

Defintions in Orthodox Theology

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1. Orthodox Theological Terms

Monotheism: Belief that there is one (*mono*) God (*theos*). It involves the recognition of a personal God who is distinct from creation. Therefore it is opposed to monism which identifies God with creation. As opposed to polytheism or dualism, monotheism affirms that God is not many, but one. As Lossky writes, "The God of theology is a 'Thou'; He is the living God of the Bible, the Absolute, certainly, but a personal Absolute whom one can address intimately in prayer" (*Orthodox Theology*, 27).

Agennetos: A somewhat ambiguous term which connotes both "ingenerate" and "self-existent," referring to God's eternal being (Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 46). It is a technical term which is used to differentiate God's unique unoriginate, self-existing nature from His creation (*ibid*, 84; 92). It also can be used in reference to the three hypostasis of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since all three persons (hypostasis) of the Holy Trinity share of the identical nature (*ousia*) they can all be said to be *agennetos*, or self-existing. But within the hypostatic relations of the Trinity, the Father is said to be "ungenerated," the Son "eternally generated" (or begotten) from the Father and the Spirit as "eternally proceeding" from the Father. If *agennetos* is used in this sense (ingenerate) it refers solely to the Father (*ibid*, 244). As Pseudo-Basil wrote, using this latter sense, "the term *agennetos* does not represent God's essence buy simply the Father's mode of existence" (*ibid*, 266).

Generation: A term which describes the proper relation of the Son to God the Father. The Son is eternally generated from (or begotten of) God the Father. St. John of Damascus explains: "Since generation is a work of nature and proceeds from the very substance of God, it must necessarily be that it is eternal and without beginning, otherwise the begetter would undergo a change, and there would be prior God and posterior God: God would develop. (*The Orthodox Faith* 1:13; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 93). Thus the Son's generation from the Father indicates that He comes forth from the very nature of God the Father. This is contrasted with creation which results from an act of God's will. The Son differs from the Father and the Spirit solely in His hypostatic or personal property of being generated from the Father (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 54).

Procession: A term that describes the proper relation of the Holy Spirit to God the Father. The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds or comes forth from God the Father. Like generation, procession is a work of nature rather than will. The generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, are in a certain way simultaneous from the Father, the one implying the other (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 44). The Spirit differs from the Father and the Son solely in His hypostatic or personal property of proceeding from the Father. The Father is ungenerated, the Son generated from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 54). According to St. John of Damascus, "The mode of generation [of the Son] and the mode of procession [of the

Spirit] are incomprehensible... we have learned there is a difference between generation and procession, but the nature of the difference we in no wise understand" (*ibid*, 55).

Ousia: A Greek word which means "essence" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 40) and "individual substance" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 51). In general it refers to that which exists (in the common or general sense). The Fathers used this word to express the reality of substance or essence which is common to the three persons of the Holy Trinity (*Orthodox Theology*, 40). Lossky writes that the *ousia* of the Trinity should not be thought of as an abstract idea of divinity, or a rational essence binding the three divine individuals -as human nature would be for three men (*ibid*, 41). Instead, through apophatism, *ousia* in the Trinity is understood in a "metalogical depth of an unknowable transcendence" (*ibid*, 41). Otherwise the danger is that the Holy Trinity's *ousia* (or essence) could erroneously be hypostasized into a "fourth person" of the Godhead - which clearly would be heretical. The Orthodox doctrine is that God is one essence in three hypostases (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 182).

Homoousios: A term which means con-substantial, identical in essence, and co-essential. According to Lossky, it is the adjective *homoousios* which "finally enabled the Church... to express the mystery of the divinity: at once monad and triad" (*Orthodox Theology*, 38). The use of this term enabled the Church to be able to explain that the Son is the same God, yet not God the Father. In other words, *homoousios* was used by the Church "to denote the co-essentiality of the Father and the Son" (*ibid*, 40). It was used at the Council of Nicaea (1st Ecumenical, 325 A.D.) to condemn the teachings of Arius and his followers who denied that Christ was "God from God, *homoousios* with the Father."

Consubstantiality: A term which means "sharing the self-same nature." It is based on Latin-based terminology (Lt. *con* = with, *substantia* = essence/nature) and it has the identical meaning as *homoousios*. It is used especially in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ Whom the Church defined as being "of the same substance (consubstantial) with his Father according to his Divinity, and of the same substance (consubstantial) with us according to his humanity; for there is a union of two natures. Wherefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord." (cf. The Letter of Cyril to John of Antioch, from the documents of the Council of Chalcedon, 4th Ecumenical Council).

