

## **Introduction**

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## I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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### 001. What is an Orthodox Catechism?

An Orthodox Catechism is an instruction in the orthodox Christian faith to serve the needs of all Christians, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. This is especially important for those who are entering the Church as adults or who were baptized as infants and desire to learn more about the “faith delivered once for all to the saints” (Jude 3). Ultimately, the goal is to enable Christians to know God, to love God and to please God so as to obtain, by His Grace, “the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9).”

### 002. What is the meaning of the word Catechism?

It is a Greek word, signifying instruction, or oral teaching, and has been used ever since the Apostles’ times to denote that primary instruction in the orthodox faith which is needful for every Christian (Luke 1:4; Acts 28:25). St Cyril of Jerusalem and St Gregory of Nyssa are, among others, remembered for their “Catechetical Lectures (*Mystagogical Catechesis*)” and “Great Catechism.”<sup>1</sup>

### 003. What is necessary in order to please God and to save one's own soul?

As the Apostle wrote:

*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).*

Furthermore, “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).”

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207.toc.html>

In order to please God and be saved, we need to know the true God (John 17:3), have a living faith in Him so as to commit ourselves and our entire life to Christ Jesus, so that we may be “hidden with Christ” (Colossians 3:3) and “escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and become participants of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).” This is why Christians must be baptized<sup>1</sup> and be united to Christ by participation in the holy and life-creating mysteries of the Church.

Also, we must “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12).” This means that united to the Life of Christ, we must live a life according to faith and that produces good works.

#### **004. Why is faith necessary in the first place?**

Because we have seen that the Word of God testifies that “without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).”

#### **005. Why must a life according to faith and good works be inseparable from this faith?**

Because, as the Scriptures bear witness:

*Faith without works is dead (James 2:20)*

#### **006. What then is faith?**

According to the definition of St. Paul, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).” It means trusting in the unseen as though it were seen, so much that what is hoped and waited for is as if it were

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<sup>1</sup> “Baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).

already present. Faith is anchored in our certainty that God is almighty and loving (Luke 1:37; 1 John 4:8).

### **007. What is the difference between knowledge and faith?**

Knowledge has for its object things visible and comprehensible. By contrast, faith related with things which are invisible and even beyond human comprehension. Knowledge is founded on experience, on examination of its object; but faith on belief of testimony to truth.

### **008. Why is faith and not knowledge only, necessary in religious instruction?**

The reason is that this catechetical instruction is about God invisible and incomprehensible, and the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery. Consequently, many parts of this learning can not be embraced by knowledge, but may be received by faith, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

As St. Cyril of Jerusalem explained:

Faith is the eye which enlightens everyone's conscience; it gives knowledge. As the prophet says, "If you will not believe, you shall not understand (Isaiah 7:9)."

### **009. Can you illustrate further the necessity of faith?**

St. Cyril illustrates this point in these words:

It is not only among us who hear the name of Christ that faith is made so great a thing. In fact, everything which is done in the world, even by people who are unconnected with the Church, is done by faith. Agriculture is founded on faith; for no one who did not believe that he should gather in the increase of the fruits of the earth would undertake this labor. Sailors are guided by faith when they entrust their fate to a structure made of wood and prefer the agitation of the unstable waters to the more stable element of the earth. All of these people give themselves up to uncertain expectations, and

retain for themselves nothing but faith, to which they trust more than to any anchors.

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## II. ON DIVINE REVELATION

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### 010. From what source is the doctrine of the Orthodox faith derived?

The Orthodox doctrine is derived from divine revelation.

### 011. What is meant by the words divine revelation?

Divine revelation refers to what God himself has revealed to the human race, so that we might believe in Him rightly and unto salvation, and honor Him worthily. As the prophet of the book of Revelation (4:8-11) beheld and heard:

*The four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night they unceasingly sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives unto the ages of ages, the twenty-four presbyters fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,*

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."*

### 012. Has God given such a revelation to all?

Since not everyone is capable of receiving a revelation immediately from God, He has employed special persons as heralds of His revelation.

