

The One God Worshipped in the Trinity

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The greatness of God

God is the highest and most perfect Being, Creator, and Director of the world, eternal Spirit, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. In His Being God is beyond comprehension not only for humans, but also for the angelic understanding: *“Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see”* (1 Tim. 6:16).

“If you wish to speak about God,” writes St. Basil the Great, “renounce your body and physical feelings, leave the earth, leave the sea and make the air be beneath you. Pass over the seasons of the year, their proper order, the adornments of the earth, stand higher than the ether, pass through the stars, their beauty, greatness, benefit, which they offer to the whole, good order, light, position, movement, and that, how many connections and distance they have between them. Passing over all this with the mind, go around the sky and, stopping above it, with one thought visualize all the beauty there: disregarding the armies of the Angels, the leadership of the Archangels, the glory of the Hosts (Authorities, Thrones, Principalities, Powers, Cherubims and Seraphims, — these are the names of the angelic ranks. The Angelic, spiritual world is much larger than our physical), the chairmanship of the Thrones, Powers, Principalities, Powers. Passing over all these, leaving all creation below your thoughts, raising your mind beyond the boundaries of it, imagine in your thoughts God’s essence, immovable, infallible, unchangeable, impassive, simple, uncomplicated, light unapproachable, power beyond words, limitless greatness, glory radiant, kindness coveted, beauty immeasurable, which strongly strikes the wounded soul, but cannot by its merit be portrayed by words.”

Such loftiness of spirit demands reflection upon God. Paradoxically, though, notwithstanding all the limitations of his mental and spiritual powers, a person from early childhood **strives to know God**. The instinctive aspiration of human thought to a Higher Being and spiritual peace is observed among peoples of all races, cultures and levels of development. Apparently, in the very nature of a person there is something which, like a magnet, attracts him upwards, into an invisible and perfect sphere. The Holy Scriptures calls this “something” in a person “**the image and likeness of God**,” which the Creator included in the foundation of our spiritual being (Gen. 1:27). Only the existence of this kinship between the soul and its Creator can explain why people entirely devoid of religious education, in the most unfavorable circumstances, by themselves gradually acquire fairly true notions about God. It is also noteworthy, that God reaches out to the person searching for him and in some mysterious way reveals Himself to that person.

The Holy Scriptures preserved the memory of a short, but precious period, when at the dawn of humanity God appeared and spoke with Adam and Eve, as a Father with His children (Genesis

Chap. 2). Then, even the hint of fear before the Highest Being did not exist in the first people, though the atheists repeatedly maintain that religion arose as the result of some instinctive fear of primitive people before the natural elements. On the contrary, according to the book of Genesis, man's first cognizance of the Creator was full of **trust** and **bliss**. It was precisely the fall from grace due to sin that deprived people of the feeling of closeness and goodness of God.

Different conceptions of God

After the fall of Adam and Eve from grace, the majority of their descendants began to draw farther and farther away from God, become wilder, fall into superstition and indulge in vices. Gradually the development of idolatry began. Nevertheless, the instinctive striving towards God remained in man. The entire history of ancient humanity attests to the fact that man, as distinct from animals, can never confine himself only to the fulfillment of his physical demands. His thoughts subconsciously are drawn upwards, to the other world, to the Creator. A person thirsts to know how and why the world around him arose. Is there a higher reason for his earthly existence and what awaits him beyond the threshold of death? Is there another, more perfect world or worlds? Is there a higher, absolute justice — reward for goodness and punishment for wrongdoing? Observing the greatness, harmony and beauty of the world, a person comes to the conclusion, that there **must exist** an Organizer of everything. His moral feeling suggests to him that there is also one righteous Lawgiver, Who will grant to each their just deserts. Thus, under the influence of internal and external motives, religious feeling gradually arises in a person — the need to know his Creator and draw nearer to Him.

For this reason there never existed a people completely devoid of any sense of God. “Look at the face of the earth” — writes Plutarch (1st century AD), — you will find cities without fortifications, without sciences, without leaders, you will see people without permanent homes, without knowledge of the use of money, without the concept of fine arts, but you will not find one human society without faith in a God.”

