

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101

St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Topic 5: The Creation of Man

Part One - Creation “ex nihilo”, or, “out of nothing”

The **Father**, the **Son** and the **Holy Spirit** were present and each participated in the creation of the universe.

Genesis 1:1 “In the Beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth.” = the **Father**

Gen. 1:2 “And the **Spirit** of God was hovering over the face of the deep.” = the **Holy Spirit**

Gen. 1:3 “And God **said**...” = The Logos (the Word; the **Son**)

John 1:1-3 “In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was God**. He was in the beginning **with God**. **All things were made through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

“**was God**” = The Son is God by Nature (sharing the Father’s one nature, will, power).

“**with God**” = The Son is always with His Father, by constant interpenetration and union.

A foundational doctrine of the Bible: Creation “ex nihilo” = creation “out of nothing”. This was the unique, Judeo-Christian revelation for its day. This was novel, new, and it blew the minds of the pagan Greeks. We take it for granted today because of our Christian culture.

Greek philosophies believed that “god”/“the gods” and matter were all eternal. Plato envisioned a one “god” who simply re-organized and refashioned pre-existing, eternal matter.

The pagan philosopher Plotinus taught that matter and God were of the same essence, that they were the same substance. According to him, everything--all creation--was divine (“pantheism”). In this Neoplatonic philosophy, “God” was the higher, more spiritual side of the universe, while creation and man and animals were the lower, “yuckier” physical side of the same divine universe.

This teaching that creation (including man) is divine (“god”) is present in Hinduism, Buddhism, “New Age” philosophies, and in Mary Baker Eddy’s “Christian Science”—which is neither Christian, nor scientific. Old lies take a long time to die out. The devil keeps “gift-wrapping” his old lies in new, “intellectual” clothing.

Orthodoxy teaches that matter originally did not exist. Originally there was only God. Only God is “pre-existent”. In our Christmas Troparion we call Jesus Christ “the Pre-eternal God.” He is always being referred to in our Liturgies as “the Pre-existing One”.

God made matter when time began (He also **made time**; hence, “the Beginning.”)

God is outside of time. He is before time. He made time.

Creation is within time. **Time is part of matter and creation:** $E=mc^2$

Time is part of $E=mc^2$. Note: “ c^2 ” refers to the speed of light multiplied by itself; speed is a measurement of distance divided by **time**, as in “miles per hour”—therefore “time” is part of the equation of the content of the universe. So, when God made the universe, He *simultaneously* created **time**...hence, He made “the Beginning,” but He exists BEFORE creation, before time. He alone is the “Timeless One”...the “Existing One”...the “I AM THAT I AM.”

God alone is Creator/Uncreated/eternal from all eternity.

We humans (and angels and animals and all creation) are creatures/created/temporal (and have a **beginning in time**).

Between God and His creation “there is an irreducible (but not irreconcilable) gulf.”
(*Faith*, p. 66)

Like a contractor who built a house, God’s being is not the “house”. He and the house are two very different “things”. They have two different natures. God is the Maker; the universe (with all its created content) is the thing that is made. (Yet God is more than a contractor who simply shapes wood into a house. God first created the wood, and then He built the house with the wood.)

Yet, having built the house, God is not locked outside of it. He is not stuck in His Transcendence. God may enter the house, fill it, and live in it. (We always pray to the Holy Spirit: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things.”) This is NOT pantheism. God is not matter. This instead could be called “panentheism” (as long as this term is interpreted in an Orthodox Christian manner, with the classic Essence/Energy distinction) = God’s Uncreated Energies can pass through and live in any created thing...but God remains God and the creature remains creature. Two different essences (natures). God’s Energies can pass through us...like light through a stained-glass window. The glass is illuminated by the light but the glass remains glass.

Pantheism = everything is “god”. This is heresy. This is a lie...not true.

Panentheism = God is in everything. This can be understood as true to Orthodoxy, as explained above. The light shines through and in the glass window, but the glass remains glass. We can have the Presence and Energies of the Uncreated God shining through and in us, but we remain created humans.

The Son of God is **begotten in eternity**. He is eternally being begotten of the Father. This is not an act that happened once in time, but is an eternal relationship that has been always existing, from before time began. As we state in the Creed: “Begotten of the Father before all ages.”

The Son helped make time. The Son made all things (John 1:3). The Son is not a created “thing” but eternally exists “before all things” (Colossians 1:17). As we state in the Creed: “Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by Whom all things were made.”

God did not always create. He did not have to create. Out of love, He created the world by His own free will out of nothing at the beginning of time. He made the world and time by His free and infinite will.

Man is not his own source of life; man is not his own Maker. Our life depends upon God. “In Him [Christ] all things consist” (Col.1:17). In other words: “in Him all things hold together.”

The meaning of life is that man was created by a loving, free, eternal tri-Personal God—Who created man (male and female) in His Image—in order that man might live in communion with God throughout eternity.

Part Two - The Creation of Man in God’s Image & Likeness

Man is unique among all things that were created: He was created in God’s “Image and Likeness”.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness’...So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

Note: **plural** for “Us” and “Our”; but **singular** for “image”.

