray for him so that he would live (Gen.20: 7), and He asked Job's friends to let Job pray for them lest He treat them according to their follies (Job.42: 8). He allowed Abraham to plead for Sodom (Gen. 18) and allowed Moses to plead for the sake of the people of Israel. He listened to them and accepted their pleadings.

### **(11) The spirituality of asking the prayers of the saints**

(a) Asking the intercession of the saints implies belief in the life to come; belief that the departed are still living and have their work to perform; belief in the constant relationship between heaven and earth, and belief in venerating the saints who are venerated by God Himself.

(b) Intercession is a fellowship of love between the members of the One Body. The Church is the body, Christ is the Head and all of us, whether on earth or in heaven, are members of the One Body. Love, prayers and fellowship are perpetually exchanged between the members of the One and same Body. We plead for the departed in our prayers and they intercede for us through their prayers; it is an inseparable relationship.

It is regrettable that people who object to intercession seem adamant to destroy this fellowship. They resist our for the sake of the departed and their prayers or intercessions for us? Does the love relationship between God the Father and every believer contradicts the existence of love relationship between God's children? Did the Lord Jesus Christ not ask the Father: "*...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;*

*that they also may be one in Us... that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one" (John.17: 21, 23)?*

(c) Intercession is beneficial. Whoever denies it loses its benefits and gains nothing in lieu. Those who believe in intercession benefit from the love relationship between them and the saints. They benefit from the mere connection with the souls of those who have departed. They add to their own prayers the more profound and powerful prayers of those abiding in the next world, without any loss on their part.

However, those who deny intercessions of the saints lose this relationship and these prayers without gaining anything in stead. They lose a simple and an uncomplicated belief manifested by those who celebrate the feasts of the saints, visit their churches and ask their prayers. How would they cope with meeting these saints in the next life after, while they have refused to venerate them or ask their prayers and intercessions?

(d) Intercession entails meekness of heart. The person who asks for intercession is a humble person. He is not conceited about his personal relationship with God, but takes the position of the sinner and the weak who requests the intercession of others for his sake. Vice versa is he who denies intercession. He might pompously ask: "What is the difference between me and those saints? The relationship between me and God is too strong to need intercession"! He raises himself to the rank of the saints, martyrs and angels.

Those people will be reproached by the Apostle's words: *"Pray for us" (Heb.13: 18) and "...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph.6: 18).*

(e) Intercession is proof of God's justice in the principle of equal opportunities. If God permits Satan to fight His children, tempt them in false visions and dreams and torments them, so, according to His justice and the principle of equal opportunities, He permits the angels and the souls of the righteous to help His children on earth. Thus God's justice is manifest in the intervention of the souls of those abiding in the next world in the life of men.

If God permitted Satan to harm Job, He also permits angels to bandage the injuries of men and to minister to His children without them asking. How much more if they pray for it! *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"* (Heb.1: 14)

So long as the angels are sent forth for this purpose why should we not ask their intervention to help us while they are near us?

## **(12) Intercession is a living reality**

The intercession of the saints for us is not merely a theological research text-proved from the Holy Bible, but it is a living reality we experience. It is a living history through the generations, narrating the amazing relationship between those who departed and those who are still living on earth. It is a living contact with the saints who truly pity our state more than we do to the extent that sometimes our problems are solved for us due to their intercessions for us without our request or prayers. They understand more than we do and they apply the verse: *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"* (Rom.12: 15) more than we do.

Intercession is proof of the bond between the members of the

Church on earth and the members of the Church in heaven. It is one Church: one part of it is on earth, which we call Church Militant and the other part is in heaven which we call Church Triumphant. Both of them pray for each other.

Those who reject the intercession of the saints are in fact disregarding the marvellous miracles that occurred and are testified to by people, through the prayers of the saints on the occasion of their feasts or in their churches and monasteries. It appears that such dogmatic arguments in theology may of resulted in denial of factual history and day to day facts of life.

It suffices to mention the miracles which occurred by the appearance of the Virgin Mary in her Church at Zeitoon. Whether to Christians or Moslems, and which were documented by the people's oral and written testimonials. Also the miracles which occur in the name of St. George, Archangel Michael and other saints. All these should be sufficient to convince our Protestant brethren in coming to terms with the reality of the intercessions of the saints.

**Read the life-stories of the saints and you will come to know about the intervention of the angels and saints in people's lives.** You will see how they appear, foretell, give promises and guidance and bring good news of the birth of a saint from a barren mother or of God's choice of a saint for His ministry. As far as these people are concerned, the subject of their relationship with the saints is not a one day and night acquaintance but it is ages-long relationship. It is a relationship we can never destroy. It is a relationship between people, the angels and the saints. This is why many of these people find it difficult to understand the Protestant stance of rejecting the inseparable bond between the Church on earth and its members in heaven.

# FASTING

1. Are all fasts in secret?
2. Communal fasts
3. Fasts in set times
4. Reply to Objections:
  - a. *"Let no one judge you"*
  - b. Vegetarian fasting
  - c. Abstaining from certain foods
5. Church authority in organising worship



# Fasting

It is quite obvious that fasting was not a symbol but a commandment in the Old Testament and New Testament. Our Protestant brethren do not utterly deny fasting but they have practically cancelled it. Here, I will not discuss the subject of fasting in general with its importance, benefits and spirituality because all these can be read about in our book entitled *The Spirituality of Fasting*.

Points of variance:

(1) Our Protestant brethren say that fasting should be practised secretly between man and God, following the Lord's commandment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.6: 17,18).

(2) Our Protestant brethren do not have fixed fasts for all the believers at set times and on certain occasions, but most of their fasts are individual practices. The individual fasts whenever he likes, in the manner he likes, and the Church has no authority over him and does not interfere in his fast.

(3) Our Protestant brethren depend on a misinterpretation of the verse: *"Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a*

*shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col.2: 16,17).*

(4) Our Protestant brethren disagree with vegetarian fasting and with abstaining from foods of animal produce. They accuse us that in doing so, at least the second part of the following verse applies to us: "*.... in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons... forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving" (ITim.4: 1,3).*

### **Reply to the objection concerning fasting in secret**

There are two kinds of worship: individual and communal.

(a) In prayer for example, there is individual prayer; you pray in your room, to your Father who sees in secret. This does not cancel the existence of communal prayer for all the groups of believers to pray in one spirit, in one soul and in one voice. Examples of such prayers are numerous in the New Testament. One of these examples is the prayer of the believers after the release of Peter and John from prison: "*So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said...*" (Acts 4: 24).

Of course the Lord's commandment regarding praying in secret (Matt.6: 6) does not apply to such prayer.

(b) Likewise in charity, there is a charitable deed done in secret as an individual act in which you do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt.6: 3). But this does not cancel the general charity collected from everyone, as when

King David collected donations to build the Temple. He mentioned in detail how much he contributed, and how much was contributed by the leaders of the fathers' houses, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work (1Chr.29: 3-9). Another example is when the rich people put their gifts in the Temple treasury and the poor widow put in two very small copper coins (Lk.21: 1,2).

(c) Likewise in fasting, there is individual fasting practised in secret that does not cancel the general fast shared by the whole community of believers.

### **Reply to the objection: Is communal fasting a Biblical doctrine or not?**

There are numerous examples of communal fasts in the Holy Bible, such as:

#### **(a) The people's fast at the time of Esther**

All the people fasted together at the same time for one purpose, praying for one request of the Lord, and the Lord accepted their fast and granted them their request (Esth. 4).

#### **(b) The fast of the people of Nineveh**

They all fasted together and not in secret, and the Lord accepted their fast and forgave them their sins (Jon.3).

#### **(c) The people's fast at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra**

Nehemiah says: *"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads"* (Neh.9: 1). And Ezra

says: "*Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions*" (Ezra 8:21).

#### **(d) The fast at the time of Joel**

The Bible says: " *'Now, therefore,' says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.'... consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room*" (Joel 2: 12-17).

#### **(e) The Apostles' fast in the New Testament**

When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked why His disciples did not fast, He replied: "*But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast*" (Matt.9: 15). The Apostles did fast together and not in secret, and the Lord accepted their fast.

Some examples of the Apostles' fasts: "*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.'* Then, *having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them...*" (Acts 13: 2,3).

**(f) St. Paul fasted for a long time together with all the people on the ship** (Acts 27:21)

**Therefore communal fasting is acceptable and is a Biblical doctrine.** It is proof of the oneness of soul in worship and in approaching God, especially if the purpose of the fast is a matter that concerns the whole community, or if the whole

community partakes in the fast, as they do in prayer, in one soul.

### **There is no hypocrisy in communal fasting**

In communal fasting there is no distinction between one person and the other. The level and depth of the fast of each individual remains '*in secret*'. In the New Testament there is not one single verse that prevents communal fasting.

### **Reply to the objection of fasting in set times**

Fasting in set times is also a Biblical doctrine, as the Lord defines in the Book of the Prophet Zechariah: "*The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth*" (Zech.8: 19). The reason of defining times for fasting may be to regulate communal worship. Occasions of fasts in Christianity have Christian implications: each fast has its own spiritual aim, effect and reason.

### **Reply to the phrase "*...let no one judge you*"**

The Apostle did not say: "Let no one judge you in fasts", but he said: "*...let no one judge you in food or in drink.*" By this he meant the unclean foods forbidden to the Jews and the types of food which they considered impure.

This reminds us of the vision which St. Peter the Apostle saw in connection with directing Cornelius. The Apostle saw a great sheet in which were all kinds of food and he heard a voice telling him to kill and eat. But Peter said: " '*Not so, Lord! For*

*I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common' "* (Acts 10: 14,15).

It was regarding these foods which were considered impure and unclean, that the Apostle Paul said: "*...let no one judge you in food or in drink. "* For at the beginning of Christianity, the first people who became Christians were Jews who tried to "Judaize" Christianity, that is, to bring into Christianity all the Jewish customs such as unclean food, purification, keeping the Sabbath, moon festivals, celebrations of the beginning of months and Jewish feasts (such as the Passover, the Unleavened Bread, the Trumpets, the Tents and the Atonement Day). St. Paul wanted to resist the Judaization of Christianity. That is why he said: "*Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come*" (Col.2: 16,17).

Hence this was not an occasion of talking about fasting but it was an occasion of talking about the Jewish customs which the converted Jews wanted to bring into Christianity.

### **Reply to the subject of vegetarian food**

(a) Firstly, we would like to say that fasting in our Church is not merely eating vegetarian food but it is abstaining from eating for a certain time followed by eating vegetarian food (food free from animal fat).

(b) Vegetarian food was the food which God presented to Adam and Eve in Paradise (Gen.1: 29) and also after the sin (Gen.3: 18). All animals were fed on vegetarian food, namely grass (Gen. 1: 30).

(c) The Holy Bible did not allow the eating of meat until after Noah's Ark (Gen.9: 3) when the world had degraded to the extent that made God send the Flood.

(d) When God led His people in the Wilderness of Sinai, He offered them vegetarian food, that is, manna (Num.11: 7,8). He did not allow them to eat meat (quails) until after their wailing, groaning and the degradation of their spirits. When God gave them meat He struck them with a severe plague which caused the death of many of them (Num.11: 33). The place where they were buried was named 'Kibroth Hattaavah' (which means 'Graves of Craving') because they had craved to eat meat.

(e) We notice that vegetarian food was the food which Daniel and the three youths ate. The Lord blessed their food and their health was better than all the servants of the king (Dan.1: 12,15).

The reasons for using vegetarian food are that it is light food which does not stimulate the bodily desires and it was the original food which God presented to man.

### **Reply to the objection concerning abstaining from certain foods**

The verse in the Holy Bible on which our Protestant brethren depend does not speak about Church discipline, but says: "*...some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons... forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving*" (ITim.4: 1-3). Probably the people whom St. Paul is referring to are the Manichaeans and the Mandaeans who forbade marriage, meat and wine. The Church excommunicated them and condemned all their heretic publications.

**The Church does not forbid the eating of meat and similar**

**foods, but abstains from eating them during fasts as an ascetic practice and not because they are unclean food. This is proved by the fact that people eat these foods when they break their fast.**

Daniel ate pulse only and abstained from all other foods, yet he was not condemned according to the aforementioned verses. Likewise, John the Baptist abstained from certain foods and so do all ascetics everywhere and in every age.

