

Inscape December 2016

© Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

The theological and anthropological views of the Eastern Fathers were the basis for their development of an *orthodox* teaching of the most elemental truth, the keystone on which the Christian faith is constructed, namely, a right teaching and worship concerning Jesus Christ as true God yet true man and how he is the Redeemer and Savior of God's entire created order. Let us turn to the writings of the early Eastern Fathers to see how they developed their traditional teaching of Jesus Christ as the sole Redeemer and Savior through whom all of creation will be restored and will reach fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

RECAPITULATION

The Greek Orthodox theologian Constantine N. Tsirpanlis approaches the traditional views of Eastern Christian theologians on the understanding of the meaning of redemption or salvation: "The conception of *soteria* in the Eastern Church and the patristic tradition is broader and more inclusive than the Roman Catholic emphasis on "redemption" and "reconciliation" and the Protestant "justification." The Orthodox Church prefers to use the term *soteria* also because the New Testament uses that term (about 40 times) in order to describe the work accomplished by Jesus Christ (and the title given to Christ: *soter* about twenty times).

Saint Irenaeus was the first Christian theologian to formulate a restored anthropology in and through Jesus Christ. He was the first to describe the purpose of the incarnation of God's Word into the human race. Christ shows forth to us human beings the perfect image (icon) of God (Colossians 1:15). He comes to restore the similitude or likeness of God to us. In a theological synthesis amazing for its time, the double mysticism of Saint John and Saint Paul coalesce. Irenaeus mingles the two elements: the identification of the flesh of Christ with ours and the promise of eternal life because Christ is the Prince of Life who ontologically lives within us through God's uncreated grace. He writes: "The Word of God (Logos) was made a son of man in order that we may receive the adoption and become a child of God....How could we have been able to be united to incorruptibility and immortality if *Incorruptibility and Immortality* did not first become that which we are?"

To describe the role of Christ as the Second Adam, the restorer of a cosmos grown sick with self-love, Irenaeus uses the Pauline work *anakephalaiosis*, meaning "recapitulation." Many commentators of Irenaeus have labored to define his precise use of this word, for he uses it as a framework within which he constructs the first articulated Christian theology of redemption as well as a Christian anthropology.

His theory of recapitulation structures his theological system. It signifies a rebeginning of the human race, whereby Christ reverses the process that had turned earth away from true Light, Life and Incorruption toward sin, chaos, and death. God gathers up in his Logos his entire work by fulfilling it according to his original plan through an intimate association with the living Logos in the individual human being, made according to the image and likeness of God

which is Christ. The “logosized” creature, in union with the other creatures of the universe, is restored in Christ to reach the *pleroma* (the fullness completion) in Christ’s glorious second coming, his *parousia*.

The term, therefore, can mean a resume, a taking up of all since the beginning, a recommencement, a return to the source, a restoration, a reorganization and incorporation under one head. Included in this comprehensive, imaginative concept is the idea that Christ the redeemer underwent all the trials of Adam, but with total success. Christ does not merely undo, detail by detail, all that Adam had done to bring the human race into its fallen state. Basing his theology of Christ’s restoration of the human race on a dynamic concept of growth and conflict, Irenaeus presents Christ as the champion of the human race, who also enters into the fray to do battle with the Evil One.

Yet Christ the Victor does not merely restore creation to what it was in the beginning. He completes it through a process of growth as a human person grows from embryo, through childhood, to full manhood.

The term *anakephalaiosis* (recapitulation) springs initially from Ephesians 1:10: God decreed “to gather (*anakephalaiosasthai*) all creation both in heaven and on earth under one head, Christ.” But Irenaeus advances the content of the term: “Christ has therefore in his work of recapitulation summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy and crushing him who at the beginning had led us away captive in Adam...in order that, as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life through a victorious one.”