Hypostasis: A word used to indicate personhood (but not individuality). *Ousia* and *hypostasis* were originally nearly synonymous, both indicating "the sphere of being" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 41). The idea of "other" without reabsorbing it into a unity was radically foreign to the thought of the ancients. They tended, ontologically, to put a high value upon "sameness," and to denounce the notion of "the other" -what they took to be an disintegration of being" (*ibid*, 40). Because of this, the Greek language lacked any real, specific designation for person. As a result, the Fathers had to specialize the meaning of the words *ousia* and *hypostasis*. As Lossky writes, "The Fathers, by specializing their meaning, came to be able... to root personhood in being, and to personalize ontology" (*ibid*, 41).

Prosopon: A Greek word which was used (especially by the West) as an equivalent of the Latin word *persona* (person) although it did not have this exact connotation. Rather it "merely denoted the delimiting, deceptive, and finally illusory aspect of the individual; not the open-face of personal being, but the masked face of impersonal being" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 40). Because *prosopon* indicated "a mask" or "the role of an actor" it was seen by some Fathers as open to heretical interpretation. For example, in reference to Christology, e.g., *prosopon* could be misinterpreted to mean that in Christ was only a "*prosopon* (or appearance) of union" whereas Orthodox Christology teaches there is a real "*hypostatic union*" of Divinity and humanity in Christ (cf. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 154).

In reference to doctrine of the Trinity, the use of *prosopon* could also be problematic. "St. Basil saw in this term, as applied to Trinitarian doctrine, a tendency peculiar to western thought: a tendency which had already shown itself in Sabellianism in making of the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost no more than three modalities of a unique substance" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 52). The West equally had misgivings about *hypostasis* which they translated as "substantia" connoting "essence" more than "personhood." Thus Eastern Trinitarian theology sounded to the West like "tri-theism." As a result of controversies over the meaning of these words (especially as they were used at Chalcedon), they were further clarified. *Hypostasis* came to be understood by the West as describing personhood in the concrete sense" and "persona / *prosopon* was given a suitable interpretation and received in the East (cf. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 153; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 52).

Hypostatic Union: Not a union of two hypostasis but rather a union of two *natures* (Divine and human) in the one divine hypostasis of God the Word (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 154). It is important to note that in the *Neo-Chalcedonianism* of the 5th Ecumenical Council it was affirmed that "the human nature of Christ is not personalized into a separate human hypostasis as Nestorius affirmed." Rather, "a fully human individual life was *en-hypostasized* in the hypostasis of the Logos, without losing any of its human characteristics... in Christ, [Divine nature and human nature] were united in the single, divine hypostasis of the Logos" (*ibid*, 154). As Canon 2 of the Council of Ephesus (3rd Ecumenical Council) stated, "If anyone shall not confess that the Word of God the Father is united hypostatically to flesh, and that with that flesh of his own, he is one only Christ both God and man at the same time: let him be anathema."

Monarchism: Orthodox Monarchism derives from the Greek term *mone- arche* (single-principal). It was a common teaching among the Church Fathers of the fourth century. According to Lossky, "the innascibility of the Father without beginning is the basic idea of the monarchy of the Father, the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, describes the relationships which allows us to distinguish the persons of the Holy Trinity" (*Orthodox Theology*, 43). The term is used in reference to the Father who, as *mone-arche*, is the sole principle and source of Divinity within the Holy Trinity. Thus the two other Persons (i.e., the Son and the Spirit) have their origin from the Father who is the "single-principal" and "divinity-source" (according to Dionysius the Areopagite). "The notion of monarchy therefore denotes in a single word the unity and the difference in God, starting from a personal principle" (*ibid*, 46). Orthodox Monarchism, through apophatism, does not denigrate into a doctrine of subordinationism. this is because whereas "in our experience, the cause is superior to the effect,

in God, on the contrary, the cause as fulfillment of personal love cannot produce inferior effects: it wishes them to be equal in dignity, and is therefore also the cause of their equality” (*ibid*, 47, cf. *Mystical Theology*, 62). The Orthodox expression of this doctrine is clearly differentiated from heretical "Monarchianism" as well as various forms of Modalism.