Asceticism for a certain time is one thing and forbidding food is another. We have to say an important remaining point.

### **Church authority in organising worship**

The Church has regulated the fasts and has laid down for them spiritual rules and set times based on spiritual grounds. Thus the Church maintains the fasts and they have remained essential and indispensable spiritual practices.

The Church has the right, or rather the obligation, to organise for the benefit of her members various spiritual practices so they may worship the Lord together in one spirit. Here the Church implement's Lord's commission to her leaders: "*...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matt.18: 18). Thus Church discipline is biblically based.

Our Protestant brethren, in adopting an individualistic and congregational approach, made their congregation lose the benefits of fasting, which is regrettably, almost extinct from the evangelical churches.

Discipline is generally useful for the individual; it does not hinder his freedom but rather regulates its usage.



# **PART TWO**



# THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

## AND HER PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

- (1) Venerating the Virgin Mary
- (2) Reply to the questions:
  - (a) Why do we give the Virgin the titles 'the vine' and 'the gate of Life'?
  - (b) Is it correct to pray to the Virgin?
- (3) The perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary
- (4) Reply to the opposing opinions:
  - (a) The phrase "*he firstborn*"
  - (b) The phrase "*your wife*"
  - (c) "*Before they came together she was found with child*"
  - (d) "*did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son*"
  - (e) The phrase "*His brothers*"

## **The Veneration of St. Mary the Virgin**

(1) Our Protestant brethren do not venerate our Lady the Virgin nor do they ask for her intercession. Some of their groups even go to the extent of likening her to the eggshell that loses its value after the chick hatches. This exaggeration in not venerating the Virgin Mary is probably a reaction to the exaggerated veneration given her by the Roman Catholics. Thus our Protestant brethren do not celebrate any of the Virgin's feasts.

(2) Some Protestant groups call the Virgin Mary 'our sister'.

(3) In addition, our Protestant brethren say that after the Virgin had given birth to the Lord Jesus she consummated her marriage to Joseph and begot children known as Jesus' brothers" or "the Lord's brothers".

(4) Our Protestant brethren also object to some of the titles which our Church gives to our Lady the Virgin.

(5) One of the features which reveals the non-veneration of the Virgin is that, in their translation of the Holy Bible, they

have changed the title given her by the angel from '*full of grace*' into '*highly favoured*'.

(6) Our Protestant brethren frequently give our Lady the Virgin the title 'Mother of Jesus' instead of 'Mother of God' (Theotokos).

### **Venerating the Virgin Mary**

It suffices to mention the Virgin's words which are recorded in the Holy Bible: "*For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed*" (Lk.1: 48). The phrase "*all generations*" means that venerating the Virgin is a universal dogma which commenced at the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ and will continue until the end of ages.

Some of the veneration of the Virgin Mary are recorded in the Holy Bible. For example Elizabeth, who was about the same age as saint Mary's mother, said to her: "*But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy*" (Lk1: 43,44). What amazes us here in the Virgin's greatness is that when Elizabeth heard her greeting, she "*was filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Lk1: 41). The mere hearing of the Virgin's voice caused Elizabeth to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Not only did the Virgin receive veneration from the human race but she also received it from the angels. This is clear from Angel Gabrielle's greeting to her. He said: "*Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*" (Lk.1: 28) The phrase "*Blessed are you among*

women" was repeated by Elizabeth in her greeting to the Virgin Mary (Lk.1: 42). In addressing Virgin Mary, Archangel Gabriel used more glorious and venerating manner of speech, more than what was used for Zacharias the priest (Lk1: 13).

There are many prophecies in the Holy Bible that refer to the Virgin Mary. Among them are *"At Your right hand stands the Queen"* (Ps.45: 9). The Divine Inspiration also says of her: *"The royal daughter is all glorious within"* (Ps.45: 13). Therefore, the Virgin is the Queen and the daughter of the King. That is why the Coptic Church, in all the icons of the Virgin Mary, portrays her as a crowned queen and places her at the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him.

The Church, in her hymns, praises the Virgin, saying: *"Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all"* (Prov.31: 29).

St. Mary the Virgin was the desire of all generations. She is the one whose Offspring was able to "bruise the Serpent's head", thus fulfilling God's first promise of saving man (Gen.3: 15).

As the Virgin is the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, so all the titles of the Lord can be attributed to her motherhood.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Light (John.1: 9). He said of Himself. *"I am the light of the world"* (John.8: 12) Therefore, His mother the Virgin is the Mother of Light or the Mother of the True Light.

Since Christ is the Holy One (Lk.1: 35), thus the Virgin is the Mother of the Holy One.

Since Christ is the Saviour, as it was said to the shepherds: *"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a*

*Saviour, who is Christ the Lord*" (Lk.2: 11), and since His name is Jesus, that is, 'Saviour', because "He will save His people from their sins", therefore the Virgin is the Mother of the Saviour.

Since Christ is God (1John.1); (Rom.9: 5); (John.20: 28), therefore the Virgin is the Mother of God.

Since Christ is the Lord, according to Elizabeth's words to the Virgin Mary: "*the mother of my Lord*" (Lk1: 43), therefore the Virgin is the Mother of the Lord. In the same way, she is the Mother of Emmanuel (Matt.1: 24) and the Mother of the Word Incarnate (John1: 14).

If the Virgin Mary is the Mother of Christ, then unquestionably, she is the spiritual mother of all Christians. It suffices that when the Lord Jesus Christ was on the cross, He said to St. John, the beloved Apostle, of her: "*Behold your mother!*" (John.19: 27) If the Virgin is mother to St. John who addresses us, saying: "*My little children*" (1John.2: 1), therefore she is the mother of us all. Consequently, the title "our sister" is not welcomed and does not deserve a reply because it is unacceptable and illogical to consider the mother of Christ the sister of His children who believe in His name!

Whoever venerates the Virgin is in effect venerating Christ Himself. If to honour one's mother is the first commandment with a promise (Eph.6: 2); (Ex.20: 12); (Deut.5: 16), should we not venerate our mother the Virgin, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ and the mother of the Apostles? The Virgin is the one to whom the angel said: "*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 will be called the Son of God*" (Lk1: 35). She is the one who was praised by

Elizabeth who said: *"Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord"* (Lk.1: 45).

The phrase *'Blessed are you among women'*, which was said by Angel Gabriel and by St. Elizabeth, means that if the Virgin is compared with all the women of the world she will be the blessed one because none of the women of the world received the glory which she had received through the Divine Incarnation. Undoubtedly, God chose our Lady the Virgin from among all women, because no other woman has ever had the Virgin's qualities. This shows her exaltation and elevated position. That is why Isaiah the Prophet named her *'a cloud'* in his prophecy of the Flight into Egypt (Is. 19: 1).

With regard to God's indwelling in the Virgin during the Incarnation, the Church calls her the Second Heaven and the Tabernacle or the Dome of Moses.

The Church also calls the Virgin the City of God or Zion, as it is said in the psalm: *"And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her'" and "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!"* (Ps. 87)

Since the Lord Jesus said that He resembles the manna because He is the Living Bread that came down from heaven (John.6: 58), therefore, the Church calls the Virgin the Manna Pot.

Regarding St. Mary's virginity, the Church calls her Aaron's Rod which blossomed (Num.17).

The Ark of Testimony (Ex.25:10-22) is a type (resemblance) for Virgin Mary because firstly, the Ark was overlaid with gold



on the inside and the outside, symbolising her purity and elevation. Secondly because the Ark was made of Acacia wood which does not decay, symbolising her sanctity. Thirdly because the Ark contained the manna, which symbolises Christ the Living Bread who came down from heaven, and lastly because the Ark contained the two tablets of the Law which symbolise Christ the Word of God (John.1: 1).

The ladder reaching from earth to heaven which Jacob saw in his dream, is a type (resemblance) for Virgin Mary. Being this conjunction between earth and heaven in the Incarnation of Christ; She was the earth in which heaven dwelt and whilst she was on earth she bore heaven within her (Gen.28: 12).

The burning bush that was not consumed and which Moses saw (Ex.3), is a type (resemblance) for Virgin Mary, upon whom came the Holy Spirit with His Divine fire and she was not consumed.

Since the union of Divinity and Humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ resembles the union of coal and fire, therefore, St. Mary the Virgin, who bore within her that Union, resembles the censer. She is called Aaron's Censer or the Golden Censer, signifying her exaltation.

The Church also gives the Virgin the title 'The Good Dove' because:

1. In her meekness she resembles the dove.
2. The Holy Spirit, Who appeared in the form of a dove (Matt.3: 16), came upon her.
3. She brought the message of man's salvation, resembling the dove that brought the message of the return of life to the earth after the Flood (Gen.8: 10,11).

The Virgin is also likened to the Church and many prophecies apply simultaneously to the Virgin and to the Church.

The symbols and resemblances of Virgin Mary in the Church rituals and in the Holy Scriptures are numerous. She is venerated because:

1. the Holy Spirit came upon her,
2. she is the mother of God,
3. she is of perpetual virginity,
4. she is holy,
5. the Holy Bible testifies of her,
6. the Lord Himself venerated her, and
7. because of her miraculous signs and sacred appearances.

This veneration is expressed in the Church rituals, hymns and songs, in the Church prayers asking for her intercession, in celebrating her many feasts and in consecrating one of our fasts in her name.

## **The Virgin's Feasts**

1. Her (dormition) dying, 21st Toubi and the 21st day of every Coptic month
2. Her nativity, 1st Pashans
3. The annunciation to her parents, 7th Mesra
4. Her presentation into the Temple, 3rd Keyahk
5. Her entry into the land of Egypt, 24th Pashans
6. Her assumption, 16th of Misra
7. Consecration of her church in Philippi, 21st Ba'ouna
8. Her appearance in her church at Zeitoun, Cairo, 2nd April

## Two Questions on the Virgin's Titles

(1) Why do we call the Virgin 'the vine' in the prayer of the Third Hour, saying: "O Mother of God, you are the true vine bearing the Fruit of Life", when the Vine is the Lord Jesus Christ who says plainly of Himself: "*I am the True Vine and My Father is the Vine-dresser. I am the Vine, you are the branches*" (John.15: 1, 5)?

(2) Why do we address the Virgin, in the third watch of the Midnight Prayer, saying: "O noetic gate of life", when the gate is Christ who says of Himself: "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John.10: 7)?

### (1) The Virgin Is the True Vine

Giving the title 'the true vine' to the Virgin in no way contradicts the title of the Lord Jesus Christ as the True Vine. The Lord is the Vine in one sense and the Virgin is the vine in another.

The Lord is the Vine when we are the branches; He is the Origin and all of us originate from Him; He is the Head and all of us are members of His Body.

As for the Virgin, according to the Church's hymns, she is the one who bore the Fruit of Life - the Son of God. She is the

vine who neither experienced senescence nor was reaped by anybody.

Here we would like to record an important point:

### **The Lord Jesus Christ grants us some of His titles**

(1) The Lord says: *“I am the good Shepherd”* (John.10: 11, 14). This title was given to God by David in his psalm when he said: *“The Lord is my Shepherd”* (Ps.23: 1), and was also given to Him in the Book of Ezekiel (Ez.34: 11-16).

Nevertheless, the Lord appoints some of His children shepherds. While He is concerned to make the whole Church *“one flock and one Shepherd”* (John.10: 16), He says to Peter the Apostle: *“Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep”* (John.21: 15,16). In the Old Testament the Lord says: *“And I will give you shepherds according to My heart”* (Jer.3: 15). The title 'shepherd' became the title attributed to the Apostles' successors; the bishops who are to *“shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20: 28). St. Peter says: *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers”* (1Pet.5: 2).

(2) The Lord Jesus Christ calls Himself ‘Light’ when He says: *“I am the Light of the world”* (John.8: 12); (John.9: 5). Nevertheless, He says to His disciples: *“You are the light of the world”* (Matt.5: 14) and *“Let your light so shine before men”* (Matt.5: 16).