In view of the lack of detailed writings about the life and beliefs of the most ancient peoples it is difficult to determine how their religious ideas arose and developed. Nevertheless, a series of scholars in the area of comparative religions maintain that the original religion of many ancient peoples was belief in **one God** (monotheism); while the deification of natural forces and different gods (polytheism) arose among these peoples later (see the book of Prof. Wilhelm Schmidt, the many-tomed work “Der Ursprung der Gottesidee”). The first chapters of the book of Genesis familiarize us with the way polytheism began to develop among “the sons of man” as a result of their moral coarsening — at the same time that the “sons of God” (the descendants of Seth) retained their faith in one God. It must be explained, by the way, that in polytheistic religions one Great God usually stood out among the other less important deities. For this reason, notwithstanding all the imperfections of the heathen religions, their admission of the existence of a Higher Deity infers that people are **religious by nature**. Atheism is an unnatural, pathological state of a human soul. It comes from a sinful lifestyle and becomes entrenched with years by way of inculcation of atheistic ideas.

In Greece, where polytheism began to displace monotheism about 600 years BC, we see a healthy resistance by the thinking people of that time — the philosophers. The first of them, Xenophon (570-466 BC) rose up against those who deified animals and their legendary heroes. He said: “Among gods and people there exists one Most High God, Who does not resemble them either mentally, or externally. He is all sight, all thought, all hearing. He eternally and immovably resides in one place... With His thought He governs all without difficulty.” Heraclitus speaks of the eternal Logos, from Whom everything received its existence. By Logos he means Godly Wisdom. (The teachings about Logos were developed by Philo in the first century AD). Anaxagoras (500-427 BC) calls God the purest Reason, omniscient and omnipotent. This Reason, by being an omnipresent and omnipotent spiritual Essence, brings everything to order. He created the world from original chaos. Socrates (469-399 BC) recognized that there is one God. This God is the moral beginning in the world and “Providence,” i.e. He concerns Himself with the world and with people. Plato (428-347 BC), battling with heathen superstitions, demanded that any trace of imperfection, jealousy or variability from the concept of Deity be barred: “God, and not man, is the highest measure of all.” For Plato God — “Demiurg” — is the builder of all, the Artist of universe. He is the eternal Spirit, changing the appearance of matter in accordance with His thought. There exists an eternal, real world of ideas, which is inherent to true reality, and at the head of this kingdom of ideas soars the Idea of Good, or God, the Builder of the universe (Composition “Timei”). Plato argued that the human soul is eternal. Aristotle (384-322 BC) sees in God a universal moving beginning above the world, “the immovable First Mover,” the source of movement in the universe. He is the eternal all-perfect essence, “thought of thoughts,” free from any materiality, living in the most intensive intellectual activity of self-contemplation. “Reality of thought is life, and God is that reality.” In accordance with Aristotle the whole world yearns toward God, as to a Being, beloved as the result of His perfection. The writer of the 3rd century BC Aratus of Cilicia even rose to the idea of the image of God in man, saying “we are of His lineage” (A similar thought was expressed by his contemporary stoic Cleanth). It can be presumed that under the influence of the philosophers, insisting on the existence of one most wise Being over the world, that the Athenians raised an altar to the “Unknown God,” mentioned by the Apostle Paul at the beginning of his famous sermon in Athens (Acts 17:23).

In this way, the notions of some philosophers about God were true and profound. The eminent thinkers themselves understood that there could only be **one true God**. He is all thought and possesses the highest wisdom. He is the eternal, transcendental Absolute, the first Reason of any activity and movement in the world. Some philosophers ascended to the idea of God as the “Demiurg” — the builder of the universe. But they lacked the precise notion about God as the Creator making the world from nothing, which we find in the Bible. The main shortcoming of their philosophical ideas about God, is that their God is “cold,” that is, **removed** from the earth and as if **secluded** in His internal self-contemplative life. The reason for such a withdrawn notion of God is due to the philosophers’ lack of personal spiritual practice: they did not experience live association with the all-good God, who comes to a person during focused and warm prayers (nevertheless, many holy fathers highly esteemed the ancient philosophers and even called them “Christians before Christ.” The main contribution of the ancient Greek philosophers is that they worked out religious-moral concepts, created the necessary terminology, which helped the early Christian apologetics and Church fathers set forth and defend Christian truths).

The views of the philosophers presented here about the Higher Being are interesting also in that they show the **limits** in the knowledge of God that a person can attain through his own natural efforts (more perfect views about God among the philosophers of the middle ages and the present are borrowed from Christianity).