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**013. Why are not all men capable of receiving a revelation immediately from God?**

The principal reason is the effect of sin and impurity, toher with weakness of spirit, soul and body. The Scripture give us a striking example in the vision of the Prophet Isaiah (6:1-10):

*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory..." And the house filled with smoke. I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."*

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" So I answered, "Here am I; send me!"*

*And he replied, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."*

**014. Who were the heralds of divine revelation?**

Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and other Prophets, received and preached the beginnings of divine revelation. However, it was the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought it to earth, in its fullness and

perfection, and spread it throughout the world by his Disciples and Apostles.

As the Apostle writes, in the beginning of his Epistle to the Hebrews (1:1-3):

*In the past, God spoke to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. At the end of these days, he has spoken to us in his Son whom he has appointed heir of all things and through whom he [had] made the ages. His Son is the radiance of his glory, the exact counterpart of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power.*

The Apostle Paul also writes as follows to the Corinthians:

*Instead, we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that was hidden, which God had foreordained before the ages for our glory, [a wisdom] which none of the rulers of this world recognized. For if they had recognized this wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory! As it is written:*

*'Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not hear, which did not enter into the heart of man; These God has prepared for those who love him.'*

*Yet, God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit, because the Spirit searches all things, yes, [even] the deep things of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? Likewise, no one truly comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-11)*

The Evangelist John writes in his Gospel:

*No one has seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known (John 1:18).*

Jesus Christ himself says:

*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son desires to reveal him (Matthew 11:27).*

### **015. Is it therefore impossible to have any knowledge of God without a special revelation from Him?**

Human being may have some knowledge of God by contemplation of those things which he has created. However, this knowledge is imperfect and insufficient, and can serve only as a preparation for faith, or as a help towards the knowledge of God from his revelation.

*For since the creation of the world, his invisible things are clearly seen. They are perceived through created things, even his everlasting power and divinity. This is so that they may be without excuse, 21because knowing God, they did not glorify him as God or give [him] thanks (Romans 1:20-21)*

As St Paul preached in Athens:

*From one man, he has made every nation to dwell on the entire surface of the earth (having determined the times and boundaries of their habitation). God did this so that people should seek the Lord and perhaps reach out for him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being!'* (Acts 17:26-28)

Saint Basil also wrote:

With regard to faith in God, it is preceded by the idea that God exists, which idea we get from creation. By attentively examining the creation of the world, we perceive that God is wise, powerful, and good. We also perceive his invisible properties. This way, we are led to acknowledge him as the Supreme Ruler. Seeing that God is the Creator of the whole world and that we are part of the world, it follows that God is also our Creator. From this knowledge, faith may follow, and from faith worship (Epistle 232).

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### III. ON HOLY TRADITION AND HOLY SCRIPTURE

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#### 016. How is divine revelation spread to all people and preserved in the Church?

By the following channels:

✠ The oral proclamation of the Word of God (which may include Holy Tradition):

*For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth: the word of God. And it is at work in you who believe! (1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

✠ The written transmission of the same proclamation of the Word of God which is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

*And so, brethren, stand firm and keep the traditions which we taught you, whether by word or by letter. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

#### 017. What is meant by Holy Tradition?

Tradition (in Greek: *paradosis*) can be a treacherous word and we must always be clear as to what we mean with all the words that we use, so as to avoid confusing ourselves and others.

Tradition can refer to what is being passed on (the content) or the way (the transmission method) by which it is passed on.

What is being passed on is the saving Gospel of the Lord and how it is lived in “the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).”