Ex-nihilo: The idea that God created everything "out of nothing." Its scriptural foundation is laid in Second Maccabees where a mother encouraging her son onto martyrdom states, "I beseech you, my child, to look at heaven and earth and see everything in them and know that God made them out of nothing; so also He made the race of man in this way" (2 Macc 7:28 LXX). Creation is a work of God's will and not of God's nature. It is in this sense that St. John of Damascus differentiates the creation of the world from the generation of the Word. Hence, that which God calls forth from non-being into being (i.e. creation), is in no way co-eternal with God. Creation has a beginning (Gen 1:1) whereas the Word is eternally generated or begotten (Jn. 1:1-3, cf. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 59). As Lossky writes, "There is, in fact, nothing in the divine nature which could be the necessary cause of the production of creatures: creation might just as well not exist. God could equally well not have created; creation is a free act of His will, and this free act is the sole foundation of the existence of all beings." (*Mystical Theology*, 93). Though creation's existence had a beginning, it will never cease to exist because "the word of the Lord endures forever (1 Pet 1:25), and the divine will is unchangeable (*ibid*, 94).

Existential Theology: Orthodox theology can be properly understood as existential. This term has the connotation of something which is actual and not (just) conceived. Lossky writes, "This faculty is the personal existence of man, it is his nature made to assimilate itself to divine life - both mortified in their state of separation and death and vivified by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Faith as ontological participation included in a personal meeting is therefore the first condition of theological knowledge" (*Orthodox Theology*, 17). In other words the Orthodox faith must be lived in order to be properly understood.

2. Heretical Doctrines, Pagan Philosophies and Personages

Pantheism: Belief that God is everything. It claims that all things are divine, or that God and the universe are identical in nature, or that there is ultimately no real distinction between God and the created world. Pantheism is the divinization of all created nature. Whereas Orthodox Christianity teaches we are to become, by grace, what God is by nature, Pantheism affirms that created nature is already a part of the divinity.

Panentheism: Belief that the world is part of God though not comprising the whole of His being. It differs from pantheism (which identifies the world as God) by affirming that a part of God is the universe and part is simply God.

Polytheism: Belief in many gods and the practice of worshipping them as equally divine. The usual biblical term for this is "idolatry." According to Lossky, in Polytheism there are no truly personal Gods. He writes that in the Polytheism of India: "Even the 'personal' gods are no more than aspects, manifestations of an impersonal absolute; manifestations as contingent, for the non-

Christian Orient, as the world which they confront, being destined like it to efface themselves, to absorb themselves in the inwardness of Total Identity." Lossky concludes, "This Identity ignores 'the other,' engulfing all personal relationship (*Orthodox Theology*, 27). Lossky explains that in the polytheism of ancient Greece, the various gods ultimately submitted to "an anonymous and dominating 'Necessity.'" "The philosophers placed above these gods, not a Person, but a superior universe of stability and light, the sphere of beauty of an impersonal being" (*ibid*, 28).

Dualism: Belief in two Gods, usually equally powerful and diametrically opposed to each other. Lossky explains that God cannot be a dyad because "the personal plenitude of God cannot stabilize itself upon a dyad, because two implies opposition and reciprocal limitation" (*Orthodox Theology*, 45). St. Gregory the Theologian differentiates the idea of God as Monad, Dyad and Triad. He states, "The monad is set in motion in virtue of its richness; the dyad is surpassed (for the deity is above matter and form); the triad contains itself in perfection, for it is the first which surpasses the composition of the dyad" (*Oratio* 40:41). Thus the Godhead is not understood as limited, nor is it seen as indefinite. Lossky state that the former is Judaic and the latter is Hellenistic and polytheistic. The Gnostics dealt with dyads and the Platonists with dualism. But according to St. Gregory the Theologian, two is the number which separates, three is the number which transcends all separation. (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 46)

Modalism: A heterodox doctrine which emphasized the unifying essence of God at the expense of the three hypostases. As such it amounts to the exact opposite of Tritheism. It is the "denial of any permanent distinction within the Godhead (J. Antypas). Lossky states, "Its most perfect expression was in the third century, the modalism of Sabellius, where the very notion of personhood disappeared." With Sabellius, "God is an impersonal essence which manifests itself diversely to the universe" (*Orthodox Theology*, 37). At creation God appears as Father. After the fall of man, God appears as Son and Savior. Then following the Ascension, God appeared as Holy Spirit and came down upon the Apostles and the Church. At the Final Judgment, "This successive Trinity remains thus a pure appearance and in no way concerns the reality itself of God: here nature completely absorbs the persons" (*ibid*, 37).

Unitarianism: Akin to modalism, Unitarianism is also a denial of the Orthodox teaching on the Holy Trinity. This heterodox teaching affirms that in the Holy Trinity there is really only one person who is manifested in three different modes (i.e., as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit). As such it represents a "unipersonality of God" (J. Antypas) and affirms a single hypostasis in God. According to Lossky, the natural tendency of the human mind is to try to suppress the mystery of the Holy Trinity "by reducing Trinity to unity," and "in making it an essence of the philosophers with three modes of manifestation" (*Mystical Theology*, 48).

