

MAN'S JOURNEY FROM ADAM TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

Man is a theological being according to the understanding of the Fathers. In the world before the fall, God came in the cool of the day to converse with the primordial human as with a friend. This man was in virtue sinless and pure. This man was created in the image of God. Being in the image of God, pure and blameless, this kind of divine communion was given and set in. Thus it is as such that the human being was created as a mediator between God and the creation, by communing in divine life.

When God created man, he created him the Fathers declared, *avtexsousios*¹, “possessing self-determination.” This distinctly human quality, freedom of will, pertained to man’s very being from the beginning. It is presupposed in the very fact that God gave Adam and Eve a command—and, therefore, a choice whether or not to obey it—in the original Garden of his existence.

The second century Bishop of Lyons, St. Irenaeus, who cited the Lord’s many commandments as proof of man’s to *avtexsousion*, “self-determination” (*Against the Heresies* 4.37.3).

Why would the Creator have given a “law” to man unless man was able to make a choice with respect to that law? There is “no coercion in God,” St. Irenaeus reasoned; “God made man self-determining (*avtexsousios*) from the beginning” (4.37.1).

Thus for the primordial human, in his very nature was included a life of grace in God and with God, for he was created in the world for God. And in adamic sin (not to confuse with the RC understanding of original sin) the human extinguished the life of grace within and tore asunder his direct

graced communion, “conversation” with God; ceased to be a human, a friend of God, and instead became a natural being, and plunged into cosmism.

This was in Adam’s paradisiacal state, before the fall, when the ontological² commandment not to eat the fruits of tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the double possibility for self-determination towards God or towards the world appeared before Adam. After the choice, this possibility of choice disappeared not only for Adam but also for all of his descendants. This is ‘the event’ that marked the beginning of our age, the consequences of which stand even till the present times and further.



Having turned away from God, the human lost the power and fountain of life within and weakened, he could no longer contain and bind his body. Death entered the world.

At the same time being the ontological center of the world, its soul, he lost the faculty “of having dominion” in the world. The world fell into an orphaned state; it was left without a master.

The fall was a cosmic catastrophe, “a curse” for the earth; it happened not just in the human but also in the whole world (and through this it condemned the human to labor in the sweat of his brow). The world fell ill with the human, and until the present day, the whole creation groans and is tormented on account of “the one who accused her” from whom she hopes for her deliverance (Romans 8.19-22). The world of the human being became a world lying in

¹ frjohnpeck.com

² Ontological means a branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being

evil and suffering, although the human world was a divine world in its first principles. Having corrupted his body, the human being harmed the whole world; having become the law of his life, evil in the world began to bear fruit and multiply as it did in the human. We see this further down from Cain (who committed fratricide) in his generation of descendants.

Adam comes forward as the all-human, with his own definition defining his nature not on its essence (in the image and likeness of God) but its condition. Thus this critical moment of choice, trial and self-determination lay unavoidably on the human's path (that is for every individual) owing to his creatureliness (a created being), and perhaps to the double possibility objectively deposited to him (through 'the event' mentioned above): if he turned towards God, he could become god by grace for the sake of the whole world or, if he turned away towards the world, he could become its slave and give power to the elements of non-existence and death.

After the fall, we sons of Adam no longer know this "very good"³ in which the world was created. If the fallen human being, according to the word of the apostle, has "another law which is in our members, a sinful law" (Romans 7:11, 20), then this disorder extends into the whole world.

Being away from God, not knowing the *very good*, man started living and understanding life in his own terms without God. This is known as self-creation. Thus man was defined as an individual without God rather than a man filled with the grace of God, divinizing himself from measure to measure with the influence of the Divinity that was set in for him. He committed a sin of unbelief and hatred for God. He got the false idea that spiritual might and

immortality could be obtained by the powers of this world.

Thus individuality is born in this self-determination (on the freedom to choose). Individuality is the fruit of the fall. The human being characterizes himself as a biological being and spends his whole life and activities on his material and biological needs without having any other pursuit in his life. This is the present state of man as we now see him.

The question then is did Adam have this individuality and If it was someone else other than Adam, would the same occur?