The way that this is transmitted is in writing and in the liturgical life of the Church. In particular, apostolic succession is

the divinely appointed means by which the deposit of the faith is passed on from one generation to another. As St Paul instructed Timothy:

*What you heard from me among many witnesses, entrust likewise to faithful men who will be able to teach others as well. (2 Timothy 2:2)*

In a broad sense, Holy Tradition means the doctrine of the faith, the law of God, the sacraments, and the ritual as handed down by the true believers and worshipers of God by word and example from one to another, and from generation to generation.

In a narrow sense, Holy Tradition can be understood as the right interpretation of the Scriptures.

By Apostolic Tradition, we specifically mean the teachings and practices of the Apostles, which were observed by their disciples and passed on by the men which they had appointed as bishops and presbyters in the Churches. Often, these Apostolic Traditions were recorded in writing by their immediate or more distant disciples, such as Origen and St Basil.

There are also traditions (small “t”) which are simply the way we do things, not necessarily having receiving such practices from the Apostles. Sometimes, these traditions of human origin (such as receiving Holy Communion only very rarely) may be against Holy Tradition and fall under the condemnation of the Lord:

*He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. (Matthew 15:2,6)*

The key point is always to ask where these traditions are from and if they are in harmony (or nullify) the written Word of

God which can be understood as ‘certified and assured’ Tradition.

### **018. Is there any sure repository of Holy Tradition?**

Certainly, the Holy Scriptures can be considered an absolutely reliable repository of Holy Tradition on account of their nature as *theopneustos* or “God breathed.” But the Apostolic Church, along with her minister and sacraments is also “God breathed:”

*Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23)*

The Church (the local Church) which is communion with the other apostolic Churches and all true believers united by the holy tradition of the faith, collectively and successively, by the will of God, are therefore a sure repository of holy tradition, or, as St. Paul expresses it:

*The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)*

St. Irenæus also writes:

We ought not to seek the truth elsewhere, since we may have it by asking from the Church. In her, as in a rich treasure-house, the Apostles have laid up in its fullness all that pertains to the truth, so that whosoever seeketh may receive from her the food of life. She is the door of life. (AH 3:4)

### **019. What is that which you call Holy Scripture?**

The expression Holy Scripture refers to certain writings which have their ultimate origin in the world of the Spirit of God which revealed spiritual truths to men throughout the ages.

These human authors, who were sanctified by God, are often called Prophets and Apostles. The collection of these books is commonly called the Bible.

### **020. What does the word Bible mean?**

It comes from the Greek *biblios* and it means “the books.” The name signifies that these sacred books are uniquely authoritative witnesses to Jesus Christ. As such, they deserve attention before all others.

However, within the corpus of the Bible, there is a hierarchy of witnessing power and dogmatic authority. The Gospels hold a unique place as witnesses to the Truth and only the Gospels are placed on the Holy Table in the sanctuary.

### **021. Which is the more ancient, oral tradition or the written word?**

The most ancient and original instrument for spreading divine revelation is holy tradition. From Adam to Moses there were no sacred books. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself delivered his divine doctrine and ordinances to his Disciples by word and example, but not by writing. The same method was followed by the Apostles also at first, when they spread abroad the faith and established the Church of Christ. The necessity of tradition is further evident from this, that for many centuries, books were available only to a small part of mankind, but tradition (inseparable from the life and structure of the Church) to all.

### **022. Why, then, was Holy Scripture given?**

To this end, that divine revelation might be preserved more exactly and unchangeably.

In Holy Scripture we read the words of the Prophets and Apostles precisely as if we were living with them and listening

to them, although the latest of the sacred books were written about 2,000 years before our time.

### **023. Must we follow Holy Tradition, even when we possess Holy Scripture?**

We must follow that tradition which agrees with the divine revelation and with Holy Scripture, as is taught us by Holy Scripture itself. There are many ways, notably the study of the Early Fathers and of ancient liturgies to ascertain whether particular traditions or practices are apostolic and God-pleasing. Furthermore, these will always be in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, even when the Scriptures do not say much on a particular topic.

