

## THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST



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“The time is fulfilled,”<sup>1</sup> “the times of ignorance”<sup>2</sup> passed. “The fullness of the time came,”<sup>3</sup> and the old world’s “shadows flee away.”<sup>4</sup> “The Logos became flesh, and lived among us.”<sup>5</sup> “God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, that might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children.”<sup>6</sup> The Logos (Word) of God, “begotten of the Father before all worlds (aeons) . . . was

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17:30.

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 4:4.

<sup>4</sup> Song of Songs 2:17.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 4:4–5.

incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus Christ was born *of* the Virgin Mary, not *through* the Virgin Mary, in the sense that he has a human body and soul, his human soul, like ours, has intellect and will, and, in general, Jesus Christ is like man in all things but sin. However, simultaneously, Jesus Christ has the infinite intellect and will of God. Jesus Christ is one divine person (hypostasis), namely, the Logos of God, having two natures, the human and the divine. Thus, Virgin Mary is called Theotokos, which is a Greek word that literally means ‘birth-giver of God.’<sup>8</sup> “Without controversy, the mystery of godliness is great: God was revealed in the flesh.”<sup>9</sup> The birth of Jesus Christ signals the entrance of the suprahistorical telos of history into historical becoming.

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ started his earthly ministry when he became 30 years old. When adequately understood, the number thirty secretly proclaims Jesus Christ the Creator and Preserver of time, nature, and the world of ideas as follows:<sup>10</sup> seven symbolizes the Creator of time, because time is divided in weeks, and each week has seven days, and because, according to Moses’s cosmogony, the creation of the world was completed in seven days; five symbolizes the Creator of nature, because there are five senses; eight symbolizes the Creator of the intelligible world, or the world of ideas, because the intelligible world transcends the sensible (temporal) world, and the latter is symbolized by number seven; ten symbolizes the Preserver of the world, because, according to the Holy Bible, God gave ten commandments for the moral perfection of mankind, and because the first letter of the name of the Incarnate Logos in Greek—namely, ΙΗΣΟΥΣ (JESUS)—is the tenth letter of the Greek alphabet. The sum of five, seven, eight, and ten is the symbolically important number thirty. If we add three, that is, the number of the Holy Trinity, to thirty, then we get thirty-three, which symbolizes the Exaltation of Jesus Christ.

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,”<sup>11</sup> “the logos of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert, and he went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>12</sup> “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee”<sup>13</sup> “to the Jordan to John to be baptized.”<sup>14</sup> “But John would have hindered him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?’ But Jesus answering, said to him, ‘Allow it now; for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed him. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming to him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”<sup>15</sup>

As John Chrysostom has pointed out, Jesus Christ was baptized neither according to the Jewish baptism nor according to the Christian baptism, but according to John the Baptist’s type of baptism.<sup>16</sup> These three types of baptism—namely, the Jewish, the

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<sup>7</sup> The Creed of Christendom according to the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD).

<sup>8</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 36, 113, 633, 641

<sup>9</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>10</sup> The following remarks about the spiritual meaning of various numbers associated with the person of Jesus Christ have originally been proposed by Maximus the Confessor; Maximus the Confessor, “First Century” (written for Thalassius), *Philokalia*, Vol. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 3:1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 3:3.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 1:9.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 1:13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 3:14–17.

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 49, 367.

Christian, and the Johannite baptism—are different from each other. The Jewish type of baptism was cleansing man from corporeal filths, but not from spiritual sins. Thus, according to the Mosaic Law, a sinful person shall “bathe himself in water,” but he shall “be unclean until the evening.”<sup>17</sup> According to John Chrysostom, cleansing instructions were incorporated into the Mosaic Law not because specific material objects, e.g., specific types of food, clothes, etc., were literally unclean, but in order to instruct people who were still spiritually imperfect and, therefore, needed instructions for material cleansing to become more reverent toward God and pay more attention to their conscience.<sup>18</sup> The Christian type of baptism is not like the Jewish one, but it is much more important than that and full of God’s grace. Therefore, the Christian type of baptism cleanses the soul from ancestral sin and gives the Holy Spirit to it. John the Baptist’s type of baptism was spiritually superior to the Jewish one, but it is spiritually inferior to the Christian type of baptism. John the Baptist’s type of baptism was spiritually superior to the Jewish one, because, in contradistinction to the Mosaic Law, which was preaching cleansing by instructing people to wash their clothes and bathe themselves in water, John the Baptist was preaching cleansing by instructing people to “produce fruit worthy of repentance.”<sup>19</sup> However, according to John Chrysostom, John the Baptist’s type of baptism is spiritually inferior to the Christian type of baptism, because it was neither giving the Holy Spirit to those who were being baptized by John the Baptist nor was it offering forgiveness of sins through God’s grace.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus Christ said about John the Baptist: “among those who are born of women there is no one greater than John, yet he who is least in God’s kingdom is greater than he.”<sup>21</sup> The previous statement means that, of all people, no one fulfilled his God-given purpose better than John the Baptist, yet, in God’s kingdom, all who come after John the Baptist have a greater spiritual heritage, because the human nature was restored to its Paradisiacal state, that is, it became capable of deification, as a result of the Incarnation of the divine Logos, namely, Jesus Christ. In other words, through his previous statement, Jesus Christ was contrasting life before Christ with life in the fullness of Christ’s kingdom.

Why was Jesus Christ baptized by John the Baptist? According to Cyril of Alexandria, Jesus Christ received John the Baptist’s type of baptism, whose nature was incapable of offering forgiveness of sins through God’s grace, because, in this way, Jesus Christ taught us that he did not need to receive forgiveness of sins, since he assumed the human nature, with its infirmities, its liabilities, its temptations, but he was totally free from the law of sin, since he was the only-begotten Son and Logos of God.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, according to John Chrysostom, Jesus Christ received John the Baptist’s type of baptism, whose nature was incapable of giving the Holy Spirit to those who were being baptized by John the Baptist, because, in this way, Jesus Christ taught us that he did not need to be given the Holy Spirit through baptism, since Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Logos of God, and his flesh was originally created by the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

However, the following question emerges: since Jesus Christ did not need to repent for anything, nor did he need to receive the Holy Spirit through baptism (since the totality of the Holy Spirit is in the only-begotten Son and Logos of God), why didn’t he

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<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 17:15.