We find much purer and complete knowledge of God in the Holy Scriptures. Here we discover that about God which He Himself revealed about Himself to the people seeking Him — the righteous of the Old and New Testaments. Here is not the fruit of abstract reflections, the guesses within one's power, but **direct enlightenment from above**, perceived by the saints as active spiritual experience. The saints wrote about God that which the Spirit of God revealed to their spirit. For this reason in the Holy Scriptures, as well as in the works of the Christian saints, there are no conjectures or contradictions, but there is complete agreement.

The attributes of God

The Holy Scriptures give us an elevated and unified portrayal of God. It teaches that God is One. He is the highest, overall and individual Being; God is Spirit — eternal, all-good, omniscient, all-righteous, almighty, omnipresent, invariable, all-satisfied, all-blessed. Not having need of anything, the almighty God in His goodness created the entire visible and invisible world, including us humans, from nothing. Before the creation of the world nothing existed, neither space nor time. The one and the other originated together with the world. God, as a loving Father, concerns Himself with the world as a whole and about each being He created — even the very smallest. Through His mysterious paths He leads each person to eternal salvation, however, without forcing him, but enlightening him and helping him to realize his good intentions.

Let us now consider more carefully several godly characteristics revealed in the Holy Scriptures and in the Holy Fathers of the Church. God reveals himself to humans as a Being that is completely separate from the physical world, specifically — as a Spirit. *“God is a Spirit,”* say the Scriptures, — *“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (John 4:24; 2 Cor. 3:17). In other words, God is not involved with materiality or corporeality, which is possessed by people and even by angels, revealing in themselves only the “image” of the spirituality of God. God is the highest, purest and most perfect **Spirit**. God revealed himself to the prophet Moses, as “I Am” (Jehovah) as a pure, spiritual, highest Existence. True, sometimes we find in the Scriptures such places, which symbolically assign to God members, similar to human ones — ears, eyes, arms and other so called “anthropomorphisms” — likening to humans. Such expressions are used for clarity and are found most often in the poetical parts of the Holy Scriptures. By them the Scriptures have in mind the corresponding spiritual properties of God, for example: ears and eyes point to His omniscience, the hand and muscle — to His omnipotence, the heart — to His love.

No matter how customary it is to the contemporary consciousness to imagine God as a pure Spirit, still the widespread **pantheism** in our time (“God is everything and everything is God” — the idea, that some unconscious and impersonal deity is spread throughout nature. Buddhism and several eastern religions are based on the idea of pantheism) contradict this truth. For this reason even now in the “Rite of Orthodoxy,” performed in the first Sunday of Great Lent, we hear “To those who say, that God is not Spirit, but body — anathema.”

God is **eternal**. The Existence of God is beyond time, for time is simply a form of existence that is final and variable. (Time is regarded as the “fourth” dimension in relativity physics. In accordance to modern cosmology, space and time are not infinite entities. They appeared by the will of God and they may disappear or may become something completely different than what they are now.) For God there is no past, no present, but there is **only the present**. *“Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: but Thou are the same, and Thy years shall have no end”* (Ps. 102:25-27). Several of the holy Fathers point out the difference between the concepts of “eternity” and “immortality.” Eternity is vitality, having neither beginning nor end. “The concept of eternity can only be applied to the one Godly essence without beginning, in whom everything is always the same and in the same state. The concept of immortality can be applied to that, which is brought to existence and does not die, for instance: angels and human souls...Eternity in the true sense applies only to godly essence” (St. Isidore Pelusiote). In this sense more expressive is “pre-eternal God.”

