

Doctrine of God

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I. Doctrine of God

I/1 Divine Revelation and its Transmission

The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – created the world and “did not leave himself without witness” (Acts 14:17), but revealed and continues to reveal himself in many and various ways in the world and in history.

1. God reveals himself in his works, for “ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his invisible power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:20) and this especially in men who were created in his image and likeness, who “show that what the law requires is written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:15).

2. Men were disobedient to the divine commandment and sinned, and their likeness to God became distorted and obscured, and they were unable to know the true God, “became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened”, they therefore “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:21, 25)

But God the All Merciful, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) chose to reveal himself to the world in a direct and personal way. God revealed himself, therefore, directly and effectively “of old to our fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1) and this in the people of Israel. This revelation of God, although real, was nevertheless partial and educational in character: “the law was our custodian until Christ came” (Gal. 3:24).

3. “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). In Jesus Christ there took place the whole and perfect revelation of God: “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Only in Jesus Christ is salvation possible: “and there is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12). In Jesus Christ, the Triune God, whose essence is inaccessible and incomprehensible to us, revealed himself in his salvific energies and, indeed, in his whole plenitude: “We say that we do indeed know our God from his energies, ... but his essence remains beyond our reach” (Basil the Great, ep. 234.1 – PG 32.869).

4. This supernatural revelation in Christ is communicated in the Tradition of the Holy Apostles, which was handed on in written form in the Scriptures inspired by God and in oral form by the living voice of the Church. The oral tradition is preserved, on the one hand, in the

Creed and other definitions and canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils and local synods, in the writings of the Holy Fathers and in the holy liturgy and generally in the Church's liturgical practice, and, on the other hand, finds expression in the continued official teaching of the Church.

5. Scripture and tradition are not different expressions of the divine revelation but distinct ways of expressing one and the same Apostolic Tradition. Nor does any question arise, therefore, of the precedence of one over the other: "both have the same force in relation to true religion" (Basil the Great, Spir. 27.2 – PG 32.188). "Scripture is understood within the tradition, but the tradition preserves its purity and the criterion of its truth through Scripture and from the content of Scripture" (Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission for the Holy and Great Synod, 16th to 28th July 1971, Chambésy 1973, p.110). The Apostolic Tradition is preserved and handed on unadulterated by the Church in the Holy Spirit.

In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on "Divine Revelation and its Transmission" represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.

Chambésy/Geneva, August 23, 1975

Signatures

1/2 The Canon of Holy Scripture

Holy Scripture consists of the books of the Old and New Testaments which have been accepted by the Church into the canon established by it and in use in it. They are:

a) In the Old Testament the twenty-two – according to a different reckoning the thirty-nine – books of the Hebrew canon, together with another ten books, the so-called "Anagignoskomena", i.e. books "read" or "worth reading", which were later known in the West as "deuterocanonic", a total of forty-nine books.

The first-mentioned thirty-nine books are "canonical": Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra (Greek: 2 Esra, Vulgate and Slavonic: 1 Esra), Nehemiah, Esther, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Eze-

kiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The additional ten books, the Anagignoskomena, are: Judith, Greek: 1 Esra (Vulgate: 3 Esra, Slavonic: 2 Esra), 1, 2 and 3 Maccabees, Tobias, Jesus Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah.

The “canonical” books are distinguished by the special authority constantly accorded to them by the Church; but the Church also values highly the Anagignoskomena which have long been part of its canon of Holy Scripture:

Note. With respect to the books Greek: 1 Esra (Vulgate: 3 Esra, Slavonic: 2 Esra) and 3 Maccabees, the Old Catholic Commission adds the following qualification: Although these books are not rejected by their Church, they are not included in the Old Catholic lists of the biblical books, which derive from an old Latin tradition. The International Conference of Old Catholic Bishops still has to declare its position on this point.

b) The canonical books of the New Testament number twenty-seven in all, namely: the four gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the letters of Paul: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews; the Catholic Epistles: James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude; and the Revelation to John.

In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “The Canon of Holy Scripture” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.

Chambésy/Geneva, August 25, 1975

Signatures

1/3 The Holy Trinity

We believe and confess One God in three hypostases, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father, who “loved” the Son “before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24), revealed himself through him in the Holy Spirit in order that this love might be in his disciples (Jn. 17:26) through the communion of the Holy Spirit who has been “sent into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6). This revelation is an ineffable and inexplicable mystery, a mystery of love, “for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

1. On the basis of this revelation we believe that the God who is by nature one is triune in the hypostases or persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit denote the three modes of being, without beginning and eternal, of the three persons and their interrelationships; these persons are indivisibly bound up with one another and united in one divine nature. Thus “we worship the unity in the trinity and the trinity in the unity, in their paradoxical differentiation and unity” (Gregory of Nazianzus, or. 25.17 – PG 35.1221).