<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 49, 366.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 3:8.

<sup>20</sup> John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 49, 369.

<sup>21</sup> Luke 7:28.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 72, 521.

<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 49, 367.

simply avoid John the Baptist's baptism? According to John Chrysostom, the answer to the previous question is that, by receiving John the Baptist's baptism, Jesus Christ was made known to the people by God, namely, through the Father's voice, saying that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and through the Holy Spirit, who bore witness to Jesus Christ's divinity by descending like a dove and lighting upon Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity was revealed. Furthermore, John Chrysostom points out that, by being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus Christ fulfilled "all righteousness," and, thus, Jesus Christ revealed himself as the *telos* of the Mosaic Law.<sup>25</sup> After Jesus Christ's baptism, the Mosaic Law was brought to its *telos* and transcended, since Jesus Christ preached the spiritual worship of God, instead of Moses's legalistic system of worship, he preached the deification of man, instead of Moses's legalistic system of morality, and he preached the kingdom of God, instead of an earthly kingdom. As John the Evangelist writes, "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup>

According to the Greek church fathers Theophilus of Antioch<sup>27</sup> and Irenaeus of Lyons,<sup>28</sup> before the Fall of man, the Forebears of humanity were endowed with potential perfection, in the sense that they were endowed with the image of God from the start, and they were called to acquire the likeness of God by their own free will and efforts, assisted simultaneously by God's uncreated grace.<sup>29</sup> From the Greek church fathers' perspective, the narration of the book of Genesis is a story of man's struggle for spiritual progress and ontological perfection. In this context, the Fall of man can be interpreted as follows: in the state of Paradise, the first Adam, the Paradisiacal Adam, was existing unceasingly united with his archetype, that is, with his ontological *telos*, but, when he decided to assert his own reason's autonomy and self-sufficiency vis-à-vis the divine Logos, namely, vis-à-vis his effective and final cause, he interrupted his communion with God, and, therefore, he lost the divine Logos (i.e., he failed to keep the divine Logos in mind). Without the divine Logos, man was unable to actualize his ontological potential, that is, to achieve his deification. Thus, as Gregory the Theologian has pointed out, the first Adam, by losing the divine Logos, deprived humanity of access to Paradise.<sup>30</sup> However, the second Adam, namely, Jesus Christ, by fulfilling "all righteousness" and revealing the divine Logos, restored humanity's access to Paradise. Thus, by the term 'Paradise,' we should understand a state of perfect communion between man and God, and, since, after the Incarnation of the Logos in the person of Jesus Christ, the Father (divine Nous) sends the Holy Spirit to humanity in the name of Jesus Christ,<sup>31</sup> man can experience Paradise in this life, too. Moreover, by the term 'sin,' we should understand the commitment of spiritual errors, that is, acts and attitudes

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, Vol. 49, 367–368.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, Vol. 49, 369.

<sup>26</sup> John 1:17.

<sup>27</sup> Theophilus of Antioch was a second-century Bishop of Antioch and Christian apologist. In his *Studia Biblica* (p. 90), William Sanday describes him as "one of the precursors of that group of writers who, from Irenaeus to Cyprian, not only break the obscurity which rests on the earliest history of the church, but alike in the East and in the West carry it to the front in literary eminence, and distance all their heathen contemporaries." He is venerated as a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity.

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202) was Bishop of Lugdunum (now Lyons, France). He was a Greek from Smyrna in Asia Minor. He is venerated as a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity.

<sup>29</sup> John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, translated by George S. Gabriel, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory the Theologian, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 36, 353.

<sup>31</sup> John 14:26.

that contradict man's telos, which is his deification. There is a symbolic analogy between Noah's flood and Jesus Christ's baptism: through Noah's flood, the earth was cleansed,<sup>32</sup> and, through Jesus Christ, the human nature was cleansed.

After his baptism, Jesus Christ "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."<sup>33</sup> "He was there in the wilderness forty days . . . with the wild animals,"<sup>34</sup> and "after fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."<sup>35</sup> After being tempted by Satan and defeating the tempter, "the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him."<sup>36</sup> There is a symbolic analogy between the children of Israel who, after crossing the Red Sea, "walked forty years in the wilderness,"<sup>37</sup> and Jesus Christ, who was in the wilderness forty days. According to Epiphanius of Cyprus,<sup>38</sup> the 'wilderness' is a symbol of our inner earth, what Cyril of Alexandria refers to as humanity's "fallen nature,"<sup>39</sup> and what Gregory of Nyssa refers to as a rough soul,<sup>40</sup> i.e., a filthy, dry, and tough soul. The 'wild animals' that exist in the previous symbolic wilderness symbolize selfish passions and desires, and the worst of all these 'wild animals' is the Devil, who, according to the Apostle Peter, "walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,"<sup>41</sup> since the Devil is an angel (spiritual being) who exercised his freedom of will in such an errant way that he became the paradigmatic representative of ontological failure, which is the essence of evil. However, due to the presence of Jesus Christ, the 'wilderness' is transformed, or rather transmuted, into a cleansed soul in which the communion between man and God takes place. Thus, the Prophet Isaiah rejoices, saying: "The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a lily."<sup>42</sup> The previous transmutation is the essence of the mystery of the church of Christ.

Jesus Christ explicitly said to a Pharisee called Nicodemus that real theology and the salvation of man consist in man's participation in the grace of God: "unless one is born anew, he cannot see God's kingdom . . . unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into God's kingdom. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>43</sup> In the previous teaching of Jesus Christ, water symbolizes baptism. Basil the Great has pointed out that, if the Israelites had not crossed the Red Sea, they could not separate themselves from the Pharaoh, and that, similarly, through baptism, Christians separate themselves from "Devil's tyranny."<sup>44</sup> According to Basil the Great, baptized Christians imitate the Prophet Joshua (Jesus of Navi): they leave the 'wilderness' (i.e., the sin) and cross the Jordan (i.e., the border between the kingdom of grace and the realm of Devil's tyranny), just as Joshua "came up out of the middle of

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<sup>32</sup> Genesis 6–9.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 4:1.

<sup>34</sup> Mark 1:13.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 4:2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 4:11.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua 5:6.