There is no doubt that the Lord is the absolute Light in the full sense of the word. His disciples are light because they derive their

light from Him and with His light they shine before others. In the same way, He is the Shepherd in the full sense of the word but they are shepherds because they are God's stewards appointed by Him to shepherd His flock.

(3) It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is the Bishop: *"The Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"* (1Pet.2: 25). Nevertheless, the Apostles' disciples were ordained bishops by the Holy Spirit (John 20:20-23) (Acts 20: 28); (1Thess.3: 2); (Phil.1: 1); (Titus1: 7).

(4) It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is the *"Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"* (Ps.110: 4); (Heb.5: 6). Yet there are numerous verses in the Holy Bible about the high priest, the chief priest and the priests to whom God gave an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations (Ex.40: 15).

In the Old Testament it is written: *"Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness"* (Ps.132: 9,16); *"And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to sanctify him"* (Lev. 8: 12) and *"you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty"* (Ex.28: 2). In the New Testament, we notice that St. Paul calls himself a priest (Rom.15: 16).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Priest in the sense that He offered Himself a Sacrifice on our behalf. But priests from the human race are ministers and stewards of God's mysteries. They offer the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Old Testament they offered what symbolised Christ's Sacrifice.

(5) It is written that Christ is the Son of God (1John.4: 14,15) and that we also are children of God (1John.3: 1). Christ is the Son of God in the sense that He is of God's Essence, Nature and Divinity. But we are children through love and adoption. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Only Son (John.3: 16).

### **Likewise is the title 'vine'**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Vine. The whole Church is called the vineyard and the Lord sang a song of the vineyard about the Church in the Book of Isaiah (Is.5: 37) in which He says: "*Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?*" And the Divine Inspiration says: "*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel*" (Is.5: 7).

The same meaning applies to the parable of the vineyard and the tenants, which the Lord told in (Matt.21: 33-41). In this parable, the vineyard is the Church, the tenants are the priests, and God is the Landlord.

In calling the Church 'the vine' we quote the words of the Divine Inspiration in the Book of Psalms. We say to *God*: "*Return, we beseech you, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted*" (Ps.80: 14,15).

Do we steal God's glory if we call the Church 'the vine' when Christ Himself has bestowed upon her that title? Do we steal God's glory if we call people the vineyard, when the teaching of the Holy Bible commands us to do so? Or is this just an attack against the Church of which the Holy Bible says: "*Sing to her, a*

*vineyard of red wine! I, the Lord, keep it. I water it every moment” (Is.27: 2,3)?*

Moreover, the title ‘the vine’ is given to every blessed mother, as the psalm says: “*Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house*” (Ps.128: 3).

Therefore, it is not surprising to call St. Mary the Virgin ‘the vine’.



## **(2) The Virgin Is the Gate of Life and the Gate of Salvation**

In the Holy Bible the Virgin Mary is called ‘the gate’. It is written in the Book of Ezekiel that she is a gate that faces toward the East, and the Lord God entered by it and went out the same way (Ez.44: 2).

As the Lord is the Life, then the Virgin is the gate of Life. The Lord declares that He is the Life when He says: “*I am the resurrection and the life*” (John.11: 25). Since the Virgin is the gate through which Christ came, therefore she is the gate of Life.

In the same way, the Virgin Mary is the gate of Salvation because the Lord is the Saviour; He came to save the world; to save that which was lost (Lk.19: 10).

It is not surprising to call the Virgin ‘the gate’ because the Church was called ‘the gate’ a long time ago. Our father Jacob said of the holy place which he consecrated a church and named Bethel, that is, house of God: “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!*” (Gen.28: 17).

### **Is It Correct to Pray to the Virgin?**

We do not pray to the Virgin but we address her when we pray and entreat her to intercede for us. Not only do we address the Virgin, but we also address the angels, nature, people, ourselves

and even the Devil. This is based on written texts from the Divine Inspiration and is not considered prayer. Why should we not address our mother the Virgin in particular?

(1) We address the angels when we pray, saying: *“Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure”* (Ps.103: 20,21) and *“Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts!”* (Ps.148: 1,2)

(2) We address nature in our prayer, saying: *“Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him you heavens of heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word; mountains and all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars”* (Ps.148: 3-9).

(3) We address the holy city of God and ask her to praise the Lord, saying: *“Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you”* (Ps.147: 12,13). In another psalm we say: *“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!”* (Ps.87: 3)

(4) We address people in our prayer, saying: *“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of*

*triumph!*” (Ps.47: 1), “*Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth*” (Ps.46: 8), “*Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help*” (Ps.146: 3) and ? “*Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion*” (Ps.103: 22). In another psalm, we say: “*Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord!*” (Ps.113: 1). And we also say: “*Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*” (Ps.29: 1,2).

(5) Also, the worshipper addresses himself, saying: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy, name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that our youth is renewed like the eagle’s*” (Ps.103: 1-5). In another psalm, the worshipper prays: “*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why, are you disquieted within me? Hope in God*” (Ps.42: 5). In the Twelfth Hour Prayer, the worshipper addresses himself, saying: “*Repent, O my soul, as long as you are still dwelling on earth.*”

(6) Moreover, in our prayer we address the evil spirits and all their powers, saying: “*Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled, let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly*” (Ps.6: 8-10).

Do we pray to all these? Do we pray to angels? Do we pray to nature, people and devils? God forbid! We address them in our prayer. This is acceptable; it is a Biblical teaching and taken from the spirit of the Psalms which St. Paul the Apostle talked about, saying: *“Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm”* (1Cor.14: 26), *“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph.5: 19) and *“teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”* (Col.3: 16).

As long as we address angels, nature, people, ourselves and devils in our prayers, according to the teaching of the Divine Inspiration, then it is not wrong to address our mother the Virgin whilst we pray and this is not considered prayer.

## **The Perpetual Virginit of the Virgin Mary**

The perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an old subject which was discussed by the Church Fathers of the second, third, fourth and fifth centuries.

In 1962, we translated a discourse written in 383 A.D. by St. Jerome, in which he defended the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary against the wrong teaching of a man called Helvidius. It appears that the arguments presented by our Protestant brethren resemble Helvidius’.

### **Summary of the opposing opinions attacking the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary**

(1) The phrase ‘*her firstborn Son*’ (Lk.2: 7); (Matt.1: 25). Opposers think that the word ‘*firstborn*’ means the first of His siblings.

(2) The phrase ‘*your wife*’ which was said to Joseph of the Virgin (Matt.1: 20), and the word ‘*woman*’ in general wherever it refers to the Virgin Mary (Matt.1: 24).

(3) The sentences “...*did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son*” (Matt.1: 25) and “... *before they came*

*together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matt.1: 18).*

(4) The verses in which the words ‘His brothers’ are mentioned, such as (Matt.12: 46; 13: 54-56); (Acts 1: 14); (Gal. 1: 18,19).

With God’s help, we will reply to all these objections in the following pages.

### **(1) The phrase “*her firstborn Son*”**

The Holy Bible clearly defines the meaning of the *word firstborn*. Prior to the establishment of Aaronic priesthood, the Divine Inspiration had said: “*Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal; it is Mine*” (Ex.13: 2). Every firstborn was consecrated to God; dedicated to Him, whether or not a brother was born to him later. The parents did not wait until they begot him a brother, nor did the owner of the livestock wait until another offspring was born before offering and consecrating the firstborn to the Lord! But from his birth the firstborn was consecrated because he was the first offspring of the womb. Therefore there was a great possibility that any firstborn was an only son.

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ was the firstborn and the only Son. St. Jerome was right when he said: “Every only son is a firstborn but not every firstborn is an only son.” The expression ‘firstborn’ does not mean that another is born after him but it means that no sibling was born before him. That is why the firstborn of the unclean animals could be redeemed when they

were one month old (Num. 18: 16,17), and the first offspring of the clean animals were to be offered as sacrifices to God without waiting until the birth of another offspring. He is the firstborn, whether or not one is born after him, because he is the first offspring of the womb.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the Virgin. For when the Virgin and Joseph offered a sacrifice forty days after His birth, the Holy Bible tells us: *“Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’ ”* (Lk.2: 22-24).

It is clear that the law of the firstborn was applied to the Lord Jesus Christ forty days after His birth. Of course, there is no relation at all between the firstborn and the birth of siblings.

Here St. Jerome asks: “When God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, did He strike only those who had siblings or every male who opened the womb whether he had siblings or not?”

## **(2) The phrase “*your wife*”**

The word ‘*wife*’ or ‘*woman*’ was the title given to a betrothed maiden immediately after her betrothal. In interpreting the words of the angel to Joseph: *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy, Spirit”* (Matt.1: 20),

St. John Chrysostom says: "Here the angel calls the betrothed 'wife' because the Holy Bible always calls the betrothed couple 'man and wife' before their marriage. "He also says: "What is the meaning of 'take her to you'? It means: 'Keep her in your house, as she has been entrusted to you by God and not by her parents; because you are entrusted to take her, not to consummate the marriage but to be he guardian. 'In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself entrusted the Virgin Mary to His disciple John" (Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew).

St. Jerome says that the title 'woman' or 'wife' was also given to the betrothed maiden. The Biblical text proofs are: "*If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbour's wife*" (Deut.22: 23,24) and "...*what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not yet married her?*" (Deut.20: 7)

**Thus the Holy Bible uses the words 'woman' and 'wife' to mean a pledged virgin. They are used to signify femininity and not the state of being wedded.**

In fact, Eve was first called 'woman' because she was taken out of man (Gen.3: 20). So the word 'woman' signifies her creation and femininity and the word 'Eve' signifies her motherhood.

The proof that the word 'wife' attributed to the Virgin Mary meant pledged and not married, are the words of St. Luke the Evangelist: "*And Joseph also went up from Galilee... to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child*" (Lk.2: 4,5). Therefore the phrase 'your wife' means 'your betrothed one.



Therefore the Virgin Mary was called '*wife*' not because she lost her virginity, God forbid, for the Holy Bible testifies that Joseph did not know her. But she was so called because the common Jewish expression for the pledged to be married was '*wife*' and the expression for the unmarried girl was '*woman*'. A clear proof of this is that immediately after her creation, Eve was called '*woman*'; before the sin, the dismissal out of Paradise and the begetting of children.

We notice that the angel did not use the word '*wife*' after the Virgin had given birth to the Lord Jesus, but said to Joseph: "*Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt*" (Matt.2: 13). And on Joseph's return from Egypt, the angel said to him: "*Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel*" (Matt.2: 20). Joseph did as he was told on going to and returning from Egypt: "*When he rose, he took the young Child and His mother*" (Matt.2: 14,21). Here the Holy Bible does not use the phrase '*his wife*'.

The phrase '*his wife*' was used before and after the conception so that the Jews would not stone the Virgin Mary because she conceived a Child while she was not a man's wife. But after giving birth to Christ, the Divine Inspiration did not use that expression; not in the angel's words to Joseph, nor in describing what Joseph did, nor in talking about the Magi, of whom the Holy Bible says: "*And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother*" (Matt.2: 11), nor in talking about the shepherds who "*found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger*" (Lk.2: 16).

**(3) The sentence "*before they came together, she was found with child*"**

St Luke the Evangelist aims at proving that Christ was

conceived of a virgin who did not know any man, for two reasons:

(a) The fact that Christ was not born through the natural way from two parents as all people are, but was born of a virgin, is proof of His Divinity; proof that He was born of the Holy Spirit as expressed by the angel: "*...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1: 20).

(b) His birth from a virgin convinces us that He did not inherit Adam's sin. Thus He would be able to save us since the One without sin is able to die for the sinners.

**Therefore the Apostle concentrated on the Virgin not knowing any man before giving birth to Christ in order to prove the Lord's Virgin Birth. But the fact that the Virgin Mary did not know any man after giving birth to Christ is a self-evident truth.**

**(4) The sentence "*did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son*"**

The word 'till' refers only to the precedent clause, and does not imply that the subordinate clause it introduces is opposite in meaning to the precedent clause.

Some examples to illustrate this:

(a) The Holy Bible says that Michal, King Saul's daughter, "*had no children to (till) the day of her death*" (2Sam.6: 23). Of course she did not bring forth children after her death.

(b) The Lord Jesus Christ says: "*I am with you always, even to (till) the end of ages*" (Matt.28: 20). Of course, and after the end of ages as well.