Two examples come to mind: (1) the baptism of infants which is taught in Scriptures but not in a direct and explicit manner, and (2) the practice of praying for the reposed. These are undoubtedly well-attested apostolic traditions and they are fully consistent with the Scriptures rightly interpreted.

Again, the instruction of the Apostle Paul comes to mind:

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle (2 Thessalonians 2:15)*

Clearly, St Paul is referring to teachings which do not completely coincide and which may clarify each other. A person entrusting his house to another will ask the housekeeper to following all his instructions given in writing and by word. This request indicates that what has been said may complement or clarify what is written. In the context of the writings of St Paul and as attested by St Basil (quoted below), these oral traditions (Holy Tradition) typically refer to the inner life of Church, especially the administration of the Holy Mysteries or

Sacraments. We thus find the language of tradition in reference to the Eucharist:

*I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:23-24)*

#### **024. Why is tradition necessary even now?**

Tradition has been recorded in the writings of the early Christians and Fathers, as well as in the liturgies. Because Tradition is intimately with the life of the Church and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, it is part of what the Holy Fathers have called "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit." It is the same Spirit which is the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit is the indispensable guide to rightly understand the Scripture.

Tradition, which reflects the life of the Spirit in the Church, is therefore a guide to the right understanding of Holy Scripture, for the right ministration of the sacraments, and the preservation of sacred rites and ceremonies in the purity of their original institution.

In his book *On the Holy Spirit*, St. Basil the Great explains:

Of the doctrines and injunctions kept by the Church, we have received some from written instruction, and some we have received from apostolic tradition, by transmission through the mysteries (or "in secret"). Both have one and the same force for piety, and this will be contradicted by no one who has ever so little knowledge in the ordinances of the Church. Indeed, if we were to dare to reject unwritten customs, as if they had no great importance, we should insensibly mutilate the Gospel, even in the most essential points. We would leave the teaching of the Apostles leave as an empty name.

For instance, let us mention before all else the very first and most common act of Christians, that they who trust in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ should sign themselves with the sign of the cross. Who has taught this by writing?

What about turning to the east in prayer? What Scripture do we have for this?

What of the words of invocation in the change of the Eucharistic bread and of the Cup of blessing? Which of the Saints have they been left us in writing? As it is, we are not content with those words which the Apostle or the Gospel records, but both before them and after them, we pronounce others also, which we hold to be of great force for the sacrament, even though we have received them from unwritten teaching.

Likewise, by what Scripture do we bless the water of baptism, the oil of unction, and the person who is baptized? Is it not by a silent and secret tradition? What more? Regarding, the very practice of anointing with oil, what written word have we for it? And where does the rule of triple immersion come from? What about the rest of the ceremonies at baptism, the renunciation of Satan and his angels? What Scripture are they taken from? Are they not all from this unpublished and private teaching, which our Fathers kept under a reserve inaccessible to curiosity and profane inquisition, having been taught as a first principle to guard by silence the sanctity of the mysteries? (66,68)

This reminds us of the teaching of the Lord:

*Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you (Matthew 7:6)*

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## **IV. ON HOLY SCRIPTURE IN PARTICULAR**

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### **025. When were the sacred books written?**

At different times: some before the birth of Christ, others after. The most ancient writing go back to Moses (circa 1500 BC) and the latest to the Apostles John (circa 70-98 AD).

### **026. What is the usual division of the sacred books?**

Those written before the birth of Christ are called the books of the Old Testament, while those written after are called the books of the New Testament.

### **027. What are the Old and New Testaments?**

Testament is another word for “will” or “covenant.” This refers to a sacred relationship. In other words, these two sections of the Scripture deal with the old and new Covenants of God with men.

### **028. What was the Old Testament about?**

In the economy of the Old Testament, God promised that a divine Savior who come to rescue the human race from the grip of death, and prepared a chosen people to receive him.