God is **all-good**, that is, He is infinitely kind. The Scriptures witness: *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy”* (Ps. 103:8). *“God is Love”* (1 John 4:16). The goodness of God extends not to some limited region of the earth, like the characteristic love of limited beings, but to the **whole world** with all the beings found therein. He lovingly cares about the lives and needs of each creature, no matter how small or insignificant they may appear to us. “If we were asked,” says St. Gregory the Theologian, “by someone: whom do you honor and to whom do you bow? The answer is ready: We honor love.” God grants His creations as many blessings as each one can accept by their nature and condition, and inasmuch as it corresponds to the general harmony of the earth. God extends His especial goodness to humans. “God is like a mother bird, which, seeing its fledgling fallen from the nest, herself flies out of it, in order to lift it, and when she sees him in danger of being swallowed by some kind of snake, with mournful cries circles it and all the other fledglings, not being capable of being indifferent to the death of one of them” (Clement of Alexandria) “God loves us more than a father, mother or friend, or anyone else, can love, and even more than we can love ourselves, because God cares more about our salvation than even about His own glory, evidence of which serves that He sent His Only-Begotten Son into the world for suffering and death (in human flesh) only for the sake of opening for us the path of salvation and eternal life” (John Chrysostom). If a person often does not understand the full force of the goodness of God, then this occurs because he focuses his own thoughts and desires too much on earthly welfare; but God’s industry combines the gifts of temporary, earthly blessings with the appeal to acquire eternal goods for ourselves, for our souls.

God is **omniscient**. *“All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Heb. 4:13). *“Thine eyes did see my substance,”* — wrote King David (Ps. 139:16). The omniscience of God is simultaneously vision and direct knowledge of everything, existing and possible, the present, past and future. The foreseeing of the future itself is in fact spiritual vision, because for God the future is the present. God’s foresight does not encroach upon the free will of his creatures, the same as the freedom of our near ones is not violated by the fact that we see their actions. The foresight of God regarding the evil in the world and the actions of free beings is as

though crowned by the foreseen salvation of the world, when “*God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15:28).

The **wisdom** of God is another facet of His omniscience. “*Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite*” (Ps. 147:5). The holy fathers of the Church, following the word of God, with deep reverence always pointed to the greatness of the Wisdom of God in the arrangement of the visible world, dedicating to this subject whole works, for example, discussions on the six days, that is on the process of the world’s creation. (Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa). “One herb or one blade of grass is enough to occupy all your thought with the examination of the art, with which it is produced” (Basil the Great).

God is **all-righteous**. Righteousness is understood in the word of God and in its usual lingual usage by two meanings: a) as holiness and b) as fairness, or justice. Holiness consists not only in the absence of evil or sin, holiness is the presence of higher spiritual values, united with cleanliness from sin. Holiness is comparable to light, and Godly holiness — as purest light. God is “One Holy” by essence, by His nature. He is the Source of holiness for angels and people. The Justice of God is another side of the all-righteousness of God. “*He shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness*” (Ps. 9:8). “*Who will render to every man according to his deeds, For there is no respect of persons with God*” (Rom. 2:6 and 11).

How can God’s love be coordinated with God’s truth, with strict judgment for sins and punishment of the guilty one? Many of the Church fathers spoke out on this question. They compare the anger of God to the anger of a father, who, in order to bring a disobedient son to his senses, turns to fatherly punitive measures, while at the same time he himself sorrows, grieving about the irrationality of the son, and at the same time feeling compassion for him for the distress he has caused him. For this reason God’s truth is always mercy, and mercy is truth, according to the statement: “*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*” (Ps. 85:10).

Holiness and God’s truth are closely connected. God calls everyone to eternal life in His Kingdom. But nothing unclean can enter into the Kingdom of God. For this reason the Lord purifies us by punishments, as acts of corrections, because of His love for us. For a trial of fairness awaits us, a fearful trial for us. How can we enter a kingdom of holiness and light — and how would we feel there, being unclean, dark and not having within ourselves holiness and no favorable spiritual or moral value?

God is **omnipotent**. “*For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast*” (Ps. 33:9) — so expresses himself the Psalmist about the omnipotence of God. God is the Creator and the Provider of the world. He is the Almighty. “*The God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things*” (Ps. 72:18). If, then, God tolerates evil and evildoers in the world, it is not because He cannot destroy evil, but because, He granted freedom to spiritual beings and directs them, so that they by their own personal desire would reject evil and turn to goodness. (In regard to casuistic questions regarding what God “cannot” do, one must answer that the omnipotence of God extends to everything that is desirous to His thoughts, His goodness, His will).

God is **omnipresent**. *“Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me”* (Ps. 139:7-10). God is not subject to any limitations of space, but penetrates everything. In addition, God, as a simple Being (indivisible), is present everywhere not only by some part of Himself, or not only with His power, but with His whole being, while at the same time not merging with that, in which He is present. “God penetrates all, not combining with anything, but nothing penetrates Him” (John of Damascus).