NOT ASSUMED, NOT SAVED

Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria all build their theology of Christ as Redeemer and Savior upon the writings of Irenaeus. Christ’s birth and maturing is the first creation among human beings brought to perfection. Christ is the human person in his fullest completion, as God had originally planned all of us to be “in Christ.” In the incarnation a single human being came into existence, but he contained and developed to the fullest all the purity and life that the entire world had lost. Christ is fully all that we ought to be. There is in him nothing of sin, of aversion from God through Adam’s sin. In Christ’s humanity, God lays hands on us again. Those hands, the divine Logos and the Holy Spirit, will effect a “new creation” through the humanity of Christ, making all human beings one with him.

Saint Athanasius, in his valiant fight against the heresy of Arianism that denied that Jesus was truly God, the divine Logos, from all eternity, developed the insights of Irenaeus. He simply asked the question: “What was God to do?” His answer was that God could only recreate the lost relationship to the divine image and destroy corruptible death: What was to be done except the renewing of that which was in God’s image, so that by it human beings might once more be able to know him? How could this come to pass save by the presence of the very image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? Whence the Word of God came in his own person, that, as he was the image of the Father, he might be able to create afresh human beings after the image. But, again, it could not else have taken place had not death and corruption been taken away....None other then was sufficient for this need, save the image of the Father.

Saint Gregory Nazianzus gives us his basic principle used against Apollonarius, who held that Christ had a defective human nature, not possessing the full human reasoning powers. This principle, which the subsequent Eastern Fathers would repeat constantly, is: “What is not assumed by Christ is not saved; that alone is saved which is united with God.” Precisely because the divine Logos was a perfect human being, it was made possible through his

humanity for the divine Logos to make contact with other human beings and thus bring redemption to all individual persons.

Gregory's writings, especially his sermons and poems, are characterized by vigorous, forceful language to express the reality of the incorporation of the individual through a most personal, intimate union with Christ. **The events of Christ's life on this earth, his activities and his miracles are being renewed in our souls.** The passion of Christ is taking place today! He is suffering today in the sense that his members are suffering with him. He sustains them by his indwelling divine life. "Yesterday I was crucified with him; today I am glorified with him; yesterday I was buried with him; today I am quickened with him....Let us offer ourselves, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our dignity; let us honor our Archetype; let us know the power of the mystery and for what Christ died. Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for his sake since he for us became man."

CHRIST THE PERFECT ADAM

Saint Gregory of Nyssa saw the reality of God's creation as primarily present in his transcendent eternal decree. We might call it a forth-dimensional view that allows him to see the beginning (not chronologically, but in the order of God's finality) as coterminous with the end, the *eschaton*. Measured history, therefore, is a dynamic process, a fulfillment of the divine unified idea of the cosmos, wherein the end coincides with the beginning. God's idea of the created world in and through the Logos, which he possesses from all eternity, will be realized in the *pleroma* exactly as he has conceived it, outside of time (*chronos*). Thus one of the great hurdles of Western theological thinking is cleared, namely, the union of nature and supernature. We human beings are viewed in *toto* and never seen outside of God's redemptive plan in and through Jesus Christ.

Gregory, influenced by Origen, saw in the Genesis account of the creation of the first human being, Adam, the ontological "every human person." The first man, Adam, stands for the universal human being, every human person, who has been made by God to his image and likeness. Thus the first human being and the final, perfected human being are alike. Gregory, in his work *The Creation of Man*, insists that before Adam, historically the first man, human's nature in the mind of God was already perfect and realized in and through Jesus Christ.

Yet we human beings alone could not respond *positively* to God's ideal plan. A greater, more perfect being, one who already had attained the state to which we were all aspiring, was needed; one who could inspire not only by his example, but also by his activity, could effect in us this "return." This more perfect being had to be none other than the very Lord of our human nature, for he had given to us our existence, and only he could restore us to participation in his own divine likeness.