<sup>38</sup> Epiphanius of Cyprus, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 41, 1032. Epiphanius of Cyprus was a fourth-century Bishop of Salamis, Cyprus. He is venerated as a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity.

<sup>39</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 77, 1188.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 46, 593.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Peter 5:8.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 35:1.

<sup>43</sup> John 3:3–7.

<sup>44</sup> Basil the Great, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 31, 428.

the Jordan”;<sup>45</sup> they bear Christ’s Gospel, just as Joshua was bearing the Ark of God’s Covenant;<sup>46</sup> they run toward the Christian polity, a polity flowing with grace, just as Joshua was moving toward the promised land, “a land flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>47</sup>

One day that Jesus Christ was passing through Samaria, “being tired from his journey,” he sat down by Jacob’s well, and he revealed the mystery of true worship to a Samaritan woman who came to draw water: “the hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, will you worship the Father . . . the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the father seeks such to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, the true temple for the true worship of God is man’s soul, particularly, the mind (the repository of divine energy in man), and the perfect way of worshipping God consists in cleansing our mind from all created forms of knowledge (e.g., our own thoughts, sentiments, instincts, etc.) in order to be filled with God’s grace. Jesus Christ contrasts worshipping God “in spirit and truth”—which is focused on taking care of our inner temple of God—with the Pharisees’ religious legalism and formalism and with the Sadducees’ ritualism and pietism. In this context, Jesus Christ said that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,”<sup>49</sup> and he exposed the real ethos and the real motives of the scribes and the Pharisees, saying the following: “Woe to you, scribes and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness . . . For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, whereas the Sadducees believed that the Temple of Jerusalem could also be used as a place to transact business, “Jesus entered into the temple of God, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple.”<sup>51</sup>

Jesus Christ said to the Samaritan woman to whom he revealed the true worship: “You said well, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband.”<sup>52</sup> The Greek church father Euthymius Zigavenos, a prominent Byzantine theologian and author, has interpreted the previous Biblical passage as follows: the Samaritan woman symbolizes the human nature, which, symbolically, has had “five husbands,” that is, five laws, and, during the time of Jesus Christ, it had a sixth law; the first law that the human nature has had was the law of Paradise, the second was the law after the Fall of Adam (post-Paradisiacal law), the third was the law of the Flood of Noah (Noahic Covenant, found in Genesis 9:8–17), the fourth was the law of Abraham’s circumcision (found in Genesis 17:23–27), the fifth was the law of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (found in Genesis 22:7–8; God did not want Isaac to die, but He wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in his heart, so it would be clear that Abraham loved God more than he loved his son), and the sixth law was the Law of Moses (found in Exodus, chapters 20–31).<sup>53</sup> The Law of Moses was only

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<sup>45</sup> Joshua 4:18.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 4:9–11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 5:6.

<sup>48</sup> John 6:3–24.

<sup>49</sup> Mark 2:27.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 23:25–27.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 21:12.

<sup>52</sup> John 4:17–18

<sup>53</sup> Zigavenos, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 129, 1193.

the shadow of good things to come,<sup>54</sup> it could not bring about justification,<sup>55</sup> it could not bring about perfection,<sup>56</sup> it could not free man's conscience from a knowledge of sin,<sup>57</sup> and, therefore, when Christ was born, humanity was in need of a new law. "One of the scribes" asked Jesus Christ, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?"<sup>58</sup> Jesus Christ's answer was the following: "The greatest is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second is like this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."<sup>59</sup> In addition, at the Last Supper with his disciples, before being Crucified, Jesus Christ said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>60</sup> The new law, that is, the Law of Christ, is love.

In order to understand love as the Law of Christ, we must interpret love not as a sentiment, but as God's mode of being. A sentiment is an emotion endowed with an evaluative judgment. Love *qua* sentiment means that a person X loves a person Y because of the benefits (e.g., emotional gratification, material benefits, etc.) that come from that relationship, and, therefore, ultimately, the energy of X's love for Y returns to X. Sentimental, worldly love is self-seeking: when we love in this way, we seek to unite ourselves with some other mortal human being for immediate purposes, such as happiness, self-satisfaction, or worldly joys and pleasures. However, God loves because this is the way He exists, since He is totally self-sufficient, and, thus, He does not need to receive any benefit from any relationship. In regard to God, communion is an ontological category, since God is a communion of three Persons, and God is in communion with Creation, since the latter is an actualization of God's will. Thus, God's love stems from the ontological category of communion, and, in fact, it is the life of communion, that is, Paradise. Moreover, love as the Law of Christ, that is, love as God's mode of being, is equivalent to spiritual freedom, because it implies that one is free from any logical, natural or historical necessity; such a person is even free from the logic of individual interest. This is the essence of the mystery of the Eucharist, which Jesus Christ instituted at the Last Supper.<sup>61</sup>

From the perspective of the Law of Christ, we can talk meaningfully about 'philosophical theology' only if and to the extent that the term 'philosophy'—which is a Greek word literally meaning love of wisdom—is understood as a way of life that manifests and expresses one's conscious choice to seek truth freely and "for the sake of *theoria*"; hence, from the previous perspective, philosophers do what they do due to a conscious erotic urge toward a principle and value of Transcendence, leading from 'being' to a 'more-than-being.' This is the essence of the classical Greek approach to philosophy. According to Herodotus's account (1.29.2), Solon, one of the so-called "seven sages" of ancient Greece (i.e., seven early-sixth-century BC philosophers, statesmen, and law-givers), having given the Athenians new laws, travelled around the

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<sup>54</sup> Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 13:39.

<sup>56</sup> Hebrews 7:19.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 10:1–4.

<sup>58</sup> Mark 12:28

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 12:29–31.

<sup>60</sup> John 13:34–35.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29.

world “for the sake of *theoria*.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, philosophy is a self-sufficient conscious enquiry that is nurtured and enriched by the given activity itself, since *theoria*, i.e., gazing at the real truth, is the ultimate pleasure of the mind, and, therefore, an end-in-itself.

Jesus Christ built his church on the “rock”<sup>63</sup> of mystery, that is, on a truth that was not revealed by “flesh and blood” (i.e., it did not originate from a created source of knowledge), but by God the Father himself,<sup>64</sup> and, therefore, the church of Christ transcends critical reasoning.