(c) The Lord says to Christ: "*Sit at My right hand, till I*

*make Your enemies Your footstool"* (Ps.110: 1). Of course Christ will continue to sit at the right hand of God the Father forever.

There are numerous examples of this point. Therefore, the word 'till' does not necessarily imply the opposite meaning of what precedes it.

Joseph did not know the Virgin Mary till she gave birth to her firstborn Son, neither did he know her after she gave birth. If he withheld to touch her before she gave birth to Christ, how would he feel after she had given birth to Him; after he had seen the miraculous signs, the angels and the Magi, and after knowing that He is the Holy One, Emmanuel and the Saviour?

Joseph realised that the Child was Christ who completed the prophecy of Prophet Isaiah who said: "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel*" (Is.7: 14) and "*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, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever*" (Is.9: 6,7). The angel must have quoted the last part of this verse when he appeared to the Virgin Mary (Lk.1: 31-33).

##### **(5) The phrase '*His brothers*'**

In Hebrew expressions, the word 'brother' may signify near relations or step-brothers. There are numerous examples of this in the Holy Bible, such as:

(i) Jacob and his uncle Laban

The Holy Bible says about the meeting between Jacob and Rachel: *“And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was **her father's brother**”* (Gen.29: 10-12). Thus Jacob called Rachel's father his brother although he was his mother's brother. The phrase ‘mother's brother’ was repeated many times in this chapter. The word ‘brother’ was used to mean very near relations.

Laban talked to Jacob in the same manner, saying: *“Because you are my **brother**, should you therefore serve me for nothing?” Tell me, what should your wages be?”* (Gen.29: 15) Thus Laban called Jacob his brother although he was his nephew.

(ii) Abram and Lot

Lot was Abram's nephew, the son of his brother Haran (Gen.11: 31), yet the Holy Bible says: *“Now when Abram heard that his **brother** was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants”* (Gen.14: 14). Here Abram considered Lot his brother although he was his nephew, due to their near relationship.

**In like manner, the phrase ‘brothers of Jesus’ was used in referring to the cousins of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

## **Who are the brothers of the Lord?**

When the Lord went to His own country, the people were astonished and said: *“Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?”* (Matt.13: 55,56); (Mark.6: 1-3)

St. Peter the Apostle mentions that he saw James, the Lord's brother (Gal.1: 19). This James was called *‘the Less’* (Mark.15: 40) to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee. He was also called the son of Alphaeus (Matt.10: 3) and was one of the Apostles (Gal.1: 19).

St. Matthew the Apostle says in his Gospel that at the cross *“many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons”* (Matt.27: 55,56).

Who then was Mary, mother of James and Joses? Was she the Virgin Mary? Is it reasonable to assume that the Virgin Mary begot all those children?

The mother of James and Joses was Mary, the wife of Halfa or Clopas, of whom St. John the Apostle said: *“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene”* (John.19: 25). Compare this verse with verses 55 and 56 of chapter 27 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Mary the mother of James and Joses was with Mary Magdalene at the cross of Christ (Matt.27: 55,56). They were the same two persons present at the Lord's burial and saw where He was laid, and it was they who brought spices to anoint His body when the Sabbath was over (Mark.16: 1). They were the same persons of

whom St. John said in his Gospel: *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene"* (John.19: 25).

Therefore, the brothers of Jesus are His cousins, the sons of Mary, the Virgin's sister, the wife of Clopas or Halpha and mother of James, Joses and the rest of the brothers.

Regarding the difference between the names Clopas and Halfa, it may be a difference in pronunciation or, as St. Jerome said, it is not uncommon for the Holy Bible to give more than one name to a person. Moses 'father-in-law was called Reuel (Ex.2: 18) and was also called Jethro (Ex.4: 18). Gideon was called Jerubbaal (Judg.6: 32), Peter was called Simon and Cephas, and Judas the Zeolot was called Thaddeaus (Matt.10: 3).

It is obvious that Mary the mother of James and Joses is not the Virgin Mary who was never called by that name in the Holy Bible.

## **Remarks:**

(1) It is unreasonable that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the Virgin Mary to His Apostle John when He was on the cross if she had all those sons and daughters. Undoubtedly her children, if she had any, should have been the ones to look after her.

(2) We notice that during the journey of St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary to and from Egypt, there is no mention of any other children of the Virgin Mary except the Lord Jesus (Matt.2: 14,20,21). Neither is there any mention of the sort during their journey to and from Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus was twelve years old (Lk.2: 43).

(3) It is unsound to hold, as some people do, that the ‘brothers of Jesus’ are the sons of Joseph whom he begot from another wife after whose death he became a widower, because the Holy Bible mentions that Mary the mother of James and Josés was present at the time of Christ's crucifixion and burial, as we have previously explained (M k.15: 47).

(4) There is a clear Biblical text confirming the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary. In his prophecy, Prophet Ezekiel saw a closed gate in the East and he was told: *“This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut”* (Ez.44: 2). This gate is the Virgin’s womb through which the Lord entered; it remained shut and was not opened by another child.

# **SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND. GIFT OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES**





## **The Spiritual Gifts and The Gift Of Speaking in tongues**

1. The fruit of the Spirit is more important for your salvation than the gifts of the Spirit
2. Gifts are not your own merit, therefore there is no reward for them
3. Are gifts granted or are they requested?
4. The Pentecostal Movement and the gift of Speaking in tongues
5. Speaking in tongues is last in the order of gifts
6. Speaking in tongues is not a gift for all
7. Speaking in tongues should be for edifying the church
8. Speaking in tongues should be interpreted
9. What is the meaning of '*edifies himself*'?
10. The Apostle's fight against the errors of Speaking in tongues
11. Speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers

## The Spiritual Gifts and the Gift of Tongues

Some of our Protestant brethren cling to the spiritual gifts and strive to attain them as privileges of being God's children and heirs. They put before them the verse: "*But earnestly desire the best gifts*", without taking into account the completion of the verse: "*And yet I show you a more excellent way,*" (1Cor.12: 31).

While they give great importance to the gift of Speaking in tongues, they disregard that immediately after this verse the Apostle Paul says: "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*" (1Cor.13: 1). The Apostle is explaining how love is preferred to all the gifts.

### **The fruit of the Spirit is more important for your salvation than the gifts of the Spirit**

St. Paul the Apostle talked about the fruit of the Spirit, saying: "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gal.5: 22,23). The Apostle Paul said that love, which is the first fruit of the Spirit, is greater than faith that can move mountains (1 Cor.13: 2,13). And the Lord said about love: "*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt.22: 40).

When the disciples returned to the Lord Jesus joyful over gifts, He said to them: "*Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this,*

*that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Lk.10: 20).*

**Many people lost their salvation and perished despite their possession of spiritual gifts**

The gifts did not help them and did not save them. Thus the Lord says: *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!’ ” (Matt.7: 22,23)*

**Gifts are not your own merit, therefore there is no reward for them**

Spiritual gifts do not give you salvation. Why then do you struggle to attain them? They tempt those who seek vainglory and vanity for themselves, but the great saints, who loved humility, always escaped from gifts.

One of the fathers said: **“If God gives you a gift, ask Him to give you humility with it to protect it, or ask Him to take this gift from you.”**

When the Apostle Paul received many gifts from the Lord, he said: *“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2Cor.12: 7).* This great Apostle, the man of grace who was caught up to the third heaven (2Cor.12: 2), was in jeopardy from the gifts! If there was fear on the Apostle Paul from spiritual gifts, how much more should the poor youth of today fear when they pray for gifts, saying that gifts are their

privilege, and their spiritual counsellors pray for them, laying their hands on them to receive gifts!

Jacob the Patriarch received spiritual gifts. He received the blessing of birthright, saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven on which the angels of the Lord were ascending and descending, and saw God Himself and spoke with Him. He struggled with God and with men, and prevailed (Gen.32: 28). To protect Jacob from gifts, God touched the socket of his hip so that his hip was wrenched. God gave Jacob a kind of weakness in the body to protect him from conceit due to having gifts.

What is more dangerous than gifts these days is when one person says to another: "Come, I will commend to you a gift", or "I will commend to you the experience", lays his hand on him, and prays to grant him the Holy Spirit or to grant him the fullness. Strangely enough, even women lay their hands on people to grant them the Holy Spirit because God sometimes grants a woman the gift of healing!

**But to grant the Holy Spirit is the task of the clergymen, first practised by the Apostles by the laying on of hands, then by the clergymen in the Sacrament of Chrismation.**

We receive the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) after the Sacrament of Baptism. The Holy Bible mentions this Anointing in (1 John.2: 20,27) and mentions the laying on of hands by the Apostles in (Acts 8: 14-17).

The authority to grant the Holy Spirit, which was the Apostles' and then their successors', is claimed today by youth and laity who commend the Holy Spirit to others to let them be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak with tongues!

In our Orthodox theology, whoever receives a gift tries to hide it, as did Bishop St. Serapion who had the gift of healing, and many other saints.

### **Are gifts granted or are they requested?**

God endows whatever gift He wishes to whomever He wishes in the time His Divine Wisdom defines, according to His words: "*The kingdom of God does not come with observation*" (Lk.17: 20). Gifts are like the wind that blows wherever it wishes, "*as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*" (Rom.12: 3). Why are gifts prayed for, then? And why the gift of Speaking in tongues in particular?

Gifts are not entrusted from one person to another but they are given by the Will of God and they are the work of His Holy Spirit.

When the gift of tongues is prayed for, it may be satisfying the pride of those who seek vainglory. It is an appealing gift for the old self. It is not appealing to the spiritual person. What is worse than this is when those who have the gift of tongues despise and look down upon those who do not have this gift and declare them to be of a low level, although the Holy Bible says that the gift of tongues is not for all (1Cor.14). Does this conceit not lead us to doubt in those who claim to have this gift?

If a person comes to you and says: "Come, I will commend to you this experience", tell him: "I do not deserve these gifts. I have not the meekness of heart that can bear them. If God wills to give me a gift, He will give me without me asking for it. Then I will ask Him to give me humility to protect me from

pride. If God gives me a gift I will not speak about it and I will not declare it to people so as not to expose myself to spiritual combats above my measure."

The phrase "*earnestly desire the best gifts*" does not mean that we ask for gifts, but that we prepare the heart with purity and meekness to receive the gifts which are not only miraculous powers, but also include wisdom, knowledge and faith, according to the Apostle's teaching (1 Cor.12: 8,9).

If you want to ask God for a good gift, the Lord teaches us what to ask! He says in the Sermon on the Mount: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matt.6: 33).

We notice that in the Lord's prayer, which He taught us and which is an exemplary prayer, we do not ask for gifts.

## **The Pentecostal Movement and the Gift of Speaking in Tongues**

The most outstanding characteristic of the Pentecostal movement is that the Pentecostals believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit (other than the baptism of water and the Spirit). This is what the Pentecostals and their followers the Charismatic group in Egypt call for, as it is clear from their books without them declaring it. They call this matter 'Spirit Baptism' or 'Filling of the Holy Spirit'.

The Pentecostals and the Charismatic group think that the most distinguished characteristic of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, of this descent and fullness of the Holy Spirit is to speak with tongues. Speaking in tongues, in their opinion, is the first sign that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit. That is why, in joining a new member to their group, the Pentecostals and the Charismatic group strive to make him or her speak with tongues so as to resemble the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost.

Following the teachings of their advisors, the Pentecostals and the Charismatic group place great emphasis to the gift of Speaking in tongues as if it were everything, whether the tongues are intelligible or not. In most cases, if not in all, the tongues are just meaningless voices.

What is the teaching of the Holy Bible about the gift of Speaking in tongues?

## Speaking in tongues

From studying the Holy Bible and in particular chapter fourteen of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, which we may call the chapter of the gift of tongues, we notice the following points:

### **(1) Speaking in tongues is last in the order of gifts**

When the Apostle Paul mentions the spiritual gifts in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he puts the gift of Speaking in tongues and their interpretation last in the order of gifts. He says: *“Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”* (1Cor.12: 4-11). Thus the Apostle puts the gift of Speaking in tongues and their interpretation last in the order of gifts. The gift of Speaking in tongues is preceded by wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, and the ability to distinguish between spirits.