Redemption is described by Gregory mainly in terms of restoration by Christ of the image according to which we all have been created. Christ was "transfused by our nature in order that our nature might by this transfusion of the Divine become itself divine. Being united to a divine person, Christ's humanity was perfectly divinized. Hence his human nature "returned" to the state before the fall. Christ's humanity, through his human obligation of self to God, became deified. He was the perfect human being according to which model God conceived our full human nature. We, by our human nature as conceived in the eternal *now* of God's decree, signifies, of necessity, a relationship to Christ. It is necessary if we are to be perfectly fulfilled.

Christ's humanity still lives inserted into our universe, drawing us to the "return" or fulfillment in accordance with his own image. His redeeming, restorative activity extends to all

human beings. It is through Christ's resurrectional activities in us that he can touch and change the universe into glory to the Father. Christ is the living Word in us, suggesting our good thoughts and workings in us to do good deeds. Individuals begin by contemplating the divine activity of Christ within themselves. This activity of the prolonged incarnation in our lives extends to the universe.

MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

Yet Gregory of Nyssa was rarely concerned with the rest of material creation. In God's providence this would be the task of Saint Maximus the Confessor (+662). Although he is best known as the one who synthesized the Orthodox teaching on Christ as Redeemer and Savior as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (451), Maximus interests modern readers more because of the cosmic dimensions of his synthesis of the whole created order, a harmonious union with God in and through Christ.

He renews and develops the central idea in the writings of Saint Irenaeus on the recapitulation of the whole universe in Christ. He sees the whole world in the light of the incarnation. Polycarp Sherwood, a patristic authority of the theology of Maximus, finds this to be the key to Maximus's speculation that has influenced all later Eastern Fathers, especially Saint Gregory Palamas: "For the coherence of Maximus' thought...does not derive from the systemization of the Church's teaching in function of some humanly posited principle or philosophy, but from a vision of divine things (*theoria*) in the light of the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the light therefore of that mystery by which alone we know the Father and our salvation."

Maximus saw more clearly than his predecessors that only a proper understanding of the purpose of the incarnation of Christ and his resurrection would yield a true understanding of the cosmos as it was created and destined by God. From this mystery he derived his fundamental law that would provide the keystone to his synthesis of the universe.

Both as the preexistent divine Logos and as fullness of existing human nature, Jesus Christ is the bond providing the unity of intelligibility of the cosmic energy (love) that are hidden beneath the surface of the material appearances of creatures. The *logos* of each creature is its principle of harmony that shows us the relationship of a given creature to God's total providence and to the total order of salvation. The whole world is interlocked and interrelated, but only thinking human beings are capable of seeing the harmonious relationship between the *logoi* and the Logos.

Maximus conceives the Logos on different levels of incarnational activity. He first sees him as the preexistent second person of the Trinity, the Word that speaks eternally the Mind of the Father and hence is the model according to which all creatures have their fullness. Next Maximus understands the Logos made precisely as a parallel to the historical incarnation. The Logos, God-man, gloriously resurrected, is inserted into the material world and is actively working to bring both human beings and the subhuman cosmos to the likeness of the divine idea possessed by the preexistent Logos.

The harmony and unity between the *logoi* and Logos is effected by us who by contemplation learn to see the intelligibility "within" the created order and learn in love to live according to God's purpose. But to see the *logoi* in all creatures, we must submit to the illuminating activity of the Logos. Maximus writes in his *Four Centuries on Charity*: "Just as the sun when it rises and lights up the world manifests both itself and the things lit up by it, so the Sun of Justice, rising upon a pure mind, manifests itself and the essences of all things that have been and will be brought to pass by it."

Only he who has this gift from the Logos to see beyond the appearances can unlock the world and see the harmony existing among all creatures. He is able to enter partially into God's very purpose, into God's very mind, to see the *raison d'être* of each created being.

THE CHURCH—THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

Christ's transforming activities through the power of the Holy Spirit continue in the cosmos through the Church. In the Church the living Logos is preached, and through the sacraments Christ is encountered in his resurrectional life by the Christian faithful. As has been pointed out, the supreme work of God living in us is to effect a unity among disjointed creatures, separated from their Creator and from one another by ignorance (spiritual darkness) and sin. It is the work of the Church to achieve this unity and it does this first by unity of true faith in the teachings of revelation.