Adam was the primogenitor (first born) of the human race. As a primogenitor, alone in himself, begins beforehand and holds in himself all people and everything (For example,

an apple seed forms into an apple



tree, the tree contains the seeds that it produces and will produce in the form of apples and also in the form of other apple trees and further on...i.e. in a particular seed is contained the future trees and seeds). Given this, in his primordial state, his being unburdened by sin, his clarity of sight and proximity to God are fundamental immanent characteristics of such an Adam. His personal qualities, in the sense of individual endowments, genius or talents, as we now distinguish them in people are completely annihilated and seem insubstantial, as if they did not exist, due to his superiority in his immanent characteristics. In other words, as sinless and primordial, Adam does not have individual personhood in the sense as we now understand it. Adam was not an individual, for a sinless human is at the

same time a human in general i.e. is the all-human, free from the bad limiting influence of individuality.

Thus Adam's individuality had no specific significance, it was his position as primordial that was decisive here and none of the descendants of Adam, placed in his position, would be distinguished from him at all, each one would be Adam. All people are not only of equal value but are also equal, equally of genius in their primordialness and chastity. Distinctions in individual endowment and strength came later, only in the fall, in its limiting and hence differentiating power.

Hence the question loses meaning; it becomes senseless to ask what would have been if the primordial had not been Adam but, for example, Seth or even you (the reader) and me (the author). Each primordial would have equally turned out to be Adam.

Is it then, that each one of us commit ancestral sin, and if so, when and how?

St Paul says: 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned' (Rom.5:12).

This text, which formed the Church's basis of her teaching on 'adamic sin', may be understood in a number of ways: the Greek words *ef' ho pantes hemarton*⁴ may be translated not only as 'because all men sinned' but also 'in whom [that is, in Adam] all men sinned'. Different readings of the text may produce different understandings of what 'ancestral sin'⁵ means.

If we accept the first translation, this means that each person is responsible for his own sins, and not for Adam's transgression. Here, Adam is merely the prototype of all

future sinners, each of whom, in repeating Adam's sin, bears responsibility only for his own sins. Adam's sin is not the cause of our sinfulness; we do not participate in his sin and his guilt cannot be passed onto us.

However, if we read the text to mean 'in whom all have sinned', this can be understood as the passing on of Adam's sin to all future generations of people, since human nature has been infected by sin in general. The disposition toward sin became hereditary and responsibility for turning away from God sin is universal. As St Cyril of Alexandria states, human nature itself has 'fallen ill with sin'; thus we all share Adam's sin as we all share his nature. St Macarius of Egypt speaks of 'a leaven of evil passions' and of 'secret impurity and the abiding darkness of passions', which have entered into our nature in spite of our original purity. Sin has become so deeply rooted in human nature that not a single descendant of Adam has been spared from a hereditary predisposition toward sin.

The Old Testament writers had a vivid sense of their inherited sinfulness: 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me' (Ps.51:7). They believed that God 'visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation' (Ex.20:5). In the latter words reference is not made to innocent children but to those whose own sinfulness is rooted in the sins of their forefathers.

How is it that '...one man's obedience many will be made righteous'⁶?

The Lord conquered death and healed the entire human race from ancestral sin. To Him belongs all authority in heaven and on earth, and He will resurrect the whole human race (for The Last Judgment) and

⁴ Orthodox Faith Texts

⁵ The phrase the Greek Fathers used to describe the tragedy in the Garden was ancestral sin.

⁶ Romans 5:19

renew nature, once the new heaven and new earth have appeared. The world is saved by Christ, for the power of Resurrection acts in the world. The new Adam has already taken the place of the old one, and if the old Adam is still decaying and with his decaying body covers the flesh of resurrection, then anything connected to the heavenly worship, the sacraments does not correspond to the authentic reality, as in the sacred mysteries, the empirical [visible] reality of bread and wine does not correspond to the real presence of Body and Blood.

The old Adam is not decaying because the saving fruits of Christ's death were made available not only to those who lived after Him, but

also to those who lived before Him; for during His three-day burial Jesus Christ harrowed hell and brought to Paradise those righteous ones who had lain in



hades throughout the ages. "Christ's death," writes St. Symeon the New Theologian, "was an indispensable sacrifice also for the pious ones who died before His coming in the flesh⁷."