The Apostle also says: *“And God has appointed these in the*



*Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (1Cor.12: 28).* Thus the Apostle puts the gift of Speaking in tongues last in the order of gifts.

When the Apostle says: *“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (1Cor.12: 31)*, he explains that this more excellent way is love. He explains how love is greater and more important than every prophecy, all knowledge, all faith which can move mountains, charity and asceticism (1Cor. 13). He explains that love is more important than Speaking in tongues of men and of angels - not of men only. He says: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1Cor.13: 1).*

## **(2) Speaking in tongues is not a gift for all**

We have seen from the aforementioned that God *“distributes to each one individually as He wills” (1Cor.12: 11)*; *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom.12: 6)* and *“as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom.12: 3).*

With regard to the gift of Speaking in tongues, the Apostle plainly says: *“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of hearings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1Cor.12: 29,30)* It is clear from this passage that the gift is not for all. Therefore even at the time of the Apostles it was not necessary for every believer to receive the gift of Speaking in tongues which was not an essential sign to prove the descent of

the Holy Spirit upon a person. A man can be a saint even though he does not speak with tongues.

God knows when to give gifts and the reason of giving them. He gave the gift of Speaking in tongues abundantly at the time of the Apostles, the beginning of preaching for the sake of edifying, because it was essential at the time.

Speaking in tongues is not necessary in every age. The Holy Bible says concerning this: “*Whether there are tongues, they will cease*” (1Cor.13: 8). Even in the era of the Apostles there were conditions for Speaking in tongues. We read some of these conditions in chapter fourteen of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

### **(3) Speaking in tongues should be for edifying the church**

The most important word which characterises the chapter about the gift of Speaking in tongues (1Cor.14), is the word *edifying*. The Apostle mentions it many times and emphasises it. He says explicitly: “*Let all things be done for edification*” (1Cor.14: 26) and “*Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel*” (1Cor.14: 12).

For the sake of edifying the church, the Apostle says that “*he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues*” (v.5) because “*he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church*” (v.4). The word *prophesy* at that time also meant teaching. The Apostle

prefers prophesying because “*he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men*” (v.3).

#### **(4) Speaking in tongues should be interpreted**

The Apostle says: “*Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret*” (v.13), and adds “*But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church*” (v.28). The Apostle's reason is obvious: the edification of the church. He says: “*...unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification*” (v.5). If this edification is not achieved, he should keep silent, and the phrase ‘*keep silent*’ is an Apostolic command. Therefore he who speaks in a tongue must either speak for the edification of the church or keep silent.

The presence of an interpreter is a testimony that the Speaking in tongues is sound. Thus the gift of tongues is given to two persons simultaneously. One is the speaker and the other the interpreter. Consequently, the Biblical verse: “*By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established*” (2Cor.13: 1), is applied. If speaking in a tongue is without interpretation, what is its use? What is its use if all present do not understand the language?

#### **(5) What is the meaning of 'edifies himself'?**

To ‘edify himself’ is to be in a certain spiritual state of the descent of the Holy Spirit, which is beneficial for the individual's edification. There are two remarks mentioned by St. Paul about this state. They are:

(a) The person should keep silent just as in any private

spiritual state between oneself and God. The Apostle says: “...let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God” (v.28). It is a matter between him and God, more suitable for him to stay in his closet and not in church in front of people. Thus speaking in a tongue will be a kind of prayer. Even so:

(b) The mind will be unfruitful; it is just a work of the spirit. The Apostle says: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful” (v.14). The Apostle could see that this state should be completed by understanding. The person should pray in spirit and also with understanding; sing in spirit and also with understanding. Although the Apostle mentions the phrase ‘*edifies himself*’ very cautiously and with remarks, and points out that it is not a complete edification, yet for the sake of edification he says: “I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (vv.18, 19).

Therefore there is no need for people to strive with all their might to speak with tongues, believing that this is a great achievement.

If this is the case of Speaking in tongues as a gift of the Holy Spirit, what then shall we say when some people claim to speak with tongues and we are not certain of the genuineness of their claim?

## **(6) The Apostle's fight against the errors of Speaking in tongues**

The Apostle fought strongly against the tongues which were not edifying the church and whose owners did not keep silent. He says that:

(a) The tongues are not beneficial *"But now, brethren, if I come to you Speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?"* (v.6) He describes these tongues as musical instruments which make indistinctive, unknown and incomprehensible sounds (vv.7, 8).

(b) The tongues will be spoken into the air. The Apostle says: *"So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will bespeaking into the air"* (v.9).

(c) Speakers with tongues will be like foreigners. The Apostle says: *"Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me"* (v.11).

(d) Speakers with tongues have no fellowship with the church and do not edify others.

No one can understand the one who speaks with a tongue when he stands to pray, to give thanks or to bless the Lord. So how can he enter into a life of sharing with the believers if they do not understand him? Therefore the Apostle says: *"Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified"* (vv.16, 17).

(e) Speakers with tongues will resemble the mad. *"Therefore if*

*the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”* (v.23).

(f) The tongues should be appropriate, in order and without confusion. The gift of Speaking in tongues filled everyone at the time of the Apostles, but the Apostle insists that the gift should be disciplined. He says: “*For God is not the author of confusion but of peace*” (v.33) and “*If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret*” (v.27).

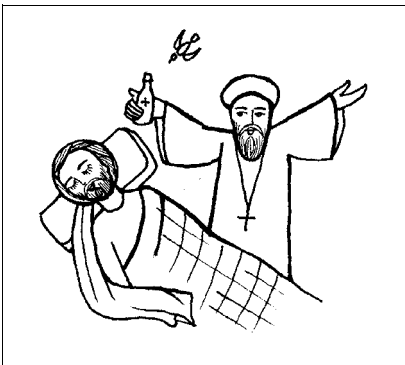
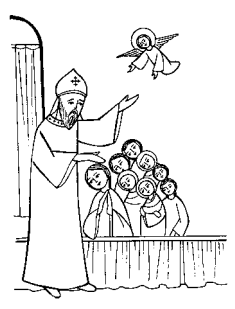
### **(7) Speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers**

In the Apostle's opinion, believers will benefit from forthtelling, whereas unbelievers will profit from the tongues provided that they are interpreted. He says: “*Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe*” (v.22).

Therefore if those who are present in church are believers, what is the benefit of Speaking in tongues, according to the Apostle's teaching?

# **RITUALS**

1. Veneration of the Cross
2. Facing the East
3. The sanctuary and the altar
4. Incense
5. Lights and candles
6. Pictures and icons





## **(1) Veneration of the Cross**

One of the differences between Orthodoxy and Protestantism is the Orthodox's wonderful veneration of the cross. Our brethren the Protestants do not sign themselves with the sign of the cross before or after prayer, and say: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." They do not sign food with the sign of the cross before eating, nor do they use the cross to bless people or clothes.

Our brethren the Protestants are content that they believe in the cross in their hearts without using it. Until recently, they were not raising crosses on their churches. Many of them do not wear crosses and none of them hold crosses in their hands. Also, they do not celebrate the feasts of the cross nor do they make any processions holding crosses whilst singing hymns and praises. They neither kiss the cross nor take a blessing from it.

Now we will try to explain why Orthodoxy gives such importance to the cross and we shall see that making the sign of the cross is beneficial, useful and in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Bible.

### **(1) The emphasis of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross**

Since the commencement of the Lord's ministry, during His teaching and prior to His crucifixion, He laid great emphasis on the

cross. He says: “*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matt. 10:38) and “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*” (Matt.16: 24); (Mark.8: 34). In His conversation with the rich young man, He said to him: ‘*Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor... and come, take up the cross, and follow Me*’ (Mark.10: 21). He also says: “*And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*” (Lk.14: 27).

## **(2) The cross was the core of the ministry of the angels and the Apostles**

An important point is that the angel who proclaimed the Lord's resurrection said to the women: “*...you seek Jesus **who was crucified**. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said*” (Matt.28: 5,6). Thus the angel called the Lord “*who was crucified*”, although He had already resurrected. Thus the title ‘*crucified*’ continued to be attributed to the Lord.

Our fathers the Apostles emphasised the Lord's crucifixion in their preaching. In preaching to the Jews, St. Peter said: “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, **whom you crucified**, both Lord and Christ*” (Acts2: 36). St. Paul says: “*..we preach **Christ crucified***” (1Cor.1: 23), although the Lord's crucifixion was considered “*a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness*”.

The Apostle considered the cross the essence of Christianity and says: “*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and **Him crucified***” (1Cor.2: 2). He means that the cross is the only subject he wants to know.

### **(3) The cross was the object of the Apostles' glory**

St. Paul the Apostle says: *“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Gal.6: 14). If we ask him the secret behind these words, he will continue and say: *“by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Gal.6: 14).

### **(4) When we make the sign of the cross, we remember many of its divine and spiritual meanings**

We remember God's love for us, who for the sake of our salvation accepted to die for us: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Is.53: 6). When we make the sign of the cross, we remember *“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John.1: 29), and that *“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”* (IJohn.2: 2).

### **(5) When we make the sign of the cross, we profess that we belong to the Crucified**

Those who take the cross only by its spiritual meaning inside the heart without showing any manifest sign do not reveal this belonging openly which we proclaim in making the sign of the cross, in wearing and kissing the cross in front of all, in engraving it on our wrists and in upraising it on our places of worship. By doing all these we are merely proclaiming our belief openly. We are not ashamed of Christ's cross in front of people but we glory in it, are called by it, celebrate its feasts and cling tort so that, even without us talking, our appearance professes our belief.

**(6) Man is not only spirit and mind but he also has corporeal senses which should sense the cross through the above-mentioned means**

Not all people are of the same spiritual level and do not need the senses for their spiritual contemplation. The senses are nourished by all the above-mentioned means and are not confined within themselves but they transfer the effects they receive to the mind and the spirit. The mind by itself might not remember the cross or might not remember it much. But when it perceives the cross before it, through the senses, it remembers all the divine and spiritual feelings connected with the cross and the Crucified. Thus we worship God spiritually, intellectually and physically. All these strengthen each other.

**(7) We do not make the sign of the cross in silence, but we say: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen”**

Therefore every time we make the sign of the cross, we profess our belief in the Holy Trinity who is the One God forever. Amen. Thus we are given the chance of constantly remembering the Holy Trinity.

**(8) In making the sign of the cross, we profess our belief in the Incarnation and the Redemption**

We make the sign of the cross from up downwards and from left to right. We remember that God descended from heaven to earth and transferred people from the left to the right; from

darkness to light; from death to life. How numerous are the contemplation we think of with our minds and feel with our hearts when we make the sign of the cross!

**(9) Making the sign of the cross is a religious teaching to our children and to others**

He who makes the sign of the cross when he prays, when he enters the church, when he eats, when he goes to bed and all the time, is the one who remembers the cross. This remembrance is beneficial spiritually and is Biblically requested. It also teaches people, especially little children, that Christ was crucified.

**(10) In making the sign of the cross, we proclaim the Lord's death for us, according to His commandment**

This is the commandment of the Lord: to proclaim His death (which is for our redemption) till He comes (1Cor.11: 26). Every time we make the sign of the cross we remember His death and will remember Him till He comes.

We also remember the Lord in the Eucharist but this Sacrament is not celebrated constantly whereas we can make the sign of the cross at any time, and thus remember the Lord's death for us.

**(11) In making the sign of the cross, we remember that the penalty of sin is death**

That was why Christ died. We were “*dead in trespasses*” (Eph.2: 5), but Christ died for us on the Cross and gave us life. On the Cross He paid the price and said to the Father: “*Father, forgive them*”.

**(12) In making the sign of the cross we remember God's love for us**

We remember that the Cross is a sacrifice of love. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John.3: 16). We remember that *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Rom.5: 8,10). In the cross we remember God's love toward us, because *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends”* (John.15: 13).

**(13) We make the sign of the cross because it gives us power**

St. Paul the Apostle felt the power of the cross and said: *“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Gal.6: 14) and *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* (1Cor.1: 18). We notice that he did not say that the crucifixion is the power of God but that the mere word 'cross' is the power of God.