God is **unchangeable**. *“The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). God is perfection, and each change is a sign of imperfection, and therefore is unthinkable in a perfect Being. One cannot say about God that any sort of process of growth, change of appearance, evolution, progress or anything of the kind occurs in Him. But the invariableness of God is not some immobility or withdrawing within Himself. Notwithstanding His invariability, His Being is life, full of power and activity. God Himself in Himself is life, and life is His existence.

God is **self sufficient** and **all-blessed**. These two words have similar meaning. The former cannot be understood as “satisfied with oneself.” Rather, it signifies the fullness of possession, complete blessedness, the fullness of all good things. *“As though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things”* (Acts 17:25). In this way, God Himself appears the Source of all life, every blessing; from Him all creatures draw their satisfaction.

The Apostle Paul twice calls God “blessed” (*“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God”* — 1 Tim. 1:11; *“Which in His times He shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”* — 1 Tim. 6:15). The word “All-blessed” should not be understood that God, having everything within Himself, is indifferent to the sufferings in the world He created; but that all beings draw their bliss from Him and in Him. God does not suffer, but he is merciful. “Christ suffers as a mortal” (Easter Canon) — not in His Divinity, but in His humanity. God the source of bliss, in Him is the fullness of joy, sweetness, gladness for those who love Him, as is said in the psalm: *“In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Ps. 16:11).

It should be noted that the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers of the Church speak primarily of the attributes of God, not of the actual essence of God. The Holy fathers rarely and only indirectly spoke of the nature of God, explaining, that the essence of God is “one, simple, uncomplicated.” But this simplicity, this lack of complexity, is not an indifferent or empty whole, but it includes within itself the **fullness** of His attributes. “God is a sea of essence, immeasurable and limitless” (St. Gregory the Theologian). “God is the fullness of all qualities and perfection in its highest and endless form” (St. Basil the Great). “God is simple and uncomplicated. He is all feeling, all spirit, all thought, all mind, all source of all blessings” (Irenaeus of Lyons).

Speaking of the attributes of God, the Holy Fathers point out that their multitude, in view of the simplicity of the Being, is the result of our inability to find a single way to observe the Divine. In God, one characteristic is the facet of another. God is righteous; this means that He is omniscient,

omnipotent, good and blessed. The multiple simplicity of God is similar to the light of the sun, revealing itself in various colors of the rainbow.

In enumerating the characteristics of God, the Holy Fathers and the prayers of the church services predominantly use expressions compiled grammatically in the negative form, that is, with the particles “not” or the prefix “un-.” One must remember, though, that this negative form points to the “denial of limitations,” for example: not unknowing — means knowing. In this fashion, it contains the confirmation of the limitlessness of His perfections.

Besides that, our thoughts about God speak 1) either of His **contrast to the world** (for example: God is Without Beginning, while the world has a beginning; Eternal, while the world exists in time); 2) or of the **actions** of God in the world and the relationship of the Creator to this creations (Maker, Provider, Merciful, Righteous Judge).

While pointing out the characteristics of God, we thus do not give a definition to the understanding of God. Such a definition is, in essence, impossible, because in any definition there is an indication of limits, and, therefore, an indication of boundaries, of incompleteness. There are no boundaries to God, and therefore there cannot be a definition of comprehension of God: “For even understanding is a form of limitation” (St. Gregory the Theologian).

The mystery of the Holy Trinity

The concepts of the unity and the highest characteristics of God do not themselves exhaust the fullness of the Christian teachings about God. The Christian faith lets us in on the deepest mystery of the **inner life of God**. It presents God one in essence and as a Trinity in Persons. The concept of “Person,” is close to the notions of “individuality,” “consciousness,” personality. Since God in His essence is one, then all of God’s characteristics — His immortality, omnipotence, omnipresence, and others — belong in equal measure to **all Three Persons** of the Most Holy Trinity. In other words, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are eternal and omnipotent, as is God the Father.