Through Christ's Resurrection, all mankind has been made subject to future resurrection: physical, bodily resurrection. Those who receive Christ's gift of salvation are resurrected unto eternal life, as He says;

while those who reject it are resurrected unto damnation (cf. John 5:29). Once again, this is because human nature is one. St. Paul affirms: For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15:21).

Orthodox theology is as per what St. Paul says "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling⁸". The Lord established baptism for the remission of sins and it is the only path to salvation, according to His unassailable word. This means that a for a human there cannot be theologically any action in isolation, but only within the community of the Church, he can work out his own salvation according to Trinitarian model of God, in the image of whom we humans function.

Then what about the mystery of baptism for the whole Old Testament humanity, for paganism and for the entire non-Christian world?

Destinies and salvation⁹ is a mystery of God for which there are indications in the preaching of Hades about several other paths of salvation beyond the grave unknown to us; but for Christians to whom the mysteries and the keys of the mystery have been entrusted here on earth there is only one means of salvation—through baptism. Thus baptism of infants, necessary even after the already accomplished healing from the disease of ancestral sin through Christ's incarnation and resurrection, indicates the presence of sin in them.

The effect of sin comes into light first of all as the infirmity of nature, expressed in mortality of the human being. The sickness of the body is only the particular expression of its mortality. With this is bound also its dependence on the natural elements, on hunger, cold, on the weakness of the body,

⁷ St. Symeon the New Theologian, First-Created Man, p. 73

⁸ Philippians 2:12

⁹ The Burning Bush

its weariness, on the weakness and limitedness of the mind and cognition, on the weakness of the will and its vacillations, on the affectivity of the whole passionate essence of the human being. All these properties, burdening and limiting human life, form a source of infirmity in every human being.

This infirmity of nature differs from sins as human acts known as transgressions. This becomes as the work of evil in the world. These transgressions as human acts has its basis in the infirmity of nature. These transgressions in a human is called personal sin.

Thus we have the infirmity of nature which is the consequence of the ancestral sin as that which is common to every human being and sins as personal human acts or personal sin having its basis in infirmity of nature.

The infirmity of nature causes, ofcourse, the active power of sin, engenders sinfulness. The power of the devil over humankind is realized in this sinfulness. But this power of sinfulness can be weakened or approximated to the state of potentiality. The law living in the members of the human being and opposed to the good through “the body of death” can be rendered powerless to a greater or lesser degree. That is the power of sin in a human can increase to the point of becoming satanic (Antichrist) or enfleshed (antediluvian humanity), but it also weakens to such a degree that it is capable of being exalted to the highest sanctity, the summit of which is attained in the Virgin Mary.

In the fallen world that has the consequences (the infirmity of nature) of ancestral sin, and the human being not knowing the “very good”, individuality takes root and becomes the sole form for the life of the soul, just as a sinful body is for the

life of the flesh. Fallen humankind defines his nature and knows himself only in the form of individuality. Individuality is the reflected light of the Satan on a human being whom he desired to pervert according to the image of his metaphysical egotism—a state without love. The wholeness of the human race collapses. A common single life becomes obscured and perverted. It comes unraveled together with the loss of chastity. In place of multi-unity in love, multi-difference appears. In place of concentricism (the quality of having the same center i.e. God) there is eccentricism.

Only life in Christ liberates us from individuality, leading into the multi-unity in love that is necessary for the soul, into the Church. Thus liberation from the captivity of individuality, is the condition of Christian salvation. Christ is the fullness of all good, there is no Good that is outside of him. Only in Christ can we grow in knowing the “very good” from measure to measure to become like Christ. And this is the very purpose of our life. A life deified, to attain theosis.

The Mother of God’ unconditional salvation was accomplished by the visitation of the Holy Spirit. She is not being saved but saves not as a savior; for there is only one Saviour of the whole human race and of Virgin Mary as well. For she too speaks about the Saviour as “God, and my Saviour”¹⁰. She saves us as the advocate and intercessor for the human race.

She is the new earth and heaven, created in place of the former ones defiled by sin. She is the paradise and the woman promised by God in paradise whose seed would trample the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). She is the Noah’s ark of salvation and the ladder seen in a dream by Jacob. She is the Burning Bush, seen by Moses, the Red Sea in which Israel was saved. She is the tabernacle and

¹⁰ Luke 1: 47

temple, the Ark of the Covenant, the urn, the tablets, the incense stand and the rod of Aaron. She is Gideon's fleece. She is the queen of psalm (Ps. 45) and the bride of Song of Songs¹¹. She is the Virgin foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Is. 7:14) and the closed gates seen by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 44:1-4). She is the mountain not hewn seen by Prophet Daniel, the mountain overshadowed by the thicket seen by the prophet Habakkuk.



