

Salvation and Redemption

Readings & Reflections

Orthodox Christianity is the life in faith of the Orthodox Church, inseparable from that concrete, historic community and encompassing its entire way of life. The Orthodox Christian faith is that faith "handed once to the saints" (Jude 3), passed on in Holy Tradition to the apostles by Jesus Christ, and then handed down from one generation to the next, without addition or subtraction.

The sole purpose of Orthodox Christianity is the salvation of every human person, uniting him to Christ in the Church, transforming him in holiness, and imparting eternal life. This is the Gospel, the good news, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he rose from the dead, and that we may be saved as a result.

Soteriology

is the study and doctrine of salvation. In the Orthodox Church, salvation is understood as *theosis*, the infinite process of becoming more and more like God. It is also termed *deification* or *divinization*, and its meaning is that the Christian may become more and more soaked with the divine life, becoming by grace what Christ is by nature. As Saint Athanasius the Great said, "God became man so that man might become god." By participation in the incarnation, man becomes like Christ.

Salvation is a process which encompasses not only the whole earthly life of the Christian, but also the eternal life of the age to come. It is often described in terms of three stages—*catharsis* (purification), *theoria* (illumination) and *theosis* (divinization). Salvation is thus not only becoming sinless (purification), but it is also a progress in being filled with the divine light. Additionally, it is becoming so filled with God in union with Him that the Christian shines forth with the likeness of God, sometimes even literally becoming a bearer of the uncreated light. Though these terms of three stages are sometimes used, there is much overlap between them, and the whole process is often termed *theosis*.

It is only in and through Christ that man can be saved. Salvation cannot be earned, being a free gift from God. Its acquisition, however, requires man's cooperation with God, because God will not violate the free will of man. Thus, a life of repentance and participation in the sacraments is the means by which man cooperates with God. This cooperation is termed *synergeia* (synergy).

In *theosis*, man becomes filled with the divine life. He takes on God's attributes, but he does not become merged with the Holy Trinity. There is union without fusion. Man can become a god by grace, not in a polytheistic sense, but rather in terms of becoming a son or daughter of the Most High by means of adoption. Thus, a classic patristic image of *theosis* is a sword held in a flame — the sword gradually takes on the properties of the flame (light and heat), but remains a sword.

http://orthodoxwiki.org/Orthodox_Christianity

In the Western churches, both Catholic and Protestant, **sin, grace, and salvation** are seen primarily in legal terms. God gave humans freedom, they misused it and broke God's commandments, and now deserve punishment. God's grace results in forgiveness of the transgression and freedom from bondage and punishment.

The Eastern churches see the matter in a different way. For Orthodox theologians, humans were created in the image of God and made to participate fully in the divine life. The full **communion with God** that Adam and Eve enjoyed meant complete freedom and true humanity, for humans are most human when they are completely united with God.

The result of sin, then, was a blurring of the image of God and a barrier between God and man. The situation in which mankind has been ever since is an unnatural, less human state, which ends in the most unnatural aspect: death. **Salvation**, then, is a process not of justification or legal pardon, but of reestablishing man's communion with God. This process of repairing the unity of human and divine is sometimes called "deification." This term does not mean that humans become gods but that humans join fully with God's divine life.

<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations/orthodoxy.htm>

Certain authors have expressed doubts concerning the very possibility of redemption: How can the sin of one individual be pardoned in virtue of the sufferings experienced by another individual? The very manner in which this question is stated is marred by individualism and juridicism, however, for it considers only isolated individuals to whom the principle of formal justice is applied. However, such a difference between 'mine' and 'thine' is overcome by love, which knows not only the difference between I and thou but also their *identity*. That which is absurd for abstract justice becomes natural for love. And, above all, Christ is by no means 'another' individual for every human being, for the New Adam includes in Himself every human individual. He is the universal man who includes every human being *naturally* in His essence and *compassionately* in His love. The sin He takes upon Himself by virtue of love is no longer a sin alien to Him; it is now His own sin, although not committed but only accepted by Him. Such is the power of *identification* that is manifested in the redemption. Personal in His hypostatic being, the God-Man is united with us in His humanity. That is why, in His salvific love, He can represent the sin of the entire world without violating Divine justice, for He has made this sin His own. Here we have not a *juridical* but an *ontological* relation, which is based on the real unity of the human essence, given its real multiplicity in the multi-unity of the hypostatic centers. Christ assumed the *entire* human nature; He therefore can assume, in and through it, the entire sin of *all* human individuals, although personally He did not commit it. Thus, in His holy humanity, as well as in the universal human personality of the New Adam, every adamite can find and realize his justification and reconciliation with God. In virtue of His love, the Savior identifies Himself with every sinner who comes to Him, so that it can be said about each sinner: 'not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20).

-- Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*.

trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), page 362.