In general, the language of Christ and his church is symbolic, but many people nominally identified as Christians are insensitive to symbolism and often prone to superstition. The word ‘symbol’ is etymologically derived from the Greek verb *syμβάλlo*, which means to place together and to join. In general, a symbol has the following qualities: (i) Not only does it refer to an external reality, but also it discloses within itself the nature of the external reality to which it refers. (ii) It participates in the spiritual reality of the symbolized object, function, or process. Therefore, a symbol is substantially different from an allegory; whereas the first participates in the spiritual reality of the symbolized object, function, or process, an allegory is something that passively and rather formalistically represents or stands for something else. (iii) Even though it participates in the spiritual reality of the symbolized object, function, or process, a symbol never represents the reality of the symbolized object, function, or process exhaustively, and, therefore, the spiritual reality of the symbolized object, function, or process always transcends the corresponding symbol; the reality of the symbolized object, function, or process always remains beyond any representation and image, and it can be disclosed only through an intuitive gaze, that is, through faith.

When faith is missing, then one can still be aware of the difference between a symbol and an allegory (effigy), but then one’s experience of a symbol consists in either empathy or superstition. In order to understand the difference between empathy and symbolism, we may, for instance, think of an English social anthropologist who understands (empathizes with) a tribe in Sudan that he observes, but he does not experience that tribe’s behavior and attitudes as his own personal behavior and attitudes. In order to understand the difference between superstition and symbolism, we must focus on the fact that the spiritual reality of the symbolized object, function, or process can be accessed only through faith, that is, spiritually and not representationally, whereas the superstitious approach to symbols is necessarily dependent on representation.

The fourteenth-century AD Byzantine theologian Nikolaos Cabasilas, who is venerated as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox church, wrote a treatise *On the Divine Liturgy*, in which he uses the term ‘symbol’ as I previously defined it, in order to interpret the divine liturgy, in general, and Jesus Christ’s command, “do this in remembrance of me,”<sup>65</sup> in particular. According to Cabasilas, the rite of the divine liturgy has been composed for two reasons: first, the holy liturgy does not merely narrate aspects of the divine economy (i.e., God’s actions to bring about the world’s salvation, and, generally, His interactions with the world), but it presents them in a dramatized way before our eyes; secondly, due to its symbolic character, the holy liturgy helps people’s minds to remain firmly oriented toward events of the divine

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<sup>62</sup> Patricia Curd and Daniel W. Graham, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, 2008, p. 512.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 16:18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 16:17.

<sup>65</sup> Luke 22:19.

economy until the divine liturgy culminates in the eucharist. Therefore, any superstitious approach to the Christian church's symbolic life and any attempt to treat symbols as if they were mere allegories preclude people from having an authentic experience of Christian life, which consists in union with Christ effected by Christian symbols.

### **The Concept of Catholicity and the Transcendentality of the Church of Christ**

In regard to the genuine Christian church ethos, in general, Jesus Christ's rules are clear: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you";<sup>66</sup> and: "whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."<sup>67</sup> Jesus Christ's guidelines for the clergy emphasize unselfishness,<sup>68</sup> which has been perfectly exemplified by Jesus Christ himself; wherefore the Apostle Paul has said: "He emptied himself."<sup>69</sup>

A very important issue that torments both Eastern and Western Christianity is the notion of the 'catholicity,' or universality, of the church. The Eastern Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople is called "Ecumenical Patriarch," and the Pope of Rome claims primacy over the universal church. The first Patriarch of Constantinople to be called "Ecumenical Patriarch" was John the Faster, who was a most meek and gentle ecclesiastical person. The Byzantine Emperor Maurice gave John the Faster this title in 588 AD. In general, the Byzantines loved impressive titles. Thus, the bigger and more impressive one's title was, the happier that person was.

In the sixth century AD, Constantinople was, indeed, the 'ecumenical city,' in the sense that it was the religious, political, cultural, economic, and legislative center of the *ecumēne*, that is, of the entire Roman Empire. The title 'ecumenical' was not used by the Patriarchs of Constantinople alone. There was also, for instance, an "Ecumenical Librarian" in Constantinople. Therefore, since the term *ecumēne* referred to the Roman Empire, the term 'ecumenical' carried the significance of 'imperial.' In this context, the "Ecumenical Librarian" was the chief librarian of the Imperial City, and he did not assume authority over other librarians of the empire. Similarly, the "Ecumenical Patriarch" was the Bishop of the Imperial City, and not the leader of world Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the term 'Ecumenical Council' refers to a council of bishops from the whole *ecumēne*, that is, from the whole Roman Empire.

However, John the Faster's new title, "Ecumenical Patriarch," meaning Patriarch (Bishop) of the Imperial City, was translated into Latin as "Universal Patriarch." Thus, alarmed at the thought that one bishop was claiming to himself authority over all other bishops, the then Pope of Rome, Gregory the Great wrote to John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, the following: "I pray you, therefore, reflect that by your bold presumption, the peace of the whole Church is troubled, and that you are at enmity with *that grace which was given to all in communion*"; and he went on as follows: "What will you say to Christ, Who is the Head of the universal church . . . you who, by your title *universal*, would bring all His members into subjection to yourself?"<sup>70</sup> Finally, in the same letter, Pope Gregory asked Patriarch John the following question in regard to the assumption of the title "Universal Patriarch": "Whom, I pray you tell me, whom do you imitate by this perverse title if not [Lucifer] who, despising the legions of angels,

<sup>66</sup> John 15:15.

<sup>67</sup> Mark 10:44.

<sup>68</sup> John 10:11.

<sup>69</sup> Philippians 2:7.

<sup>70</sup> See George A. Klingman, *Church History for Busy People*, third edition, 1928, p. 16.

his companions, endeavored to mount to the highest?"<sup>71</sup> In addition, far from reserving to himself the prerogative of 'universal bishop,' Pope Gregory explained that the See of Rome had refused a like title and honor.