Finally we sing along with a monk, who was a scholar-musician wandering in the highlands of Ethiopia, long ago, from his crafted love song to the Virgin in the book 'Harp of Glory-Enzira Sebhat' as,

O Virgin, you are the boast of Adam and Eve,
Because of you, the locked gate of Paradise
has been re-opened.

Because of you, the way of life has been
made smooth once more.

O Pure One, through your purity, cleanse the
defile temple of my body.
You whose name is so sweet, salt with the
flavor of your love, these insipid lips of mine.
Fountain of Glory, set me as a bucket
dropped in your holy stream, that overflowing
river of joy.

¹¹ St. John of Damascus in his discourse on the Nativity of the Theotokos

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Saint
Spyridon
December 12
Cyprus; 270 –
348 AD



SAINT SPYRIDON was a simple shepherd on the island of Cyprus. From his youth he had great humility, and a special concern to help the poor.

He married a Christian woman, and the Lord granted them one child—a daughter, whom they named Irene. When his wife died, he bore his widowhood patiently. For his goodness and simplicity of heart, he was ordained bishop of Trimethus in Cyprus. But his new position did not cause him to abandon his simple way of life.

He continued to raise sheep and to till his own land.

His purity of heart and life as a humble shepherd-bishop can be seen in this incident recounted by Saint Nikolai of Zicha¹²:

Some thieves went into Spyridon's pasture at night. When they had seized as many rams as they wanted, they tried to leave the field, but an invisible force riveted them to the earth, and they could not leave the spot. At dawn, the bishop came to the pasture and, seeing the thieves, reproached them mildly, and told them to try, in the future, to live by their own labor and not by their thieving. He then caught a ram and gave it to them, saying, "Take this, so that your trouble and night vigil should not have been in vain." And he sent them away in peace.

Saint Spyridon attended the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325. There he astonished the heretics with his wisdom and wonderworking power, and brought many of the Arians back to proper belief in the divinity of Christ.

The Russian Menaion of Saint Dimitry of Rostov (October 28) relates that the rustic, unlettered Bishop Spyridon summarized the Gospel with such power to Eulogius, a pagan philosopher who appeared at the Council, that the philosopher remained silent, as though there was nothing for him to dispute.

Finally, he said: "I think that all is in truth as thou sayest." Then the elder (Saint Spyridon) said: "Then come and take the side of the holy Faith." And the philosopher (Eulogius), turning to his friends and disciples, exclaimed: "Hear me! Hitherto the contest with me hath been waged by means of proofs, and I set against such proofs

other proofs, and with my skill in debate I repelled all that they presented to me. But when, instead of proofs from knowledge, there began to proceed from the lips of this elder some special power, proofs were powerless against it, for man cannot oppose God. If any of you can reason in like manner as I, then let him believe in Christ and follow after this elder, through whose lips God Himself hath spoken."

And the philosopher, accepting the Orthodox Christian faith, rejoiced that he has vanquished in debate by the saint for his own good.

Saint Spyridon became a great wonderworker, through his extreme humility, simple faith, and the grace of God. By his prayers rain came in a time of drought, several dead persons came back to life, a river changed its course, and on many occasions the secrets of the human heart were revealed. One time, Spyridon's gift for seeing distant events happening as if they were near helped to bring a pagan husband to the Faith, something for which his believing wife had been long beseeching God and the Saint; "Thus was an 'unbelieving husband saved by a believing wife' (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14), as the Apostle Paul said." He also healed the Emperor Constantius of an incurable disease, after appearing to him in a dream.

In 348, at a great old age, Saint Spyridon entered into the rest of the Lord, after many years of faithful service to the Church. His wonderworking relics are kept on the island of Corfu, where they remain incorrupt to this day.

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¹² Nikolaj Velimirović was bishop of the eparchies of Ohrid and Žiča in the Serbian Orthodox Church, an

influential theological writer and a highly gifted orator, known as The New Chrysostom.