Therefore, when we make the sign of the cross and when we mention the cross, we are filled with power because we remember that, through the cross, the Lord trod upon death, granted life to all people, defeated and overcame Satan. Therefore:

#### **(14) We make the sign of the cross because Satan fears it**

All Satan's efforts ever since Adam's creation and until the end of ages, came to naught on the Cross. God paid the price by His blood. He effaced with His blood the sins of all people who believe and obey Him. Therefore whenever Satan sees the cross, he trembles, remembering his great defeat and the loss of his strivings, is disgraced and retreats.

Thus the children of God use the sign of the cross because it is the sign of victory and the power of God. They are filled with power within, and the enemy trembles without.

The lifting up of the serpent in the past, which was a cure for people and salvation from death, resembles the lifting up of the Lord of glory on the Cross. It also resembles the sign of the cross in its efficacies (John.3: 14).

#### **(15) In making the sign of the cross , we receive a blessing**

The whole world was cursed and under the penalty of death. But on the Cross the Lord carried all our curses to give us the blessing of reconciliation with God (Rom.5: 10), the blessing of the new pure life; the blessing of membership in His body. All the graces of the New Testament are derived from the cross. That is why the clergymen use the cross in giving the blessing, signifying that the blessing does not come from them but from the Cross of the Lord who entrusted it to them to use in giving the blessing. In addition, they use the cross because they derive their priesthood from the Priesthood of the Crucified. All the blessings of the New Testament sprang from the Lord's Cross and from its efficacious.

## **(16) The cross is used in all the holy Sacraments in Christianity**

All the Sacraments sprang from the merit of Christ's blood on the Cross. Had it not been for the Cross, we would never have been worthy to approach God as His children in the Sacrament of Baptism, we would never have been worthy to partake of His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist (1Cor.11: 26), nor would we have been able to enjoy the graces of any of the Church Sacraments.

## **(17) We exalt the cross to remember our fellowship with it**

We remember the words of St. Paul the Apostle: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal.2: 20) and "... *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being confirmed to His death*" (Phil.3: 10). Here, we ask ourselves: When can we enter into the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings and pray with Him?

We also remember the Penitent Thief who was crucified with the Lord and deserved to be with Him in Paradise. Probably he was singing in Paradise the song of St. Paul: "*I have been crucified with Christ*".

Our aspiration is to ascend to the cross with Christ. The cross is our glory whenever it comes into contact with our senses.



**(18) We venerate the cross because it is the Father's pleasure**

The Father received Christ on the Cross as a pleasing sin offering and also as a burnt offering. He was “a *pleasing aroma to the Lord*” (Lev.1: 9,13,17). Concerning this, the Prophet Isaiah said: “*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him*” (Is.53: 10).

The Lord Jesus Christ satisfied the Father all His life on earth. But He entered into the fullness of this satisfaction on the Cross when He “*became obedient to the Point of death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil.2: 8).

Every time we see the cross, we remember the perfect obedience and the perfect submission so that we may resemble Christ in His obedience: to the point of death.

The Cross which was the pleasing object of the Father, was also the pleasing object of the Crucified Son, about whom it is written: “... *who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*” (Heb.12: 2). Thus the full joy of Christ was in the Cross. May we be like Him.

**(19) In the cross we go forth to Christ outside the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13: 13)**

Christ's reproach is His crucifixion and His sufferings. In making the sign of the cross, we relive the feelings of the Holy Week and remember what is said about Moses the Prophet: “...*esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*” (Heb. 11: 26).

## **(20) We carry Christ's cross because it reminds us of His Second Coming**

The Holy Bible says about the end of the world and the coming of the Lord: *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matt.24: 30). Therefore let us venerate the cross, the sign of the Son of Man, now on earth as long as we expect to see it in heaven when He comes on the clouds of heaven at His great Coming.

## **(2) Facing the East**

Our churches are built facing eastwards. We pray facing toward the East because the East has become a symbol to us since it directs our hearts to many precious contemplation. It also has an important place in God's thought. Since God gives importance to the East then let us also give it importance.

(1) Before God created man, He created the East as a source of light for him, and God saw that the light was good. God created the sun on the fourth day and man on the sixth (Gen. 1).

The rising of the sun is a symbol of Christ and His light. The Lord is called the ‘Sun of Righteousness’, and it is written: *“...the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings”* (Mal.4: 2).

(2) Before God created man, He planted the Garden of Eden in the East for him and then placed him there. He also planted the tree of life in the Garden where man first lived before sin. The Garden of Eden symbolises Paradise to which we aspire (Gen.2: 8). Man's facing eastward has become a symbol of his aspiration to Paradise of which he was deprived and a symbol of his aspiration to the tree of life.

(3) The Lord Jesus Christ was born in an eastern Country. The Magi saw His star in the East (Matt.2: 2). The star was a symbol of Divine guidance. When the Magi followed it, it led them to the Lord. This is a beautiful contemplation!

(4) The Lord Jesus Christ was born in an eastern Country, His star appeared in the East and His mother the Virgin Mary was likened to a gate facing toward the East (Ez.44: 1,2).

(5) Salvation came to the world from the East. Christ was crucified in an eastern Country where His blood was shed for the remission of sins of the whole world.

(6) Christianity and the Church began in the East. Jerusalem is in the East. It is the Country of the Great King where the first Church in the whole world was established. The Gospel spread from the East to the whole world. In the East the blood of the first Christian martyr was shed.

(7) The Holy Bible mentions several times that the glory of God is in the East. It is written in the Book of Isaiah: *“Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord”* (Is.24: 15). In the Book of Ezekiel, there is a prophecy about the coming of Christ in His glory from the East. It is written: *“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shne with His glory”* (Ez.43: 2).

(8) Therefore most theologians say that the Second Coming will be from the East. In the same manner He went into heaven He will come back (Acts 1: 11). In Zechariah's prophecy, it is written: *“And in that day ; His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east”* (Zech.14: 4).

(9) The East is an appealing subject and evokes splendid memories. In the Book of Ezekiel, the Prophet writes about rivers of life in the East (Ez.47: 1-9). And in the Second Book of Kings, it is written that the East is the *“arrow of the Lord's deliverance”* (2Kin.13: 17). Also, in the Book of Isaiah, it is written: *“Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord”* (Is.24: 15).

(10) The remembrance of the East has a great effect on the heart; it has a spiritual effect on the soul. I admire Daniel the Prophet when he defied pagan worship: He went into the upper room, opened the window which faced Jerusalem, and knelt down to pray. It is true that God is everywhere, but facing Jerusalem in the East has a profound meaning and a strong

effect on the heart. The remembrance of certain places awakens sacred emotions in the heart.

(11) Our worship is not worship with the intellect only. The senses also act; they are affected and they affect the feelings of the soul. An example to illustrate this: When we pray we look up although God is everywhere. But looking upwards evokes in our hearts spiritual feelings which give more depth to our prayer. The same applies to facing the East.

The Lord Himself, on more than one occasion, looked up, although the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. But looking upwards has a certain significance.

(12) When we face the East, we are in fact facing the altar which lies eastward because the Sacrifice has Its spiritual place in our hearts and Christ our Passover was a Sacrifice in the East.

(13) In the Baptismal Service, in a symbolic way, the baptised and his godparent face westward to renounce Satan and then eastward to recite the Creed. Thus the baptised feels in Baptism that he is transferred from west to east, that is, from darkness to light.

(14) We ask: Why do our brethren the Protestants fight against facing toward the East although it carries spiritual meanings, sacred contemplation and memories textproved from the Holy Bible and involves no dogmatic error to stir the sacred zeal?

### (3) The Sanctuary and the Altar

There is neither a sanctuary nor an altar in Protestant churches. The reason for this is more serious: There is no Sacrifice. We shall discuss the subject of the Sacrifice when we come to the Sacraments of Eucharist and Priesthood. Now we will confine our discussion to the altar.

(1) In the Old Testament there are numerous passages about the altar. But our brethren the Protestants think that the altar was merely a symbol of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross, and has now terminated. Therefore, in our discussion with them, we have to present text-proofs from the New Testament.

(2) St. Paul the Apostle says: "*We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat*" (Heb.13: 10). The tabernacle is the Tent of Meeting or the old Sanctuary. St. John Chrysostom comments on this, saying: "St. Paul the Apostle turned from the symbolic meaning to the actual meaning... We now have the authority to partake of the Holy Blood which was the authority of the priest only."

(3) There is a prophecy in the Book of Isaiah the Prophet about an altar in the midst of the land of Egypt. The prophet says: "*In*

*that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt. Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering” (Is. 19: 19,21).*

Of course, the altar referred to here is the altar of the New Testament in the Christian Era, because the Jews could not offer sacrifices in a Gentile land, nor would the Egyptians have allowed them to do so. Thus the appeal directed to Pharaoh at the time of Moses and Aaron was: *“Let My people go, that they may serve Me”* (Ex.8: 20). Yet Pharaoh refused to let *“the people go to sacrifice to the Lord”* (Ex.8: 29). After the Plague of Flies, when Pharaoh gave his first promise, he said: *“I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness”* (v.28). It is understood from these verses that the Jews could not offer a sacrifice in Egypt.

So when did the Egyptians know the Lord? When did they begin to have an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord? Undoubtedly, it was in the Christian Era. This is an explicit proof of the existence of altars in Christianity to offer sacrifices on.

(4) God willed that the word ‘altar’ be fixed in the minds and hearts of people, therefore He mentions it more than once in the Book of Revelation which was written at the end of the first century, after the martyrdom of the Apostles and the disciples of Christ. St. John the Evangelist says: *“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense”* (Rev.8: 3). He also says: *“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held”* (Rev.6: 9).

(5) The altar will continue to exist as long as the words of the Divine Inspiration: “*the Body and Blood of the Lord*” (1Cor.11: 27) remain before us. As long as there is Blood, then there should be an altar, and by necessity, a sanctuary to contain it.

We shall discuss this subject in detail, God willing, when we discuss the subject of the Holy Sacrifice and the clergyman who offers It.

#### **(4) Incense**

Our brethren the Protestants do not use incense or censers, considering them part of the Old Testament worship which were mere symbols and have now terminated. Here we would like to display the history of incense in the past and present and see whether incense is a symbol or an independent spiritual performance.

(1) The Lord said to Moses: “*You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood*” (Ex.30: 1). Here the Lord presents us an important point: The incense was considered a sacrifice in itself, offered on an altar called the altar of incense.

(2) The Lord gave great importance to the altar of incense. He commanded that it be overlaid on all sides with gold, have a horn of gold, be carried on two rings overlaid with gold and be



placed before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony where He would meet with Moses (Ex.30: 3-6).

(3) The incense was conditioned to be '*sweet incense*'. The Lord says: "*Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning*" (Ex.30: 7). And also at twilight "*he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations*" (Ex.30: 8).

The spices for making the sweet incense are mentioned in (Ex.30: 34). It is said that this incense "*shall be to you holy for the Lord*" (Ex.30: 37). Moreover, "*It shall be most holy to you... you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition*" (Ex.30: 36,37).

The phrase '*sweet incense*' is repeated on many occasions in the Holy Bible: (Ex.25: 6); (Ex.37: 29); (Lev.16: 12). So incense represented a fragrant perfume ascending before the Lord.

(4) Some people are mistaken and say that incense was presented with burnt offerings to absorb their smell. And as there are no animal burnt offerings now, incense is subsequently cancelled. This interpretation is unsound because incense was a form of worship independent in itself. It had its own special altar different from the altar of burnt offerings. It had its own rites in the way of offering it. It was meant and considered as a prayer in itself and not as a symbol of another thing.

(5) We notice that when the Lord sent the plague on the Israelites, Aaron the chief priest, upon Moses' command, took his censer, put incense in it and burnt it with fire from the altar to intercede for the people before God. When he ran into the midst of the assembly and offered the incense, the plague ceased. The Lord accepted the incense from Aaron as a prayer (Num.16: 44-48) as though it were a sacrifice.

We notice that Aaron did not offer a sacrifice for the Israelites, but incense alone. The incense was not offered to absorb the smell of a burnt offering but it was an offering to make atonement for the people (Num. 16: 46,47).