The Truth of the Tri-oneness of God (Trinity) represents the distinguishing attribute of Christianity. Not only do natural religions not know this truth, but there is no clear, direct revelation of it in the God-revealed Old Testament teachings. There are merely rudiments, graphic, concealed indications, which can only be understood fully in the light of the New Testament, revealing the teaching of the triune God with complete clarity. Such, for example, are the Old Testament sayings, witnessing to the plurality of Persons in the Deity: “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Gen. 1:26); “*Behold, the man is become as one of us*” (Gen. 3:22); “*Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language*” (Gen. 11:7). Here God appropriates to Himself the plural tense. There is another Biblical example, when in the narration about God three appear as one. When, for example, God appears to Abraham in the form of three wanderers (angels). Abraham, in speaking with them, uses the singular tense (Gen. 18:1-3). This appearance of God to Abraham serves as the subject for the famous Rublev icon of the Holy Trinity.

The teaching about the Trinity is the foundation on which the Christian faith is built. All the pleasing, redeeming truths of Christianity about salvation, consecration, bliss of a person can be accepted only on the condition that we believe in the Three-hypostatic God, since all these great blessings are given to us through the mutual and joint activity of the Divine Persons. “The outline of our teachings is one,” teaches St. Gregory the Theologian, “and it is short. It is as a sign on a pillar, understandable to all: These people — are true worshippers of the Trinity.” The great importance and central meaning of the dogma of the Most Holy Trinity explains the care with which the Church always guarded it, that vigilance and that intense effort of thought, with which it defended its faith from various heretics and tried to give it the most accurate definition (1 John 5:7-8).

“One in essence, God is Trinity in Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Trinity one in essence and indivisible.” In these few words is expressed the core of the Christian teachings of the Most Holy Trinity. But notwithstanding such apparent conciseness, simplicity, the dogma of the Trinity contains one of the deepest, most incomprehensible, mysterious secrets of the Revelation of God. No matter how we exert our mind, we are completely powerless to imagine how three independent Divine Persons (not powers, not attributes or phenomenon) completely equal in Godly dignity can comprise one, indivisible Being.

The Holy Fathers of the Church approached this unencompassable deep, elevated truth many times with their God-enlightened thoughts. In their attempts to somehow clarify it, to bring it closer to the comprehension of our limited mind, they used different comparisons, taken either from phenomena in surrounding nature, or from the spiritual structure of a person. For example: 1) sun, light and warmth (from here: “Light from Light” in the Creed); 2) an underground spring, a spring, and stream; 3) roots, trunk and branches; 4) mind, feelings and will. The Holy Equal-to the Apostles Cyril, the enlightener of the Slavs (in 869 AD, in a discussion with Muslims about the Most Holy Trinity), pointing to the sun, said: “See, in the sky there stands a shining circle, and from it light is born and warmth is emitted. God the Father, like the solar disk, is without beginning or end. From Him, the Son of God is born, like light from the sun, and as warmth goes from the sun together with rays of light, proceeds the Holy Spirit. Each can distinguish separately the solar disk, and light, and warmth, but the sun is one in the sky. So is the Holy Trinity: three Persons in Him, but one and indivisible God.”

All these and other comparisons, easing somewhat the assimilation of the mystery of the Trinity, appear, however, only the weakest hints at the nature of the Highest Being. They leave a sense of inadequacy, disparity with the high subject for which they are used for clarification. They cannot remove that cloak of incomprehensibility, mystery, from the teachings about the Triune God, in which this teaching is enveloped for the mind of a person.

One instructive story is preserved regarding this about the famous western teacher of the Church — the blessed Augustine. Immersed once in thought about the mystery of the Trinity and constructing a plan for a composition on this theme, he departed for the shore of the sea. There he saw how a boy, playing in the sand, was digging a hole. Approaching the boy, Augustine asked him: “What are you doing?” — “I want to pour the sea into this hole,” answered the boy, smiling.

Then Augustine understood: “Am I not doing the same thing as this boy, trying to comprehend the sea of the infinity of God with my intellect?”

In the same manner, even that great universal saint and bishop Gregory, who, for his ability to fathom with his thoughts even the deepest mysteries of faith, is honored by the Church with the name Theologian, wrote concerning himself, that he speaks more often about the Trinity than he breathes, and he admits the unsatisfactoriness of all comparisons, directed to the comprehension of the dogma of the Trinity. “No matter what I observed with my inquisitive mind,” says he, “no matter with what I enriched my intellect, no matter where I searched for something resembling this, I did not find, to what Godly essence can be worthily applied.”