### **029. How did God prepare men to receive the Savior?**

God used gradual revelations, by prophecies and types. Types are events, objects and people which point to a greater reality. They can be considered as a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of God’s dispensation which was in Jesus Christ.

### **030. What is the New Testament?**

In the new covenant, God has actually given a divine Savior to the human race, his own only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ:

*Indeed, God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

In the new covenant, God gives new life – eternal life – to his elect. The prophet Jeremiah had announced the new covenant in these words:

*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant which I had made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," because they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD. Indeed, I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

The prophet Ezechiel also wrote:

*I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)*

### **031. How many are the canonical books of the Old Testament?**

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Athanasius the Great, and St. John Damascene reckon them at 22 (by grouping books together), which is a symbolic number because the Hebrew language had 22 letters.

In current practice, there are 39 canonical books and several deuterocanonical books which will be listed and explained below.

All of these books, together with the 27 books of the New Testament, form the corpus of the Bible. All of these books are needed and useful to equip Christians to understand, proclaim and live the saving Gospel.

### **032. Why should Christians pay attention to the reckoning of the Jews?**

For two reasons:

One, because, as the Apostle Paul says that “unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Romans 3:2)

Secondly, we must remember that the primary role of the Holy Scripture is to bear witness to Jesus Christ as Messiah, Lord and Savior. As the Lord himself said:

*You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.  
(John 5:39)*

In the image of a court of law, the witnesses that are brought forward should be credible by all parties involved. However, when Christians bring certain writings ‘to the bar’ as witnesses, they realize that some of these writings are not considered as authoritative by the other side, in this case the Jews (also in recent times Protestants). For this reason, Orthodox Christians, especially since St Athanasius, have realized that there are two levels of authority among the sacred writings: those that are recognized by the Jews (“canonical”) and those who are received and used in the life of the Church (“ecclesiastical,” “deuterocanonical”).

### **033. Why is St Athanasius' Festal Letter important? How does St. Athanasius enumerate the canonical books of the Old Testament?**

In 367 AD, St Athanasius of Alexandria wrote an encyclical letter announcing the date of Pascha to the other Churches, and this letter is the first 'official' list of the 27 books of the New Testament as we have it today. In other words, this letter is a sign that the process by which the Churches discerned the limits of the New Testament canon was completed around that time. Eusebius of Caesarea indicates that the extent of the New Testament was still being discussed around the time of the Council of Nicea in 325.

The extent of the Old Testament and the classification of its contents was a longer and more complex process.

The lists given by individual Fathers are of interest to understand the process of discernment which took place in the individual Churches and by means of synods, especially in regards to the Old Testament. In general, we notice that the Fathers wanted to group the books in such a way to arrive at the ideal number 22. However, they used different lists to achieve this result. For instance, Saint Athanasius wrote:

There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. Again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Then, Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next

Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the Twelve [minor prophets] being reckoned as one book. Then, Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations and the Epistle, one book; afterwards Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament...

But for the sake of greater exactness I add this also, writing under obligation, as it were. There are other books besides these, indeed not received as canonical but having been appointed by our fathers to be read to those just approaching and wishing to be instructed in the word of godliness: Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being merely read; nor is there any place a mention of secret writings.

This list was influential but it was not exactly accepted since Athanasius includes Baruch but excludes Esther. His terminology is to distinguish between “apocrypha” (absolutely rejected), “canonical” and “to be read.” However, Orthodox Christians have taken other factors into account to accurately express themselves in this regards.

Athanasius’ list is a slight departure from the earlier perception of the Church of Alexandria and the Churches in general who had received the Septuagint (which included those disputed books such as Tobit) as the proper text of the Church. In addition to the issue of what books should be recognized, there was the issue of the text itself, what is called the textual platform. It is therefore important to understand what the Septuagint (LXX) is what how it relates to the contents of the Bible.

## **What is the Septuagint?**

The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek which was commissioned and done by the Jews before the Christian era. First, the five books of Moses called “Pentateuch” were translated. In a strict sense, the Septuagint is that original translation of the Pentateuch into Greek.