...God has created us intelligent beings so that we may glorify, thank and love Him for the lesser blessings given us for the needs of our present life, and become worthy to gain great and eternal blessings in the life to come.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>

Saint Simeon the New Theologian (On Faith, Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart; Faber and Faber pg. 149)

If any man receive not Baptism, he hath not salvation; except only Martyrs, who even without the water receive the kingdom. For when the Savior, in redeeming the world by His Cross, was pierced in the side, He shed forth blood and water; that men, living in times of peace, might be baptized in water, and, in times of persecution, in their own blood. For martyrdom also the Savior is wont to call a baptism, saying, Can ye drink rite cup which I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And the Martyrs confess, by being made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>

Catechetical Lectures Of Our Holy Father, Saint Cyril, Archbishop Of Jerusalem - Lecture 3. On Baptism

Even if through lack of zeal, or for some other reason, a believer fails to attain here what he seeks, on leaving this world it is impossible that he should not receive confirmation of the fruits of faith and struggle, and should not gain liberation through Jesus Christ, Who is the salvation and redemption of our souls, the incarnate God - the Word.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>

Saint Gregory of Sinai (Texts on Commandments and Dogmas no. 103)

Even now let there ring in your ears that excellent sound which you shall hear when the angels, celebrating your salvation, chant, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven' on the day when, like new stars of the Church, you will enter, your bodies bright, your souls shining!

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

In order not to be in daily bondage to the passions and the Devil, you must set yourself an object to aim at, have this object constantly in view, and endeavor to attain it, conquering all obstacles by the name of the Lord. What is this object? The Kingdom of God, the Divine palace of glory, prepared for believers from the creation of the world. But as this object can only be attained by certain means, it also is necessary to have such means at one's disposal. And what are these means? Faith, hope, and love, especially the last. Believe, hope, and love, especially love, disregarding all obstacles; love God above everything and your neighbor as yourself. If you have not sufficient strength to preserve in your heart these inestimable treasures, fall down oftener at the feet of the God of Love. "Ask, and it shall be given you;

seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7-8) - for He Who has promised is true.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ: part 1, Holy Trinity Monastery pg. 47)

It is by virtue of this alone - namely, that He is absolute and transcendent Goodness, possessing goodness as His essence - that the Creator and Lord of Creation is both intellectually perceived and described; and this solely on the basis of His energies which are directed towards creation.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Gregory Palamas (Topics of Natural and Theological Science no. 34,
The Philokalia Vol. 4 edited by Palmer, Sherrard and Ware; Faber and Faber pg. 360)

Just as gold is found, washed out of a great amount of sand and it amounts to very small grains like millet, so also out of many human beings few will be approved. For those who seek the kingdom are clearly manifested, while those who merely wear its word as a beautiful ornament are the ones most conspicuous. For the same reason those are manifested who are seasoned with the heavenly salt and who speak out of the Spirit's treasures. The vessels appear in whom God is pleased and to whom He gives His grace. There are also others, who, with much patience, receive the sanctifying power in many different ways, as God wishes.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Macarius the Great, Fifty Spiritual Homilies

Man's chief aim should be to find God. In finding God, he finds true happiness. The interior prayer we have been discussing [the Prayer of Jesus] leads man to Him. We can never thank God sufficiently for revealing Himself to us. We can never even thank Him enough for the other goods He bestows upon us. God need not have created man: He had hosts of angels. Yet He created man and countless marvellous things for him.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Elder Joseph of New Skete: Anchored in God by Constantine Cavarnos

The problem of our life is union with God, and sin completely prevents this; therefore flee from sin as from a terrible enemy, as from the destroyer of the soul, because to be without God is death and not life. Let us therefore understand our destination; let us always remember that our common Master calls us to union with Himself.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ, Part 1; Holy Trinity Monastery pg. 20)

The real and true life then is the Father, who through the Son in the Holy Spirit pours forth as from a fountain His heavenly gifts to all; and through His love to man, the blessing of life eternal are promised without fail to us men also. We must not disbelieve the possibility of this, but having an eye not to our own weakness but to His power, we must believe; for with God all things are possible.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lectures: Lecture 18 no. 29)

Therefore, casting out of our souls all faithlessness, sloth, and hesitation, let us draw near with all our heart, with unhesitating faith and burning desire, like slaves who have been newly purchased with precious blood. In deed, with reverence for the price paid on our behalf, and with love for our Master Who paid it, and as having accepted His love for us, let us recognize that, if He had not wished to save by means of Himself us who have been purchased, He would not have come down to earth, nor would He have been slain for our sake. But, as it is written, He has done this because He wills that all should be saved. Listen to Him say it Himself: 'I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world' (Jn. 12:17).

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Symeon the New Theologian, On the Mystical Life, Vol. 1

To uproot sin and the evil that is so imbedded in our sinning can be done only by divine power, for it is impossible and outside man's competence to uproot sin. To struggle, yes, to continue to fight, to inflict blows, and to receive setbacks is in your power. To uproot, however, belongs to God alone. If you could have done it on your own, what would have been the need for the coming of the Lord? For just as an eye cannot see without light, nor can one speak without a tongue, nor hear without ears, nor walk without feet, nor carry on works without hands, so you cannot be saved without Jesus nor enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Macarius, Homily 3.4

Whoever says that it is impossible to be saved with a wife and children is a deceiver. Abraham had a wife and children and three hundred and eighteen servants, and also much gold and silver, and he was called the friend of God! Many servants of the Church have been saved, and many lovers of the desert; many aristocrats, and many soldiers; many craftsmen, and many farm laborers. Be devout towards God and loving towards men, and you will be saved.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Niphon

Imprudent is whoever arranges only his earthly will and not his heavenly one.

<http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/salvation.html>
Saint Basil the Great