So, the teaching of the Most Holy Trinity is the deepest, most incomprehensible mystery of faith. All efforts to make it understandable, to place it in the usual framework of our thinking are in vain. “Here is the boundary of that” — notes St. Athanasius the Great — “which the cherubims cover with their wings.”

However, notwithstanding all of its incomprehensibility, the teachings about the Holy Trinity has an important moral meaning for us, and, evidently, for this reason this mystery is revealed to people. Indeed, it uplifts the very idea of monotheism, places it on firm ground and eliminates those important, unconquerable difficulties, which had earlier cropped up for human thought. Several of the thinkers of the pre-Christian antiquity, rising to the understanding of oneness in the supreme Being, could not solve the question of how in particular does the life and activity of this Being manifest itself by Itself, outside of its relations to the world. And so the Deity, in their minds, either identified itself with the world (pantheism), or appeared lifeless, withdrawn within itself, an immobile, isolated head (deism), or became a fearsome, inexorable fate having dominion over the world (fatalism). Christianity in the teaching about the Holy Trinity revealed, that in the Three-hypostatic Being, and aside from His relations to the world, there manifests itself from the ages an infinite fullness of internal, mysterious life. God, to quote one ancient teacher of the Church (Peter Chrisologue), is one, but not alone. In Him there is a distinction of Persons, existing in continuous association with each other. “God the Father is not born and does not proceed from another Person, the Son of God is born pre-eternally of the Father, the Holy Spirit pre-eternally proceeds from the Father. The internal, hidden life of the Deity is in this mutual association of the Divine Persons from time immemorial, which before Christ was hidden behind an impenetrable curtain.

Through the mystery of the Trinity, Christianity taught not only to honor God, to revere Him, but to love Him. Through this mystery in particular it gave the world that delightful and momentous idea, that God is limitless, perfect Love. The strict, dry monotheism of other religious teachings (Judaism and Mohammedanism), by not rising to the undisguised idea of Divine Trinity, cannot for this reason rise to the true understanding of love as the ruling characteristic of God. Love by its very essence is unthinkable without a union, association. If God were one Person, then in relation to whom would His Love be revealed? To the world? But the world is not eternal. How could the Godly love be expressed in the eternity before the world? In addition, the world is limited, and the love of God cannot reveal itself in all of its boundlessness. The highest love, for its fullest expression, demands as high an object. But where is it? Only the mystery of the Triune

God provides the answer to these indicated difficulties. It reveals that the love of God has never been inactive, without expression: The Persons of the Most Holy Trinity from eternity live one with another in continuous contact of love. The Father loves the Son (John 5:20, 3:35), and calls Him beloved (Mt. 3:17, 17:5 et al). The Son says of Himself: *“I love the Father”* (John 14:31). Deeply true are the short, but expressive words of the blessed Augustine: “The mystery of the Christian Trinity is the mystery of Godly love. You see the Trinity, if you see love.”

The concept of God as Love is based the teaching about the Most Holy Trinity. All the Christian moral teachings are founded on this teaching, the essence of which consists of the law of love.

In humble recognition of the impossibility of understanding the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, we must accept it on full faith, and accept it so that this truth does not remain something external, detached in relation to us, but would penetrate to the innermost recesses of our spirit, would become the property of all our soul, become the guiding power source of our life. Such should be in essence the acquisition of other Christian truths. For Christianity is not an abstract theory, but a new renaissance of life!

Note: Ancient-orthodox teachings about the individual characteristics of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distorted by the Roman Catholic church by the creation of the teaching concerning the out-of-time, pre-eternal issuance of the Holy Spirit from the Son also (Filioque). The first mention of this addition relates to the 6th century in Spain. In the 9th century Pope Leo the Third, personally approving of this teaching, forbade however the addition of the words “and the Son” to the Nicean-Constantinople Creed, where it is said, that the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. Nevertheless, several centuries later the words “and the Son” were still entered in the Roman Catholic Creed. The Orthodox Church never agreed to this addition, because the teachings about the issuance of the Holy Spirit from the Son is absent from the Holy Scriptures, was unknown by the early Church and appears a human fabrication. This distortion of the Christian faith is one of the serious obstacles to the coming together of the Roman Catholic Church with the Orthodox. Protestants inherited this teaching from the Roman Catholic Church, from whom they separated in the 16th century.