If we are to be sanctified and approach to the likeness of God in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in holiness, hence be united with the Trinity in thought and affection, it must be through an exact profession of the faith. Subjectivism and self-delusion are overcome by obedient submission to the teaching hierarchy that Christ established over his Church. It is the Church that exposes to us the incarnate Christ, living in his glorious resurrected life to be encountered by us through the sacraments. Baptism administered by the Church opens to us the fruits of the incarnation. It is especially in the reception of the divine Logos and High Priest in the Holy Eucharist that we are divinized and are able to fulfill Christ's priestly function of making all things holy.

We conform ourselves to the Logos present by grace within us. Then we are able, through the enlightenment of the Logos, to perceive the *logoi* in other creatures and to perform the role of priest by offering a sacrifice of praise and glory to God through our proper use of creatures. Christ sacrifices himself totally in the Eucharist to give himself to us in order that we, through the use of our illumined reason, might be raised to the perfection of Christ.

The Church itself is the unifier of all that divides us from one another. It achieves an ecclesial unity which is not only a type of the future cosmic unity, but is the basis for it. It is the human race already united in the fullness of Christ, but not yet fully in all the cosmos. We human beings stand at the center of the cosmos. Deified human beings, in whom God lives and through whom he acts to fulfill the world, are the mediators between the disparate and disjointed world and the unity that has been achieved perfectly in the God-man's humanity through the incarnation.

Maximus insists over and over on the intimate connection between our deification and the transfiguration of the material cosmos. We, permeated by grace, achieve a unity in the material world around us as we live and act according to the divine Logos made flesh. We can quote again the words of Vladimir Lossky to summarize Maximus the Confessor's Christology and ecclesiology that represent the fullness of Orthodox theology: "In his way to union with God, the human person in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together in love the whole cosmos disordered by sin, that it may at last be transfigured by grace."

NEW CREATION

It is this total, unified vision of the early Eastern Fathers that is most enriching for us in the modern world. By viewing our relations to God, to other human beings, and to the rest of the created world from the fourth dimension of God's finality, they were able to avoid the dichotomy that in the West was mainly responsible in theological thought for the diminishment of the cosmic dimension of Christ's activity in our present world.

Rather than an antithesis between *nature* and *supernature*, they opposed *natural* and *unnatural*. Nature was not only the embryonic seed, but the fulfillment in all the creatures' final fruition. Our nature was always destined, not only by God's finality in creating us, but also in God's loving activity to accomplish his plan, to make us divinized children of God. Our total entity, body, soul, and spirit (with God's divine life dwelling in us and guiding us in all our choices according to his divine Spirit) was to move in a continuous process of loving activities in the cosmos to a more conscious, loving relationship to the divine Trinity.

In following the giant footsteps of Saint Paul and Saint John the Theologian and Evangelist, the Eastern Fathers had secured the transcendence of God the Creator and the centrality of us human beings in the created world as the cocreators with the Trinity by stressing that we possessed in our intellect and will the seeds of a likeness to God in grace. They stressed that Jesus Christ was not only the perfect model, the Image of the Father according to whom we and the whole cosmos were created, but that through his incarnation he was also in the midst of the material world exerting his power to bring the whole created order into its fullness through the instrumentality of other human beings, motivated by reciprocal love towards Christ.