2. We interpret this unity, on the one hand and above all, in terms of the unity and identity of the divine nature, and, on the other hand, in terms of the unity and identity of the properties, energies and will, and when we understand the Son and the Holy Spirit to derive from the Father as their one origin and ground (*aition*), we are careful to preserve the unity without confusion. The three divine persons are united in the one God, bound together yet without confusion, on the one hand because they are of one nature, on the other hand because they interpenetrate each other without confusion. Therefore “from the unity of nature and the mutual penetration of the hypostases and from the identity of their will and work, their power and might and movement, we know that God is one and undivided; for truly one is God: God (Father) and the Word and his Spirit” (John of Damascus, f.o. 8 – PG 94.825), to the eternal exclusion of any separation or division of nature, any subordination of the three persons on the pretext of precedence or eminence.

3. We interpret the trinity on the one hand in terms of the difference between the three persons, but on the other hand, in terms of the diversity of their processions. Thus the three divine persons are distinct from each other without being divided; each has the fullness of divinity, and the one divine nature remains, of course, undivided and unseparated, so that “the divinity is undivided in the distinct (hypostases)” (*ameristos en memerismenois* – Gregory of Nazianzus, or. 31.14 – PG 36.149). The Father is distinct from the other persons inasmuch as from his nature and from all eternity he begets the Son and sends forth the Holy Spirit. The Son is distinct from the other persons inasmuch as he is begotten of his Father; the Holy Spirit inasmuch as he proceeds from the Father. Thus the Father is unbegotten, without ground (*anaitios*) and without origin, but at the same time is “the one origin and the one root and spring of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Basil the Great, hom. 24.4 – PG 31.609). He alone is their ground (*aitios*) who from eternity begets the Son and sends forth the Holy Spirit.

As for the Son, he is begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit is sent forth or proceeds from the Father. The Father, therefore, is without ground (*anaitios*) and himself the ground (*autoaitios*), whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit have their ground in the Father, the Son because he is begotten, the Spirit because he is sent forth, and indeed in both cases, without beginning and eternally, undivided and unseparated. Accordingly the mysterious and ineffable but nevertheless real distinction between the three hypostases or persons of the Holy Trinity consists exclusively in these their three incommunicable properties, namely, in the unbegottenness of the Father, the begottenness of the Son, and in the procession of the Holy Spirit. “The three holy hypostases are distinct exclusively in these hypostatic properties, not in nature, but by the distinctive feature of each hypostasis, and thus separated they remain inseparable” since they “do not denote the nature but the mutual relationship and mode of being” (John of Damascus, f.o. 8;10 – PG 94.824, 837).

4. On the Holy Spirit in particular, it is taught in Holy Scripture (Jn. 15:26), in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of the 2nd Ecumenical Council, and in the ancient Church generally, that he proceeds from the Father, the source and origin of divinity. His eternal procession from the Father is here to be distinguished from his temporal revelation and sending into the world, which takes place through the Son. When therefore we understand the procession of the Holy Spirit in the sense of his eternal being and procession without beginning, we confess the procession from the Father alone, and not also from the Son. But when we understand it in the sense of the temporal procession of the Holy Spirit and of his sending into the world, then we confess the procession from the Father through the Son or even from both Father and Son.

Accordingly we believe in the Holy Spirit “who proceeds from the Father ... and is communicated to the whole creation through the Son... We do not say that the Spirit is from the Son... (But) we confess that he is revealed and communicated to us through the Son... (He is) the Holy Spirit of God the Father, since it is indeed from the Father that he proceeds, but he is also called (Spirit) of the Son because he is indeed revealed and communicated to the creation through the Son, but does not derive his being from the Son” (John of Damascus, f.o. 8;12; hom. 4.4 – PG 94.821, 832, 833, [849]; 96.605).

In this sense the Doctrinal Letter of the International Conference of Old Catholic Bishops in 1969 states: “We entirely reject the addition

of the *filioque* adopted in the West in the eleventh century without recognition by an ecumenical council. The ground for this rejection is not merely the uncanonical form of this addition, though this in itself represents an offence against love as the bond of unity. But above all we repudiate any theological doctrine which makes the Son joint author of the Spirit.” In a similar sense, the special statement of the same Bishops’ Conference in the same year, “On the Filioque Question”, also emphasizes “that there is only one principle and one source in the most Holy Trinity, namely, the Father”.

In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “The Holy Trinity” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.

Chambésy/Geneva, August 28, 1975

Signatures