Pope Gregory the Great's aforementioned epistle to the Orthodox bishops of his day accurately falls upon all those subsequent Popes of Rome who claimed supremacy over all other bishops of the universal church of Christ. In his book *The Papacy*, Abbé Guettée refers to the aforementioned dispute between Pope Gregory the Great and Patriarch John the Faster and to many other similar incidents that highlight and elucidate the ecclesiological departure of subsequent Vatican leaders from the ancient See of Rome. The dispute between Pope Gregory the Great and Patriarch John the Faster in regard to the title "Ecumenical Patriarch," which was assumed by the latter, was due to a mistranslation of the term 'ecumenical' (particularly, the term 'Ecumenical Patriarch' was translated into Latin as 'Universal Patriarch,' whereas it should have been translated as 'Patriarch of the Imperial City'), but it gave the opportunity to those two bishops, Pope Gregory and Patriarch John, to clarify and agree that the church of Christ has no 'universal bishop,' other than Jesus Christ himself. Thus, ultimately, the Eastern Orthodox church venerates both Pope Gregory the Great and Patriarch John the Faster as saints. On the other hand, in 1870, at the First Vatican Council, ultramontanism achieved victory over conciliarism, with the pronouncement of Papal infallibility and of Papal supremacy, that is, the Pope was officially proclaimed a 'universal bishop,'<sup>72</sup> and many Eastern Orthodox Christians think that the Archbishop of Constantinople is the leader of world Orthodoxy.

What is, ultimately, the mark of a true 'catholic'? If we understand the ontological significance of 'catholicity,' then we realize that the nature of the answer to the previous question is definitely not administrative. Being a true 'catholic' does not consist in being in communion with a supposedly 'universal' episcopal See. The true and genuine 'catholicity,' that is, 'universality,' consists in being in ontologically grounded communion with God and, precisely, in participating in God's grace, through which and due to which man is deified, that is, he attains to 'catholicity,' or 'universality,' since a partaker of God's energies has an infinitely large psychic space, capable of receiving God, just as the Virgin Mary received God in her womb. In other words, the true and genuine 'catholicity' or 'universality' refers not to the size of a religious or a political ruler's jurisdiction, but to the size of man's soul. In fact, Jesus Christ has called each and every man, personally, to attain to universality through a psychic expansion that would transform one's soul into the true temple of God.

In order to overcome the Vatican's claims to universal ecclesiastical supremacy, the Church of England, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, and other Protestant churches have declared their administrative autonomy, and each of those churches has its own administrative system. However, even though the aforementioned churches maintain their administrative autonomy from the Vatican, they are often closely aligned with particular state authorities, thus giving rise to several

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> However, in the 1850s, members of the See of Utrecht, known as "Old Catholics," did not recognize any infallible Papal authority. In the 1870s, the Old Catholic communion of Germans, Austrians, and Swiss was formed at a public meeting held in Nuremberg under the leadership of the renowned church historian and priest Ignaz von Döllinger, following the First Vatican Council. According to the "Declaration of Utrecht" of 1889, the Old Catholic church accepts the first seven ecumenical councils and doctrine formulated before 1054, but it rejects the primacy of the Pope.

phenomena of Caesaropapism. For instance, in 1534, King Henry VIII of England separated from the Roman See and became supreme head of the Church of England. Other Protestant sovereigns, too, have exercised jurisdiction over their ‘state’ churches. Several Lutheran and Calvinist communities have aligned with local and national political authorities from Northern Europe who were seeking to break from the Roman Catholic church’s tutelage. Moreover, particularly from the sixteenth century onward, several local Eastern Orthodox churches started mingling their ‘autocephaly’ (autonomy) from the Patriarchate of Constantinople with political and geopolitical calculations and pursuits; and the politicization of ecclesiology was exacerbated by nationalism in the nineteenth century and by the geostrategic competition between Great Powers during the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. The friction that developed in the relationship between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Moscow during the twentieth century and during the twenty-first century is a characteristic example.

On the other hand, conscientious Christians do not hold the errant belief held by many Jews in the time of the Incarnate Logos, that the Messiah was to establish an earthly kingdom. Jesus Christ told them clearly, “My kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>73</sup> The leaders of the Jews did not endorse Jesus Christ’s spiritual universalism, and, for the sake of an earthly kingdom, they went so far as to demand the crucifixion of the King of Glory. As the Apostle John writes in his Gospel: “The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, ‘What are we doing? For this man does many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, many who called themselves Christians paid no heed to Jesus Christ’s spiritual universalism. Hence, we see how the First Rome went so far as to declare the primacy of the Bishop of Rome over the universal church, and the Second Rome, Constantinople, in imitation of the First Rome, has in the modern era begun to teach that the Patriarchate of Constantinople is the source and the keystone of the canonicity of all local Eastern Orthodox churches, even though neither the Bible nor the Eastern Orthodox church’s canonical tradition teaches such doctrines. However, according to the Eastern Orthodox church’s Ecclesiology and Triadology, the multiplicity of the church is constitutive of its oneness, and, thus, the ‘one’ (provost) and the ‘many’ always coexist as two aspects of the same being; in other words, ‘authority’ (e.g., the bishop’s authority) is always rooted in the church herself, that is, in the eucharistic gathering, and it cannot have any other source.

### **A Note on the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity**

In general, the Greek church fathers explain the doctrine of the Trinity by using concepts of classical Greek philosophy. For instance, in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, 9:23, Basil the Great<sup>75</sup> explains the important role of the Holy Spirit as follows: “And He [the Paraclete = Holy Spirit], like a sun joining itself to your purified eye, will show you in himself the image of the invisible. And in the blessed vision of the image [i.e.

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<sup>73</sup> John 18:36.

<sup>74</sup> John 11:47–48.

<sup>75</sup> Basil the Great (also known as Basil of Caesarea) was a fourth-century AD Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Asia Minor. He is a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa are collectively referred to as the Cappadocian fathers. The Cappadocian fathers worked methodically in order to synthesize Christianity and Greek philosophy or, more precisely, in order to expound the Christian doctrines by using concepts of Greek philosophy.

the Son = Logos], you shall behold the unspeakable beauty of the Archetype [Father = Nous or Mind].” Based on Basil’s theological essays, Gregory of Nyssa stresses that the three Persons are ‘hypostatic,’ that is, essentially equal and the same; the only way to tell them apart is their mutual relations.