The Church is the sign wherein the created cosmos enters into a transfiguration, and through its instrumentality the resurrectional life of Jesus Christ is extended to the cosmos. Retaining its own individuality, each creature is able to be assumed into a new transcendent relation with God as its end. The material world, through the Church, meets the Spirit. Retaining its materiality, it still participates in a new spirituality. The eschaton, through the Church, has been realized in the *now*, but *not yet* fully. The resurrection of Christ is applied to the transformation of the world into "God in all" to the degree that the baptized in Christ rise from a self-centered life to put on a new life in him. The rest of the world waits for us to stretch out in yearning (ecstasies) that will be climaxed only in the *parousia* when Jesus Christ shall come to render explicit what was always implicit, to reveal what was hidden, to fructify the powers in creation which were lying there in potency. He will accomplish this with our free-will cooperation to be reconcilers of all creation as we live in him in the *New Creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

Pilgrimage of the Heart; A treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality

Rev. Fr. George A. Maloney

For in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God...But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. (Saint Irenaeus)

For, as when the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from without, he whose likeness it is must needs come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood; for, for the sake of his picture, even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it; in the same way also the most Holy Son of the Father, came to our region to renew man, once made in His likeness and find him as one lost. (Saint Athanasius)

By whom was man to be recalled to the grace of his original state? To whom belonged the restoration of the fallen one, the recovery of the lost, the leading back of the wandered by the hand? To whom else than entirely to Him who is the Lord of his nature? For Him only who at the first had given the life was it possible, or fitting, to recover it when lost. This is what we are

taught and learn from the Revelation of the Truth, that God in the beginning made man and saved Him when he had fallen. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

Men, women and children, profoundly divided as to race, nation, language, manner of life, work, knowledge, honor, fortune...the Church recreates all of them in the Spirit. To all equally she communicates a divine aspect. All receive from her a unique nature which cannot be broken asunder, a nature which no longer permits one to take into consideration the many and profound differences which are their lot. In that way all are raised up and united in a manner which is truly Catholic. In her none is in the least degree separated from the community, all are grounded, so to speak, in one another by the simple and indivisible power of faith....Christ, too, is all in all. He who contains all in Himself according to the unique, infinite and all-wise power of His goodness—as a center upon which all lines converge—that the creatures of the one God may not live as strangers or enemies one with another, having no place in common, where they may display their love and their peace. (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

I cannot grieve God by keeping silent what He has ordered to be spoken and confessed. For if, according to the divine Apostle, it is He Himself who has set in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly doctors, it is clear that he has spoken through them. By all of Holy Scripture, by the Old and New Testament, by the holy doctors and synods we are taught. (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

And yet He has made the church His body, and He builds it with love through the increase of the faithful, until we shall all be united in one perfect Man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). If then the Church is Christ's body, Christ is the Head of the body, forming the countenance of the Church with His own features. Perhaps it is this that the friends of the Bridegroom saw when they were given heart: in her they see more clearly that which is invisible. It is like men who are unable to look upon the sun, yet they can see it by its reflection in the water. So the friends of the Bridegroom see the Sun of Justice by looking upon the face of the Church as though it were a pure mirror, and thus He can be seen by His reflection. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

In Christ, that which is uncreated, eternal, existing before the ages, is completely inexpressible and incomprehensible to all created intellects. Yet that which was revealed in the flesh can to a certain extent be grasped by human understanding. It is toward this element in Christ that the Church, our teacher, looks, and of this does she speak, inasmuch as this can be made intelligible to those who listen to her. What I am chiefly referring to here is the mystery of salvation, by which God was revealed to us in the flesh....And after He had reunited to Himself by the sacrifice of first-fruits the mortal substance of the flesh He had received from an Immaculate Virgin, He continued to sanctify our common humanity by His own immortality. This He does through these who are united with Him according to their share in the mystery, by nourishing His own Body the Church, and by harmoniously fitting to it all the various limbs that grow by faith in Him. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

We are called the Body of Christ, according to the words of the Apostle "You are the Body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27) not because by losing our own bodies we become His body, nor because He personally passes into us or is particularized into members; but because, like the flesh of Christ, our flesh also is freed from the corruption of sin.

For as Christ by nature was without sin as a man, both in flesh and soul, so we too who believe in Him and have put Him on in the Spirit may, by exerting our will, be in Him without sin. **(Maximus the Confessor)**

May all of you continue to experience the merciful love of God throughout this Nativity Fast,
Father John Michael Zboyovski