The revelation of godly perfection through Jesus Christ

Two thousand years ago a great miracle occurred, a mystery of piety was revealed: the Highest God, dwelling in unapproachable glory, in the Person of the Only-Begotten Son of God came to our earth and became human. The Son of God hid the glory of His Godly nature under the cover of a human body so as not to turn people to ashes. So the invisible becomes visible, the intangible — tangible, the unknown — becomes accessible to our knowledge.

“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,” said Jesus Christ to his contemporaries (John 14:9). What Godly characteristics were revealed to people, who saw and associated with the Son of God? They saw what is characteristic of God — His omnipotence and omniscience. The earthly life of the Savior was accompanied by a stream of miracles. For Him incurable diseases

did not exist. Lifeless nature immediately obeyed His Godly word; the angels served Him with trepidation as Sovereign; evil demons ran from Him trembling, like guilty servants; even inexorable death and absolute hell capitulated to Him, releasing their hostages to heaven. All the acts of His Godly omnipotence were performed in full view of all. They left an indelible print on the history of humanity. The awareness of the reality of their meeting the Creator was so strong in the disciples of Christ, that all of them dedicated their lives to preaching to the world the joyous news about the coming of God to earth. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was manifested unto us,”* wrote St. John the Theologian (1 John 1:1-2).

Besides Godly omnipotence, people, by associating with Christ, saw in Him something very valuable for themselves in a moral regard — His spiritual qualities and holiness. An entire spectrum of His virtues was revealed to people in the earthly life of the Savior: His sensitivity, compassion, unselfishness, courage, patience and, in particular, — his limitless Love. The apostles continually mention the compassion of Christ, of His pity for perishing man: *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.”* Thus *“and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,”* — concludes St. John the Theologian (1 John 3:16).

Feeling the strength of Christ’s Love, the Apostle Paul so describes the characteristics of this virtue: *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away”* (1 Cor. 13:4-8). So, Christ with His life and deeds showed the world the moral perfection of God and gave us the opportunity to understand, what the image and likeness of God in man consists of, and to what we must strive.

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In summary, God is the Highest Spiritual Being, from Whom is everything and without Whom nothing is conceivable. He has no beginning and will never have an end, being above any time and space. He is everywhere at once, penetrating everything, but nothing can penetrate Him. He is the beginning, the continuation, and life of everything existing. He is infinitely kind and, at the same time, infinitely just. Not needing anything, He in His goodness concerns Himself with the entire visible and invisible world and directs the life of each person toward salvation. The path to knowing God and eternal bliss is revealed to persons through the Only-Begotten Son of God.

Contemporary man, with his tremendous baggage of all sorts of knowledge, knows little and thinks little about God. Everything is directed as if on purpose towards distracting his thoughts from the most important — from God and from eternity, denying the person active association with the Creator. From this comes total lightlessness of bustle, continual disappointment and spiritual gloom. It is imperative to make a willful effort, to shift the bustle to secondary status,

turn full front to God and to see His light. Then, through association with Him, we will feel His nearness and goodness, will see His directing right hand in our life, and will learn to revere His will. Thus God will gradually become the most important in life to us — the source of our strength, peace and happiness, the goal of our existence. He will become our Father, and we — His children.

Prayer to God

O Lord! Your Name is Light: enlighten my soul, darkened by passions. Your Name is Mercy; do not stop being merciful to me. Your Name is Strength: strengthen me who is exhausted and falling. Your Name is Peace: bring peace to my restless soul. Your Name is Love: make me worthy of loving You.

How glorious is God

Words by M.M Kheraskov (1733-1807).

English Translation by Alexander F. Beck

How great our Lord on high in Zion,
Our mortal tongue cannot convey;
Beneath His throne the stardust flying,
Is one with windswept grasses' sway.
Throughout the Universe His glory
By day and night is bright and holy.

O Lord, Thy Lamb of golden haloes
Reflects Thy face for our eyes;
With psalter-sounds we send our prayers,
Like smoke from censers, to the skies.
Accept, Lord God, from Thy creation
Incense and songs of adoration.

Thy radiance to us revealing,
Thy love transcends a father's care;
While feeding us, our ailments healing,
Thou showest us Thy Kingdom fair.
Sweet mercy Thou to sinners sendest —
Their hunger with Thy substance endest.

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