Plural: because God is Three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Singular: NOT “images”, but “image”, because God is ONE in Essence/Nature.

Both men and women fully share the “Image and Likeness of God”.

Orthodoxy is unique in that the Fathers of our Church have always understood these two terms to be two separate things, unlike Western Christianity which sees them as only synonyms.

Orthodoxy understands “Image” to mean man *as he was originally created* (glorious, but with much room and potential *for more growth and movement* “from glory to glory”).

Orthodoxy understands “Likeness” to mean *the final goal of man’s life*. By cooperating (i.e. synergizing) with the Grace of God, we get filled with more and more of God (His Divine Energies), and thus being filled with His Presence and being energized by His Divine Power and Energy, we become more and more like Him (more “god-like”). (Yet God remains God by nature and we remain by nature human.)

In other words, “Man is created in the image of God, but He is **called to grow into the likeness** of God by the use of his free will.” (*Life*, 16)

Man was created with a goal: to be conformed to the likeness of God.
Romans 8:29 “Conformed to the image of His Son”.

Having been created in His image, like Him, *we too are free*. Freedom is part of what it means to be made in God’s Image. We are *free* to grow in the likeness, (to conform more and more to His Image) or we are *free to reject* His Grace, and to deform into a sub-human, demonic-like existence.

God did not create robots that will love Him automatically, by force or compulsion.

We are free to love God, and grow and to fulfill our human vocation to become more and more like Him.

However, we are also free to reject God, and to fail to fulfill our vocation.

“I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live.” (Deut. 30:19)

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

The Fathers have given various answers: to have a soul, to have the ability to reason, to communicate, to create, to have free will, to govern, to worship, and all else that is the totality of human existence: in summary, it is the totality of our human existence that makes us persons. (*Life* p.18)

“It is the ability to love [God, other people, and creation] that ultimately defines us as persons created in the image of God.” (*Life*, p. 20)

The concept of “**the person**” vs “**the individual**”

An individual can be described by a list of external traits and characteristics: tall, kind, pretty, etc. There can be individuals who have the same list of traits. We classify people by age, height, sex.

Yet, as persons created in the image of God, we are more than a list of traits: we are free, unique, unrepeatable and relational. *There always remains a **mystery** to a person and his/her personhood.* (i.e. a husband and wife may be married for 15 years; they each may be able to describe the other’s individual traits; yet, they cannot fully understand and classify the other person. “She remains always a mystery to me.”)

Persons are free = not robots

Persons are unique and unrepeatable = unlike Xerox machines that repeats images

(no two fingerprints are alike; there are no two persons the same)

(i.e. the fox and boy parable: two ordinary creatures, because of love, became absolutely unique to each other. “To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world.” (p.19, *Life*))

We were created in the image of a loving God Who is so personal that He is Tri-Personal.

Therefore, we human persons are by design relational = we become real persons by relating to other persons in love.

“Our personal uniqueness is found only in the relationship of love with other persons.” (*Life*, p.20)

“You cannot be a person—that is to say, fully human—on your own. To be human is to relate to others.” (*Life*, p.20)

An individual is a member of a set (“a little boy like a hundred thousand other little boys”). For an individual, “others are hell” (said the philosopher Sarte). They get in “my way.”

On the **contrary**, a person loves and is loved.

For the person, “others are our heaven” and I need/want to love them. By lovingly relating to others, I become more human—and therefore, become more “god-like”. By loving others, more of God’s Divine Energies can flood my life and my actions, deifying me. I can grow in the Likeness of God. As St. Paisios prayed to God: “make me into a human.”

In summary: “It is the **ability to love** that ultimately defines us as persons created in the **image** of God.” (*Life*, p. 20) We are created in the image of God because we have the capacity to achieve theosis (union with the God of love) and transfiguration by His loving Grace.

The more truly human (relating in love) you become, the bigger your heart becomes, and you have more room in it (more love) for other people.

But, the less human (less relational) you become, the smaller your heart becomes, and you have less room in it for others. Only room for the Ego, for “Me.” “It’s my life.”

As an Orthodox Christian I need others to love. I need others to get to heaven. I can go to hell alone, but I cannot go to heaven alone. Alone, I can go to hell. The doors of the cells of hell are locked from the inside.

The Holy Trinity is Tri-Personal: three Divine Persons relating eternally in love.

God is not the Ultimate Egoist: a solitary Individual

God is not even a Duality—a Dynamic Duo—two Divine Lovers, Best Friends who cut everybody else out of their private love affair.

But God is Triune—Three in One. The Two love each other, and together they love a Third.

We are free persons—personally unique—**not** simply individuals.

We relate to other persons. We need other persons so that we can be what we were designed to be: lovers of God and lovers of others. This is because we were made in the Image of a Tri-Personal God of love.

We can only become fully human and personal when we relate to God—and know God—and love God—and are filled with God.

How we relate to others is how we relate to God. God’s love in us is the love we give to others.

“What you have done to the least of these my children, you have done to Me,” said Jesus.

We share His love with others, and in so doing, we become more like God.

This is what it means to be “**deified**” – to be made like God, God-like.

This is “theosis” – “union with God.”

This is our **Salvation**.