(6) Because of the importance of incense, only priests were allowed to offer it. So incense is in a higher position than prayer because prayer can be raised by any individual to the Lord. When Korah, Dathan and Abiram dared to offer incense, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with all their belongings. So they went down to the pit alive (Num.16: 31,32). This happened not because they offered a sacrifice, but because they offered incense, even though they were of the tribe of Levi.

(7) As incense was so important, it was offered in golden censers as is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb.9: 4) and as is said about the twenty-four priests who had golden bowls full of incense (Rev.5: 8).

(8) In the Book of the Prophet Malachi, there is a prophecy about the continuation of the offering of incense and that it is

not limited to the Jewish Era. The Lord says: “*For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations*” (Mal.1: 11). Of course, worship among the Gentiles did not happen except in the Era of Christianity. Thus the Lord has included incense among the forms of Christian worship.

(9) There are two examples in the New Testament showing the Divine concern about incense, and both are written in the Book of Revelation:

(a) About the twenty-four priests, it is written: “*and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*” (Rev.5: 8).

(b) St. John the Visionary says: “*Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand*” (Rev.8: 3,4).

(10) In commenting on the expression “*the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God*”, we say that the whole life of the Church is incense. The Church is resembled to incense in the Book of the Song of Solomon, in which the Divine Inspiration says: “*Who is this coming out of*

*the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?"*  
(Song 3: 6)

(11) One of the important situations in the history of incense in the life of the saints is that the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias the priest on the right side of the altar of incense while he was burning incense in his lot (Lk.1: 8-11). This is proof of the sanctity of the place and the sanctity of the work of offering incense. This holy occasion was worthy to be associated with a Divine revelation.

It is clear from the incident of Zacharias' burning incense in his lot that offering incense was a separate work in itself; it was not connected with the offering of a sacrifice or burnt offering.

(12) Because incense is important in Christianity, frankincense (which is a component of incense) was one of the gifts offered by the Magi to Christ. It was a symbol of His Priesthood and a profession from the Magi that He is a Priest, in the same way that gold was a symbol of His Kingdom and myrrh a symbol of His sufferings.

(13) Incense has numerous meanings, which satisfy the senses and nourish the soul. Not all those who attend church are of a profound spiritual level and deep thought. Children, for example, who do not apprehend much from the sermon or the readings of the Holy Bible or the prayers, are spiritually affected through their senses by the incense, candles and icons which serve as spiritual lessons for them, uplifting them to a spiritual

atmosphere. The same applies to the uninformed and superficial believers who have no depth of knowledge and have not studied theological books.

### **Spiritual meanings and contemplation of incense**

(14) The first lesson we learn from incense is the Lord's teaching: "*...he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matt.10: 39). An example of this is the particle of incense, which burns and burns until it becomes perfumed pillars of smoke. You look for it in the censer as a particle of incense, but you do not find it because it offered itself as a burnt offering to God.

Burnt offerings are not only of sacrifices but also of incense, which the Holy Bible considers as a sacrifice to be offered on the altar of incense. Incense teaches us a great lesson. How beautiful it is when a man offers himself as a burnt offering to the Lord! Every offering is outside the self but the offering of the self is the greatest offering. Offering the self is represented by putting the particle of incense in the fire. It is said that our God is a consuming fire (Deut.4: 24). The saints were particles of incense put into the Divine censer and were burnt by the love of God.

(15) The second lesson in incense is its constant ascent. The burning incense does not accept to be kept down, but it rises to the sky, stretches and spreads and never ceases to ascend and spread. When you watch and follow it you cannot help raising your eyes to the sky whether you wish to or not. That is why incense always attracts people's senses to above as if it is an arrow pointing continually to heaven.

(16) A third lesson in incense is that it resembles the sweet aroma. The Holy Bible conditions incense to be sweet incense. Whoever smells the incense remembers that man's life should be a fragrant perfume before God. The Holy Bible says: *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ... through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place”* (2Cor.2: 15,14).

(17) One of the most magnificent contemplation of incense is that it reminds us of the cloud or the dark cloud in which the Lord appeared. The Lord says: *“I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat”* (Lev.16: 2). It is also written in the Book of Leviticus: *“...cloud of incense”* (Lev.16: 13). It was said about Aaron the chief priest: *“Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die”* (Lev.16: 12,13).

In directing His people in the Old Testament, whether in the Tabernacle or in the Sanctuary or in the Wilderness of Sinai, God appeared in the cloud or in the smoke. His guidance to the people in Sinai was in the form of an overshadowing cloud during the day, representing God who was overshadowing them. If the cloud moved, they knew that God was moving them so they moved. If the cloud settled, they settled (Num.9: 17). Thus it is written: *“And the cloud of the Lord was above them by day when they went out from the camp”* (Nurn.10: 34).

(18) When the Lord Jesus Christ came to Egypt it is said that He came on a cloud (Is.19: 1). The cloud was a symbol of the Virgin who was an ascending fragrant incense. In Christ's Second Coming, He will also come on the clouds (Matt.24: 30). So clouds represent the presence of the Lord in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

(19) The incident of the Transfiguration is an example of God's presence in clouds. It is written that while the Lord Jesus Christ was talking to the three disciples, *"a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'"* (Lk.9: 34,35)

(20) The Lord talked to Moses from a cloud. When the Lord spoke to Moses, the Holy Bible says: *"Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud"* (Ex.24: 15,16). The same happened when the Lord spoke to the people of Israel from the Tabernacle: the cloud and smoke were overshadowing the Tabernacle.

(21) We see the same again in the consecration of Solomon's Temple. The Holy Bible says: *"And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord*

*filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon spoke: 'The Lord said He would dwell in the dark cloud' "*(1Kin.8: 10-12).

(22) Incense represents clouds or dark clouds reminding us of God's presence and the glory of God. It is written: "*Clouds and darkness surround Him*" (Ps.97: 2). Therefore incense has numerous spiritual meanings for whoever wishes to benefit from it. It is a form of worship in itself. It was not connected with the Old Testament sacrifices thus not necessitating its termination with that of those sacrifices

(23) Lastly, we say that there is not one single verse in the New Testament commanding the cancellation of incense: "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (Rev.2: 7).

## **(5) Lights and Candles**

The Orthodox Church is characterised by its lights. We use candles in our prayers, during the Bible reading, in front of the icons of the saints, on the altar, in the sanctuary in general and in front of the altar on its eastern side, and the church remains lighted constantly. Our brethren the Protestants do not use any of these rites despite their symbolic significance.

In this brief article we will discuss the subject of lights in the church, the reason for using them and the spiritual meanings they carry.



(1) The church itself is called in the Holy Bible the golden lampstand. This is clear from the Book of Revelation. St. John the Visionary saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of seven golden lampstands and the Lord said to him: “...*the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches*” (Rev.1: 20).

(2) The church resembles heaven because it is the house of God or God's dwelling place. This is nearly the expression used about the first house of God. Jacob the Patriarch said: “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!*” (Gen.28: 17) Since the church resembles heaven, it must have lights to illuminate it like the stars of heaven.

(3) The lights in the church may represent the angels in heaven or the angels whom Jacob saw in his vision ascending and descending the ladder in Bethel (‘House of God’) (Gen.28: 12). The lights symbolise the angels because the angels are also called *angels of light* (2Cor.11: 14).

(4) The lights of the church also symbolise the saints, to whom the Lord says: “*Let your light so shine before men*” (Matt.5: 16). On this occasion the Lord likens the saints to lighted lamps put on lampstands (Matt.5: 15).

Also, the Holy Bible says: “*the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Matt.13: 43). And the Lord Jesus Christ said to the Jews about John the Baptist as an

example of those righteous: *“He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light”* (John.5: 35). Since the church is full of angels and saints then it ought to be full of lights.

(5) Primarily the church ought to be filled with lights because of God's presence in it: God is Light (John.1: 5) and the Lord Jesus Christ says of Himself: *“I am the Light of the world”* (John.8: 12).

(6) The church is lighted by lights after the pattern of the Tabernacle and the Sanctuary. They were full of lights and their lamps were never put out. The Lord commanded that the lamps be lighted by pure olive oil under the supervision of Aaron and his children as an everlasting statute. The Lord says: *“And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil, which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to their generations”* (Ex.27: 20,21).

This is a Divine command, given by God who said on the first day of creation: *“ ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good”* (Gen.1: 3,4).

(7) The lamps, which are lighted by oil, have a spiritual meaning. The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, It was used for anointing, after which the Spirit of the Lord descended: When Samuel anointed David, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in

power (1Sam.16: 13). The Holy Bible also tells us about the anointing from the Holy One (1John.2: 20,27).

Even the candles which we light in church are made of oil, and the lamps in church are lighted by oil for the same symbolic significance.

(8) We notice that the Lord commanded that lampstands be made in His house, whether the Tabernacle or the Sanctuary. The lamps and the lampstands were made of pure gold (Ex.25: 31); (Ex.37: 17); (2Chr.4: 20). All these are proof of God's concern about the existence of lights in His house.

(9) The lamps were lighted continually upon God's command. Extinguishing the lamps' light or negligence in lighting them were considered as treachery to the Lord and deserved severe punishment. Concerning this, the Holy Bible says: *“For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs on Him. They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense... therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to astonishment”* (2Chr.29: 6-8). All these show us how God cares for lights in His house.

(10) Lighting lamps has a special profound spiritual meaning. It symbolises constant readiness, perpetual watchfulness and preservation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

Concerning this readiness, the Lord Jesus Christ tells us: *“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching”* (Lk.12: 35).

The Lord Jesus Christ gives us the parable of the five wise virgins whose lamps were burning whilst the lamps of the five foolish virgins went out (Matt.25: 1-12).

The oil of the lamp symbolises the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. The constant burning symbolises the constant watchfulness in keeping the heart tied to the work of the Holy Spirit within it.

(11) What is said about individuals can also be said about the whole church. When people see the lights in church they are reminded of their duties in preserving the light inside them and that their lamps should be lighted continually. They remember that the church is one of the five wise virgins who kept their lamps lighted.

(12) With regard to lighting candles during the Gospel reading, this is undoubtedly better than reading the Gospel without light. It reminds us of the verse: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Ps. 119), and also *“The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes”* (Ps. 19).

(13) The Early Church, ever since the Apostolic Era, has given importance to lights and their symbols. The Book of Acts tells us about the upper room from which St. Paul was preaching after the breaking of the bread: *“There were many lamps... where they were gathered”* (Acts 20: 8).

(14) The candles that we light before the saints’ icons remind us that the saints were lights in their generations; they were like candles, melting in order that their light might shine before people.

## **(6) Pictures and Icons**

Our brethren the Protestants do not believe in the pictures and icons in the Orthodox Church or in the statues in the Catholic Church. They consider them against the second commandment, in which the Lord says: *“You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them”* (Ex.20: 4,5); (Deut.5: 8,9).

There was a war waged against icons in the 8th century in 726 A. D. during the time of Emperor Leo III. It continued for a few centuries then calmed down. It was revived in Protestantism since the 15th and 16th centuries and has remained among their beliefs till this day. Some of our Protestant brethren consider icons as remnants of paganism. They reproach Orthodoxy and Catholicism

for venerating icons, kissing them, lighting candles in front of them and kneeling before them.

We will try to reply to all these points, showing the spiritual benefits of icons and why the Church keeps them.

(1) In order to reply to the subject of icons, we must consider the following:

(a) What does the verse, which our Protestant brethren use imply? Why was this verse said and what is its purpose? The reason behind our questioning is the Apostle's phrase "*the letter kills*" (2Cor.3: 6).

(b) What are the other verses which, if put beside this verse, will complete its meaning and make us realise the spirit and not the letter in the Lord's commandment? We have previously explained the danger of using one verse.

(2) What was God's aim in banning images and statues? The Lord's aim is clear in His words: "*You shall not bow down to them nor serve them.*" Therefore the commandment is not broken if the purpose of using them is far from worship.

There is no doubt that this forbidding is one of the Lord's Ten Commandments. It was given in an era in which paganism abounded and there was so much anxiety that the believers might apostate that it was forbidden to engrave any stone, even in ordinary buildings or in constructing the altar.