The concept of hypostasis was methodically studied by John of Damascus<sup>76</sup> in his book *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, where he defines ‘nature’ as the principle of motion and repose, and, on this ground, he identifies the nature of a subject with its substance. However, he adds that, according to some pre-Christian philosophers, such as Aristotle, in contrast to substance, which is simple being, nature is substance that had been made specific by essential differences so as to have, in addition to simple being, being in such a way. Thus, substance *qua* substance, to which belongs simple being, is amounted to unqualified subject. On the other hand, ‘nature’ as substance that had been made specific by essential differences relates to qualified substance, which is specified by the essential difference, i.e., it has not only being in the former sense, but also being in such a way according to its essential differences.

Furthermore, in his book *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, John of Damascus introduces the term ‘hypostasis’ in order to clarify the Trinitarian formula: in this case, ‘hypostasis’ means the existence of an individual substance in itself (i.e., an individual that is numerically different). Consequently, according to the consensus of the early church fathers, nature *qua* species is a common thing, which is predicated of hypostases and has its existence in them, while hypostasis is a particular thing in a numerical sense, as an individual of some kind. Hence, according to John of Damascus, hypostasis not only possesses common as well as individual characteristics of the subject, but also exists in itself, whereas nature does not exist in itself, but is to be found in hypostasis. The previous definition of the hypostatic mode of existence implies that Christianity’s Holy Trinity, being a communion of three hypostases, is not the same God as the God of general, abstract ‘monotheism.’ Christianity stresses God’s personhood (i.e., God’s hypostatic mode of existence), whereas general, abstract monotheism stresses merely the unity of God’s nature.

Through the distinction between ‘hypostasis’ and ‘nature,’ the Greek church fathers, and especially the Cappadocian fathers, explain how it is possible for God to assume the human nature without losing or degrading His deity. God’s hypostatic mode of existence implies that God’s nature does not constrain Him, that is, God’s existence is characterized by absolute freedom. In particular, according to the New Testament, in the case of Jesus Christ, the same hypostasis of the Logos personalized both the divine nature and the human nature. Thus, according to 1 John 2:23, “No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit: Against the Macedonians*, Gregory of Nyssa stresses that the Holy Trinity should not be understood as three separate Gods (e.g., Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier). As Hans von Balthasar has argued, after the Cappadocian Fathers, “it is no longer possible to infer Divine Persons on the basis of different regions of the world . . . [for] there is a ‘common operation’ which links their divine essence.”<sup>77</sup> In order to explain the meaning of the Christian Trinitarian formula, one may put forward the following simile: Let us consider the poet T. S. Eliot. The poetry of T. S. Eliot is his ‘logos’ (word); Eliot’s logos proceeds from Eliot’s ‘nous’

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<sup>76</sup> John of Damascus was a Syrian Christian monk and priest, who died at his monastery, Mar Saba, near Jerusalem in 749 AD. His fields of interest included theology, philosophy, music, and law. He is a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity.

<sup>77</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 1995, p. 19.

(mind); and Eliot's logos provides its readers with his 'spirit,' i.e., with a special culture that makes them feel that they participate in Eliot's personal world. Eliot's spirit remains with the readers of Eliot's logos even when they do not have his poems before them. Similarly, we may argue that God the Father is the *Nous* of God, God the Son is the *Logos* (Word) of God, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. However, in the case of the Holy Trinity, the *Nous* of God (Father), the *Logos* of God (Son), and the Holy Spirit are not attributes or functions of a being, but they are three Hypostases of the same divine Nature.

The aforementioned Trinitarian formula leads to the following ontological conclusions: God does not exist as a pure individual, i.e., as an isolated being; but He exists as a communion of three hypostases. Thus, as John D. Zizioulas has argued, 'communion' is an ontological category that describes God's mode of existence.<sup>78</sup> In addition, communion comes from the three hypostases of God, i.e., it is founded on concrete and free persons. By analogy, since, according to the Bible, man is the image of God, 'communion' is an ontological category that describes human personhood: no human being can exist without communion, i.e., no human being can exist as a pure individual, and communion comes from hypostases, i.e., from concrete and free persons. In general, a 'person' (or 'hypostasis') is an individual-in-communion, i.e., human personhood is impossible without communion, and any kind of communion that suppresses or eliminates individuality ('otherness') is inhuman and ungodly.

In the aforementioned philosophical-theological context, which is focused on the hypostatic mode of being, the term 'soul' refers to a being that bears and manifests the life-energy in a personal (hypostatic) way; hence, the soul is the essence of 'personhood,' and not a naturally immortal substance. The previous argument is in conformity with the following arguments of the Greek Church fathers: the soul is created by God, and, thus, it is God's grace that makes it immortal. In the second century AD, Justin Philosopher and Martyr<sup>79</sup> writes in his book *Dialogue with Trypho*, 4–6: "if the world is begotten, souls also are necessarily begotten . . . They are not, then, immortal? . . . No; since the world has appeared to us to be begotten . . . If, then, it [the soul] is life, it would cause something else, and not itself, to live, even as motion would move something else than itself." In the same book, Justin Philosopher and Martyr continues as follows: "Now, that the soul lives, no one would deny. But if it lives, it lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life; but that which partakes of anything, is different from that of which it does partake. Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live."

The soul not only "pervades" (in Greek, *chorousa*) the "entire body" (in Greek, *hōlou . . . tou sōmatos*), as Maximus the Confessor writes, but also every member of the body responds to the presence of the soul, though the soul is incorporeal.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to radically dualist theological and philosophical arguments—according to which the soul

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<sup>78</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 1985.

<sup>79</sup> Justin (103–165 AD) was an early Greek apologist and martyr. He is venerated as a saint by many Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox church and the Roman Catholic church.

<sup>80</sup> *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 91, 1100AB. Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) was a Christian monk, theologian and scholar. He methodically and systematically supported the Council of Chalcedon's position that Jesus Christ had both a human and a divine will, fighting a heresy called Monothelitism (for Greek meaning 'one will'). Following an Asian tradition of transcendentalism, Monothelitism was an attempt to 'reduce' the humanity of Christ by arguing that Christ had only one will, particularly, a divine one. Maximus the Confessor is a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity.

is a substance that is naturally immortal and exists in the mortal human body distinct and separate from it and unmarked by any essential interaction with the body—the Greek church fathers emphasize that the two substances which make up the human being—namely, the body and the soul—are different from each other without being separate, and they are united without being confused; thus, according to Maximus the Confessor, every action and every movement of the human being is simultaneously an act of his soul and his body.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, according to the Greek church fathers, and in accordance with Aristotle’s argument that the soul is the entelechy of the body, the integral union of the body and the soul is characterized by a hierarchy of interaction, in the sense that the soul precedes the body in that interaction, not only in the temporal sense but also in the sense of importance.