Emanation: The opposite of the doctrine of "creation out of nothing" is the idea that creation emanates out from God's own nature. Orthodox theology teaches that "creation is not a kind of spreading out of infinite diffusion of the Godhead, a spontaneous communication of the energies producing beings in virtue of some necessity of the divine nature - the Good diffusing itself by itself -as was taught in Neo-Platonism (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 93). In this case, creation would come forth from God's very nature rather than coming forth from an act of God's will.

This confusion of God's nature with His creation is a form of pantheism implying that creation is divine. If true, it would mean that creation is eternal and eternally coming forth from God, since God is eternal in His nature.

Gnosticism: Kelley explains that there was no single Gnostic movement or church but behind all the various Gnostic sects there was a common set of ideas related to the problems of "existence, evil and salvation" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 26). First "Gnostic schools were thoroughly dualistic, setting an infinite chasm between the spiritual world and the world of matter, which they regarded as intrinsically evil" (*ibid*, 26). Secondly material order and creation was seen as not deriving from God but rather from a demiurge, or inferior deity or as a result of some primeval disorder. Thirdly, there is a spiritual element in man (or at least in the elite of mankind) which seeks and yearns "to be free from matter and to ascend to its true home" (*ibid*, 26). Fourth, mediators from the *aeons* are needed to help with this process. Finally all Gnostic systems taught that redemption is achieved through knowledge (Grk. *gnosis*) and the divine mediators help "open the eyes of *pneumatic men* to the truth" (*ibid*, 26). Although many of their themes and terminology sounded Christian, and Christianity had to contend with the errors of Gnosticism from the time of the end of the New Testament period, Christianity's Orthodox doctrine prevailed. As Kelley explains, "Because in general they disparaged matter...the Gnostics were prevented from giving full values to the fundamental Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Word" (*ibid*, 28).

Platonism: A philosophy taught by Plato (429-347 B.C.) which was based on his theory of knowledge. Platonism taught that knowledge is not possible through things that are sensible but rather in the non-sensible or intelligible world of "Forms" or "Ideas." This world is apprehended by the intellect alone. Whereas the senses inform us about the unstable and ever-changing, the intellect perceives characteristics grouped together in common groups (like the notion of "beauty") which are stable (Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 15). These forms are arranged in a hierarchy crowned by the most universal Form of all, the Form of the Good (later called the One), which is the cause of all other Forms and of our knowledge of them. Because these Forms are unchanging, they are the true reality to contemplate and know (*ibid*, 15).

Man has an immaterial, pre-existent and immortal soul which goes on existing after the mortal body. Since the soul pre-existed in the world of Forms it is endowed with a recollection which allows man to recognize these Forms (*ibid*, 16). A "Demiurge, or Craftsman, makes the World-Soul out of pre-existent material... He and that world seem independent of each other, so that we are left with two ultimate principles in addition to pre-existent matter" (*ibid*, 16). Lossky explains that "the demiurge is not a creator-God, but... a fashioner of the cosmos..." Instead, "the demiurge creates substances giving form to amorphous matter which exists eternally independently of himself as a chaotic and unqualifiable mass, capable of receiving every possible form and quality (*Mystical Theology*, 92).

Ideas represent the superior level of Being, even the gods are inferior to them. The sensible world has no verity. Creation remains a myth because the world and matter have always existed. The demiurge shapes matter by copying it from the model of the ideal, true world of Forms. To contemplate these Ideas or Forms "one must escape the precarious universe of change, the flux of generation and corruption" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 56). The Greek Fathers saw

in Platonism the discovery, partial and dangerous, of a reality: not dualism but the transparency of the visible to the invisible" (*ibid*, 57).

Plotinus: A Greek-speaking Egyptian who founded and best exemplified the philosophy of Neo-Platonism (Kelley, 20). Plotinus was a monist "conceiving of reality as a vast hierarchical structure with grades descending from what is beyond being to what falls below being" (*ibid*, 20). He taught there is One highest principle or hypostasis (which is God), who is the source from which being derives the goal to which it ever strives to return (emanationism). "Four times in his life, Porphyry tells us, Plotinus knew ecstasy" which was the highest state obtainable in Neo-Platonism (*ibid*, 28). He even used the term *homoousios* and taught a trinity of three consubstantial hypostases. But Lossky explains, "Their consubstantiality did not rise to the Trinitarian antinomy of Christian dogma: it appears as a descending hierarchy and realizes itself through the ceaseless flow of the hypostases which pass the one into the other, reciprocally reflecting each other (*Mystical Theology*, 49). "Plotinus was the peak of non-biblical antiquity whose thought would be assimilated and used by numerous Fathers, attaining through them a true fulfillment" (Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 28). He was one of the greatest thinkers of the ancient world (Kelley, 20).