(3) We see that God Himself, who commanded the people not to engrave any idol or form, ordered Moses in the incident of the enormous snakes to *“Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live”* (Num.21: 8). So Moses did this and he was not breaking the second commandment.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that this act was a pattern of His sacred cross. He says: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John.3: 14,15).

(4) When the Lord ordered Moses to build the Ark of Covenant, He asked him to make cherubim of gold on top of it. He said: *“And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy, seal. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel”* (Ex.25: 18-22). And it was done.

Forming the images of these two cherubim was not a transgression of the second commandment which orders not to make an idol in the form of anything in heaven above, because the aim was not to worship the angels represented by these two

cherubim. On the contrary, the image of the two cherubim was formed upon a Divine command in the same way that the snake was made upon a Divine command.

(5) In the same manner, Solomon built the Temple and decorated it from within: *“he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. One wing of the cherub was five cubits and the other wing of the cherub five cubits: ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other... both cherubim were of the same size and shape. Then he set the cherubim inside the inner room; and they stretched out the wings of the cherubim. Also he overlaid the cherubim with gold”* (1Kin.6: 23-28).

(6) It was not only a matter of two cherubim, but the Holy Bible says: *“Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers”* (1Kin.6: 29). He made two doors for the entrance and *“carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold”* (1 Kin.6: 32,35). Thus the house of the Lord was decorated with images, paintings and carvings and the people still worshipped God. They did not worship these images or carvings. They did not disobey the second commandment.

(7) Likewise the Ark of the Covenant, which was respected by priests, people and kings, did not at all represent pagan worship. The Holy Bible tells us that after the Israelites were



conquered at Ai, Joshua, the son of Nun and the successor of Moses, together with the elders of Israel, knelt down and prayed to the Lord before the Ark of the Covenant till evening (Josh.7: 6). The Lord did not say to Joshua: “You have broken the second commandments”. But on the contrary, the Lord talked to him, performed a miraculous sign in revealing the sin of Achen, son of Carmit, gave Ai into Joshua's hands and lifted up Joshua's head.

Joshua did not sin by kneeling before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord because he was not worshipping the Ark but he was worshipping the Lord who came and spoke from between the cherubim. Likewise David the Prophet did not sin when he celebrated the return of the Ark, leaping and dancing in front of it (2Sam.6: 12-15).

(8) Similarly, we say that we do not worship the pictures or the icons, but we venerate them, thus venerating those to whom they belong, according to the Lord's words to His disciples: “*If anyone serves Me, him MY Father will honour*” (John.12: 26). If the Father venerates His saints, should we not venerate them?

(9) We say the same regarding the cross, of which St. Paul the Apostle says to the Galatians: “*O foolish Galatians... before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified*” (Gal.3: 1).

(10) We thank God that our Protestant brethren now raise the cross on top of their churches without considering it a carved image.

(11) We thank God that in their Sunday Schools, our Protestant brethren distribute pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ, the angels, the prophets, Noah's Ark with its animals, the Good Shepherd and the sheep, David feeding his sheep, Elijah and the ravens looking after him, Poor Lazarus and the dogs licking his wounds, Balaam, and the Devil tempting the Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness. In distributing these pictures they are not worried or in any doubt that they may be breaking the second commandment by having pictures of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath.

(12) We cannot disregard the effect of pictures as lessons explaining the events of the Holy Bible and the lives of the heroes of faith and history. An icon may leave a more profound effect on the soul than reading or listening to a sermon.

Icons connect the believers on earth with the angels in heaven and the righteous who abide in Paradise. They give us a strong inner motive to carry out the Apostle's words: *“Remember the leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith”* (Heb.13: 7).

(13) In venerating pictures, we are in effect venerating their owners. When we kiss the Gospel, we show our love to the word of God and to God who gave us His commandments for our guidance. When we bow down before the cross, we bow down, as one of the Fathers said, “to Him who is crucified on it”. The commandment *“You shall not bow down to them or*

*serve them*”, does not apply to us at all when we do these things.

(14) It is well known that icons have been recognised since the Apostolic Era. It is said that St. Luke the Evangelist was an artist and that he portrayed more than one picture of the Virgin Mary. Tradition tells us about the image of the face of the Lord Jesus Christ imprinted on a handkerchief.

If you study the history of icons you will find that the strongest eras in faith were those in which people venerated icons. Their faith was not affected but on the contrary, they were virtuous people.

(15) Why should we deprive artists from sharing in activating the spiritual life of people? Pictures give spiritual feelings that affect the soul and effectively transfer to people the life-stories of saints.

# **REPENTANCE**

1. Repentance is a sacrament
2. Repentance and confession
3. Repentance and the Church
4. Repentance and salvation
5. Repentance and the work of Grace
6. Repentance and experiences
7. Repentance, joy and contrition
8. Repentance and newness of life
9. Repentance precedes all other sacraments
10. Repentance, conduct and deeds

## **The Concept of Repentance**

The importance of repentance is undisputed by all but repentance in the Orthodox Church is totally different from repentance in other Churches with respect to its definition, efficacy, practice and necessity for salvation.

### **(1) Repentance is a sacrament**

In the Orthodox concept, repentance is one of the Church's Seven Sacraments. It is called the Sacrament of Repentance. However, the Protestant groups, in not believing in the Church Sacraments, do not consider repentance a holy Mystery. Therefore, there is a difference between repentance and the Sacrament of Repentance. This difference has its consequences.

### **(2) Repentance and confession**

In the Orthodox concept, confessing one's sins represents a main part of the Sacrament of Repentance. By confessing, we mean confessing to a priest: *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”* (Prov.28: 13).

People in the Old Testament practised confession. It is written: *“And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned”* (Lev.5: 5,6).

The Holy Bible is full of examples of confessions. Confession continued until the last prophet of the Old Testament or the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the time of John the Baptist, when *“Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins”* (Matt.3: 5,6).

In the New Testament also people practised confession. It is written: *“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds”* (Acts 19:18), and *“Confess your trespasses to one another”* (Jas.5: 16).

However, the Protestant groups do not believe in confession and do not consider it part of repentance.

### **(3) Repentance and the Church**

It is true that repentance is a work within the heart involving regret and a resolution to abandon the sin in addition to the actual abandoning of sin practically and from the heart. Yet repentance is completed inside the Church by confession and the absolution. The sinner is to confess his sins and the priest is to read the absolution and give the forgiveness, following the Lord's words: *“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).

This is also followed by the guidance that the penitent receives from his spiritual father in order to remain in his penitence.

As for our Protestant brethren, they present repentance as being completely independent from the Church. It is an

individual act, with no relation with priesthood because they do not believe in priesthood but they believe in the direct relationship with God.

Regarding this point, our Protestant brethren are divided into two groups:

(a) A group which openly rejects confession and priesthood. This is the weaker group because it is so open that those who are steadfast in their belief will be aware of it. Also the notions of this group are clear and can be replied to.

(b) The second group does not speak against confession or priesthood or the Eucharist, but its followers try to make people forget these sacraments by not talking about them and by presenting alternatives. For example, they say: “You are in need of repentance and in need to return to God. Go and cast yourself at God's feet; leave your sins to Him to erase by His blood and immediately you will come out justified as if you had not sinned before. He washes you and you will become whiter than snow.”

They do not speak about the importance of confession or the absolution or the Eucharist; they leave them out to make people forget about them. At the same time, they use spiritual words and thus deceive many naive people. This is an obscure way and it is our duty to reveal it to people.

#### **(4) Repentance and salvation**

Many of our Protestant brethren try to separate repentance from the subject of salvation. When they concentrate on Christ's Blood, they say to people: “You are saved by the Blood of Christ and not by repentance. Repentance is one of the deeds and you cannot be saved by deeds.”

We do not deny that salvation is completed by the Blood of Christ. But there is no salvation without repentance. The Lord Jesus Christ says: “...*unless you repent you will all likewise perish*” (Lk.13: 3).

Repentance is necessary for salvation because nobody is without sin. As long as there is sin, then there is punishment for sin, and the wages of sin is death. There is no salvation from that death except through repentance. Repentance makes us worthy of Christ's Blood; “*unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*”

### **(5) Repentance and the work of Grace**

Many Protestant groups hold that repentance is one of the works of Grace and all man's strivings are void. It is sufficient that man casts himself at the feet of Christ to save him from his sins. The Orthodox doctrine holds that the whole spiritual life of man is a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supports but man should strive. If man does not strive the Apostle will reproach him, saying: “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*” (Heb. 12: 4).

The Holy Bible portrays the spiritual life as a struggle which needs the whole armour of God: “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Eph.6: 12). This war undoubtedly needs man to struggle and win.

This fight is what the Lord Jesus Christ meant in His message to the angels of the seven churches when He said: “*To him who overcomes I will give...*” (Rev.2: 17). Grace does not



do all the work, otherwise God would not have said: “*Return to Me... and I will return to you*” (Zech.1: 3).

## **(6) Repentance and experiences**

Our Protestant brethren consider repentance an experience, and encourage repentant to inform people of their experiences. So you hear from them the expression: “I was so and so, and now I have become so and so”. The repentant continues to recount his previous sins in front of everybody without shame, covering his sins with the grace he has now attained. If he keeps silent, he will be asked: “Tell us about your experiences.” but Orthodoxy forbids these narrations as they mainly involve boasting of the change, which the repentant has reached.

## **(7) Repentance, joy and contrition**

Orthodoxy emphasises the contrition of the soul of the repentant. He should remember before God the sins he committed, drenching his bed with his tears as David the Prophet did. Protestantism, however, pushes people towards joy, which involves no contrition. In most cases, the repentant directly becomes a minister, which gives him no chance to grieve in his inner self over his sins. The reason the Protestants give for this attitude is that a repentant should rejoice over his salvation.

In replying to this point, we put before them the incident of the people of Israel eating the Passover lamb: In the midst of their joy for their salvation from the sword of the Angel of Death, they had to eat the Passover lamb with bitter herbs, according to the Lord's command (Ex.12: 8). The bitter herbs

reminded them of their sins because of which they were enslaved to Pharaoh. It is true that eating the Passover lamb reminded them of salvation and its joy but the lamb had to be eaten with bitter herbs.

What is the position of *bitter herbs* in repentance according to the Protestant concept? One of the Protestant books even attacked the phrase “Lord have mercy” which we say in our prayers! It also attacked all the phrases of contrition, condemning them to be against the joy of salvation.

### **(8) Repentance and newness of life**

What we call in Orthodoxy 'repentance' is frequently called by our Protestant brethren 'newness of life', 'renewal' or 'salvation'. Some Protestants ask one another: “Have you been renewed? Have you been saved? Have you experienced newness of life?” And all they mean is the act of repentance; no more, no less.

In the Orthodox concept, all these expressions: 'Renewal', 'newness of life' and 'salvation' are completed in the Sacrament of Baptism, but repentance is a process of change in man's way of life.

### **(9) Repentance precedes all other sacraments**

The Sacrament of Repentance precedes the Sacrament of Baptism as St. Peter the Apostle says: “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptised*” (Acts 2: 38). It precedes the Sacrament of Eucharist, as our teacher St. Paul the Apostle says: “*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of*

*the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body” (1Cor.11: 27-29).* The Sacrament of Repentance also precedes the Sacrament of the Holy Unction. Our teacher James the Apostle says: *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas.5: 14,15).*

The same applies to the rest of the Sacraments because so long as the Sacraments are graces of the Holy Spirit then they should be prepared for by purifying the heart through repentance but since our brethren the Protestants do not believe in Sacraments nor in repentance as a Sacrament, these words are outside their concepts.

### **(10) Repentance, conduct and deeds**

Our brethren the Protestants hold that the Christian life is not a life of conduct and deeds but a life of Grace and faith. In Orthodoxy, faith and Grace are important but nevertheless our Church says with the Forerunner: *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matt.3: 8).* Orthodoxy holds that conduct is an important matter necessary for salvation.

If our Protestant brethren persist on the importance of Blood for man's purification, we put before them the saying of the Apostle John regarding the relation between conduct and the

Blood of the Lord: *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son Cleanses us from all sin”* (1John.1: 7). Here, conduct is put as a condition. There is no cleansing by Blood without repentance; repentance is an essential condition.





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