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### **The Ancient Indo-Aryan Quest for Transcendence and Christ**

The spiritually highest form of socio-political hierarchy consists of a vertical hierarchical system at the top of which stands a sacred or priestly class, that is, a purely spiritual elite.

Such a social model is found in the ancient period of flourishing Indo-Aryan civilizations,<sup>82</sup> in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in the *Avesta*, and in the political philosophy of Plato. It is based on a universal (supranational) system of values that expresses the ideal of transcendence, that is, the ideal of transition from ‘being’ to a ‘more-than-being.’ According to this social model, wars are not waged for territories but for pure ideas; that is, they are not geopolitical wars but holy wars. Here the term ‘sacred’ means anything we consider so exceptionally valuable that we set it apart from the world; it has no exchange value, and access to it has specific conditions and is determined by a particular process. Within this framework, the warrior serves a spiritual elite and fights on behalf of an ideal of transcendence; he is not a citizen-soldier who fights for a prince or for territories.

Christianity extricated spirituality from the intellectual shackles of the communitarianism and the formalistic legalism that characterizes traditional Semitic societies. The organizational attributes of traditional Semitic societies can be summarized as follows: tribal and clan-based origins; strong emphasis on lineage and ancestry; patriarchal structure; honor–shame cultural dynamics; and law-centered society. On the other hand, the organizational attributes of traditional Indo-Aryan societies can be summarized as follows: developed structured social stratification; ritual status significant; strong philosophical and ascetic traditions; and Dharma (duty according to role, personal moral responsibility) central to order. Thus, the traditional Indo-Aryan mentality emphasizes the individual’s spiritual path and spiritual universalism. However, without a clear formula for connecting the transcendent and the immanent, many currents in the traditional Indo-Aryan world tended toward renunciation, and this gives rise to various problems and contradictions. The doctrine of the Incarnate Logos provided a solution to such problems and contradictions. In light of what I mentioned earlier about Christian philosophical theology, Jesus Christ,

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<sup>81</sup> Maximus the Confessor, “Peri Theologias kai tes Ensarkou Oikonomias” (“Regarding Theology and the Incarnate Economy”), 90.

<sup>82</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 1; for further information, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Story\\_of\\_Civilization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Story_of_Civilization)

symbolizing the incarnation of divinity and the hypostatic mode of being (personhood and a personalistic theology), enriched the Indo-Aryan tradition to an infinite degree and showed that the pursuit of transcendence does not require the renunciation of the world, nor is it equivalent to pure mysticism, but is realized within the world as an existential transformation of both the subject and the world.

As spirituality weakens, the above form of spiritually-founded socio-political hierarchy is replaced by a geopolitically defined aristocracy. In this phase and in such systems, the ideal of transcendence is replaced by the ideals of honor and loyalty to a prince. It is the era of the knights and Machiavellian princes.

The further weakening of spirituality leads to the emergence of a new form of socio-political hierarchy in which the commercial class dominates, and the world is divided into modern nation-states that reflect the ethos and interests of particular commercial elites, national capitalist oligarchies. In this phase, the dominant values are as follows: the strict observance of quantitative rules concerning the self-interested calculations and transactions of merchants, and the ideal of the self-made capitalist. At that point, a self-complacent nihilism<sup>83</sup> prevails, the model of the citizen-soldier fully replaces the sacred ethos of the warrior, and war becomes yet another capitalist industry.

Finally, the decline of civilization may even lead to the conception of a form of socio-political hierarchy in which the 'popular mass' dominates. This refers to various types of utopian communism or political populism. As we know from the history of political theory, political populism developed particularly in the United States (American democratic populism) in the early 20th century, and various elements of populism are also found in Nazism, Peronism, McCarthyism, and the 21-century USA.

### **The Distinction Between the Sacred and the Profane**

The sacred means:

- A higher form of existence.
- An orientation toward transcendence.
- A system of vertical hierarchy, heroic morality, and spiritual authority.

Some characteristic examples are the ideal of the Platonic republic and the Roman concept of *imperium* (sacred authority).

The profane means:

- A severance from transcendent principles.
- A purely materialistic or quantitative worldview.
- Democratic egalitarianism in the context of the bourgeois civilization.
- A way of life organized around the economy, technology, and individualism.

From the perspective of the sacred, work is a vocation connected with cosmic order and transcendence (e.g., the medieval guilds, which had spiritual symbolism, or the classical ideal of the philosopher and the scientist). According to a profane line of reasoning, work is simply a job for income and consumption. A synthesis between the sacred and the profane is necessary, with the sacred prevailing over the profane.

### **Transcendence**

The term 'transcendence' means a vision of the ascent of humanity to a higher level of 'being,' to a 'more-than-being.' The existence of a specific idea of transcendence guarantees the objectivity, intersubjective meaning, and authority of the values that human beings as subjects share in common, and upon which the very idea of the moral

<sup>83</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1979.

improvement of human beings within a cultural system is based. It functions as a summary of all the moral aims of the corresponding cultural community.<sup>84</sup>

However, transcendence can be conceived intellectually in two ways: in an ontological sense or in a regulative sense. Transcendence is understood in an ontological sense if the transcendent ideal is regarded as constituting a being ('Supreme Being'). By contrast, transcendence is understood in a regulative sense if we consider, in a Kantian manner,<sup>85</sup> the reality of the world "as if" it were dependent upon and, thus, guaranteed by the existence of the corresponding transcendent foundation. Consequently, to embrace a regulative idea of transcendence means that, by rationally conceiving the transcendent as a synopsis of ideal norms, we lay the foundations of our moral behavior "as if" the transcendent existed in itself.