Neo-Platonism: A philosophy platonic in its main inspiration, but incorporating Aristotelian, Stoic and even Oriental elements, which flourished from the middle of the third century (Kelley, 20). It taught emanationism that creation was "a kind of spreading out of infinite diffusion of the Godhead, a spontaneous communication of the energies producing beings in virtue of some necessity of the divine nature - the Good diffusing itself by itself" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 93). It also taught that all individual souls are emanations from the "World-Soul." Matter in itself, unilluminated, is "darkness or non-being and as such is evil" (Kelley, 21). "All that exists is an overflow of the One... and is the ardent longing for union with what is higher... with the One itself" (*ibid*, 21).

Neo-Platonism taught that there are three stages of ascent to this union. Stage one is purification (freeing from the body and sense-perception. Stage two rises to the level of the Mind learning philosophy, science but retaining self-consciousness. The third and final stage consists of mystical union with the One and is received through ecstatic states where self-consciousness is lost (*ibid*, 22). Ultimately, according to Lossky, Neo-Platonism was to end up in a "mysticism of absorption" reminiscent of Hinduism (cf. *Orthodox Theology*, 28).

Origen: An early Christian writer and biblical exegete credited for several erroneous theories including the pre-existence of souls, the eternity of creation and the universal redemption of all (known as *apocastasis*) -including even the devil. Meyendorff explains that Origen taught the Hellenistic view of an "eternal cosmos" rather than the "Biblical linear view of history" (*Byzantine Theology*, 129). Origen taught that "the act of creation was an expression of God's nature" and, therefore, creation is also eternal. According to Meyendorff, the "eternality of creation was... ontologically indistinguishable from the eternity of the Logos. Both proceeded eternally from God" (*ibid*, 129). This erroneous connection led Arius, once he rejected creation's eternity, to similarly teach that the Logos had also been created in time. The errors of Origen were condemned in the Council of Constantinople (the 5th Ecumenical, A.D. 553). Lossky

writes, "the heterodox doctrines with which Origen was charged had their root in a certain insensitivity towards the unknowability of God on the part of this great Christian thinker. An attitude which was not fundamentally apophatic made the Alexandrian teacher a religious philosopher rather than a mystical theologian." (*Mystical Theology*, 32) Lossky concludes, "Whenever theology is transformed into a religious philosophy (as in the case of Origen) it is always the result of forsaking the *apophaticism* which is truly characteristic of the whole tradition of the Eastern Church" (*Mystical Theology*, 42).

Manichianism: A 3rd century heresy founded by a prophet named Mani from Babylonia. It embodied not only Christian teaching but also, Buddhist and Zoroastrian elements (Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 13). It was a religion which claimed universal validity and application and taught "elaborate, dramatic myths" much like the various forms of Gnosticism (*ibid*, 13). Kelley explains that Manichianism, "taught a radical dualism of two great forces eternally opposed to each other, Good (that is, God, Truth, Light) and Evil, or Darkness, the latter being identified with matter. As a result, it taught as a dogma that "matter, including the body, was intrinsically evil" (Kelley, 344). Man's salvation comes by grasping the truth that he is a fragment of the substance of God and to withdraw oneself from the contamination of the flesh, matter being the fundamental evil" (*ibid*, 14). In objection to such an erroneous view, St. Gregory Palamas wrote, "We do not apply the word '*man*' to body and soul separately, but to both together, for the whole man was created in the image of God" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 224).

Dialectical Theology: As it relates to the Theology of the Holy Trinity, Lossky teaches, "There is no interior process in the Godhead; no dialectic of the three persons; no becoming; no tragedy in the Absolute, which might necessitate the Trinitarian development of the divine being in order that it be surmounted or resolved" (*Mystical Theology*, 45). Such ideas, according to Lossky, are "proper to the romantic tradition of the nineteenth-century German philosophy" and are completely foreign to the Orthodox dogma of the Trinity. All ideas of processions, acts and inner determinations are expressions ideas of time, becoming and intention which show how much our language and thought is poor and deficient "before the primordial mystery of revelation." This is why, we must constantly return to apophatic theology in order to "rid ourselves of concepts proper to human thought, transforming them into steps by which we may ascent to the contemplation of a reality which the created intelligence cannot contain" (*ibid*, 46).