When the transcendent ideal is perceived as a regulative ideal (that is, as a moral ideal without ontological commitments), then we have a non-religious ideal of transcendence, since we possess an absolute moral point of reference without specific ontological commitments. When the transcendent ideal is perceived as a being, then we have a religious ideal of transcendence. Both perspectives are compatible with each other, in the sense that they are founded on a transition from 'being' to a 'more-than-being,' and they help us to understand the soteriological meaning of Christianity. Hence, we can have a society or an organization founded and centered on the principle and value of transcendence without resorting to theocracy and without negating the principles and values of freedom and tolerance. Jesus Christ emphasized spiritual freedom and voluntarism;<sup>86</sup> and, as regards spirituality and esoteric truths, an Aryan [noble] mind defends the dignity of man in general and of its own self in particular to such an extent that it abstains from imposing its spirituality and esoteric truths upon others in a coercive way (an element highlighted by the synthesis between Indian Mahayana philosophy and Chinese Taoism in the context of Zen Buddhism).

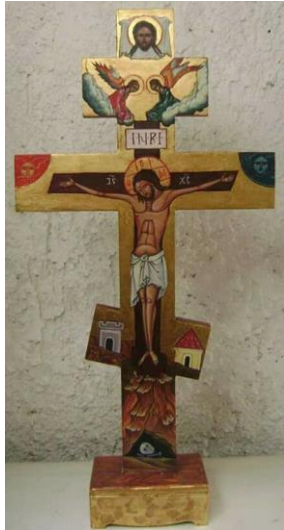
'Soteriology' is the branch of theology that studies 'salvation,' and it is etymologically derived from the Greek word *soteria*, meaning ontological fulfillment. In the context of the Greek Patristic thought, 'salvation' does not mean a static, passive, and actually tedious state nor an infinite extension of time. Furthermore, in the context of the Greek Patristic thought, 'hell' does not mean an eternal penalty in a legalistic sense. Specifically, 'salvation' does not mean that one is 'saved from' something (e.g., from a danger or from a penalty), but it means that one is integral, whole, precisely, that one has reached ontological fulfillment. In other words, 'salvation' means the full actualization of one's existential potential. Thus, the Greek word *soteria* is derived from the Greek word *sōos*, which means integral, whole, healthy, and safe. Similarly, the English word 'salvation' comes from the late Latin 'salvationem,' which comes from 'salvare,' which itself is derived from the Latin 'salvus,' meaning 'healthy' or 'safe.' Moreover, the proto-Indo-European root of 'salvus' is 'solwos,' the base of which is 'sol-,' meaning 'whole.' Furthermore, from the perspective of the previous remarks, 'holiness' means a struggle for ontological integration and wholeness, and the kind of knowledge that underpins salvation is a kind of practical spiritual therapy.

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<sup>84</sup> Carlos Belvedere, *Collective Consciousness and the Phenomenology of Émile Durkheim*, 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Graham Bird, ed., *A Companion to Kant*, 2006; and Giuliano Di Bernardo, *The Epistemological Foundation of Sociology*, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew, 16:24.



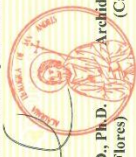
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**Nicolas Laos's scholarly credentials:** Doctoral Degree in Christian Philosophy from the Theological Academy of Saint Andrew (Academia Teológica de San Andrés), Veracruz, Mexico; signed by the Dean of that Theological Academy, Metropolitan Dr. Daniel de Jesús Ruiz Flores of Mexico and All Latin America of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Iglesia Ortodoxa Ucraniana en México).



**Transcript:** Dr. Nicolas Laos successfully completed the following Ph.D. courses: Methodology of Philosophical Investigation I & II, Theology and Philosophy I–IV, Selected Topics in Christian Philosophy I–IV, Seminar on Investigation in Christian Philosophy I–IV, and Interpretation of Philosophical Texts, I & II.

<p>Institución de Procedencia / Grado Académico Obtenido: Free European School of Economics (Brittau , Cantón de Argovia, Suiza) / Master of Business Administration</p>		<p>Total de Unidades: 160 Escala de Calificación: A – Excelente B – Muy Bien C – Satisfactorio 4 de enero de 2011 Fecha de Conclusión del Programa: 28 de mayo de 2012 Fecha de Expedición del Certificado: 1 de junio de 2012 Número del Certificado: 021 Fecha de Expedición del Grado: 1 de junio de 2012</p>	
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El Decano de la Academia Teológica de San Andrés, de la Iglesia Ortodoxa Ucraniana en México, A.R., hace constar que Nicolás K. Laos, matrícula EIGR1101, cursó los estudios correspondientes al Doctorado en Filosofía Cristiana, con los resultados siguientes:

Clave	Nombre del Curso	Unidades	Calificación
<b>Primer Bloque</b>			
FC 701	Metodología de la Investigación Filosófica I	10	A
FC 703	Teología y Filosofía I	10	A
FC 707	Temas Selectos de Filosofía Cristiana I	10	A
FC 713	Seminario de Investigación en Filosofía Cristiana I	10	A
<b>Segundo Bloque</b>			
FC 702	Metodología de la Investigación Filosófica II	10	A
FC 704	Teología y Filosofía II	10	A
FC 708	Temas Selectos de Filosofía Cristiana II	10	A
FC 714	Seminario de Investigación en Filosofía Cristiana II	10	A
<b>Tercer Bloque</b>			
FC 711	Hermenéutica de Textos Filosóficos I	10	A
FC 705	Teología y Filosofía III	10	A
FC 709	Temas Selectos de Filosofía Cristiana III	10	A
FC 715	Seminario de Investigación en Filosofía Cristiana III	10	A
<b>Cuarto Bloque</b>			
FC 712	Hermenéutica de Textos Filosóficos II	10	A
FC 706	Teología y Filosofía IV	10	A
FC 710	Temas Selectos de Filosofía Cristiana IV	10	A
FC 716	Seminario de Investigación en Filosofía Cristiana IV	10	A

Additionally, Dr. Nicolas Laos is a graduate in Mathematics from the University of La Verne (California), where he successfully completed a dissertation on mathematical analysis and differential geometry under the supervision of Professor Themistocles M. Rassias. Dr. Laos has written several books on mathematics, published by the Greek scientific publishing company NewTech-Pub: <https://newtech-pub.com/>  
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