Later on, other books were translated and this collection of sacred writing is what we commonly call the Septuagint. At the time when our Lord was born, most Jews lived in the diaspora (diaspora) and Greek was then the *lingua franca* (common language). Their Bible was not the Hebrew text (or what later on was formalized as the Masoretic text). When St Paul writes to Timothy, “from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” he is referring to the Septuagint. Indeed, St Paul’s citations of the Old Testament (for instance 2 Timothy 2:19) typically follow the Septuagint text against the Hebrew Masoretic text. Furthermore, the letter to the Hebrews makes explicit reference to sacred history recorded in 2 Maccabees 7 (Hebrews 11:35).

Although there are a few instances where the New Testament follows the Hebrews instead of the Septuagint, the majority of the citations follow the Greek. Many early Christian leaders such as St Justin and St Irenaeus believed that the Holy Spirit was involved in the production of this translation which by divine providence was used by the Apostles and which was used so effectively to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah (for instance Isaiah 7:14 LXX). However, the Jews eventually rejected their own translation, the Septuagint because it had become ‘a Christian text’ and produced other texts to replace it.

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## **How do we know that the Septuagint was the sacred collection of the Churches everywhere and that this collection or corpus included the disputed books?**

Writing in the mid-200s, Origen, who has travelled extensively, testifies:

*In many other of the sacred books, I found sometimes more in our copies than in the Hebrew, sometimes less... through the whole of Job there are many passages in the Hebrew which are wanting in our copies. But why should I enumerate all the instances I collected with so much labour, to prove that the difference between our copies and those of the Jews did not escape me? In Jeremiah I noticed many instances, and indeed in that book I found much transposition and variation in the readings of the prophecies. Now, when we notice such things, we are immediately to reject as spurious the copies in use in our Churches, and enjoin the brotherhood to put away the sacred books current among them, and to convince the Jews to give us copies which shall be untampered with, and free from forgery! Are we to suppose that that Providence which in the sacred Scriptures has ministered to the edification of all the Churches of Christ, had no thought for those bought with a price, for whom Christ died...*

For this reason, it is not surprising to find the most ancient fathers such as Clement of Rome or Polycarp of Smyrna quote from such books as Judith or Tobit.

However, when the Jews eventually rejected the Septuagint and the disputed books, Christians had to take that fact into account because of the role of Scriptures as witnesses. As a result, we must understand the following:

✠ The normative text of the Old Testament for Orthodox Christians is the Greek Septuagint. However, following the example of the Holy Fathers, Orthodox Christians also refer to

the Hebrew text when they study the Holy Scriptures. The Latin translation prepared by St Jerome is also part of the Orthodox heritage.

✠ Orthodox Bibles always contain the “canonical” and “deuterocanonical” books of the Old Testament because all are needed to rightly understand the Scriptures and be fully equipped in the Church.

✠ Orthodox Christians are aware of the difference in witnessing authority between the “canonical” and “deuterocanonical” books of the Old Testament. Sometimes, the “deuterocanonical” are called “canonical” in the sense that they belong to the corpus of the Holy Scriptures, not in the sense that they have the same level of authority as those who are undisputed. The Pan-Orthodox council of Jassy (1642) confirmed that these books are “genuine parts of scripture.”

✠ The Orthodox meaning of “deuterocanonical” is somewhat different from its use in Roman Catholicism. In Orthodoxy, “deuterocanonical” means included in the Bible since the beginning as part of the Septuagint but of lesser authority. In Roman Catholicism, “deuterocanonical” means confirmed in the canon at a later time (in a “second” phase) but of the same authority.

✠ It may be said that the issue of the exact text of the Old Testament is not and need not be fully and perfectly settled. The points of discussion (exact reading for a number of passages where the LXX and Hebrew differ), inclusion of certain “deuterocanonical” texts such as 3 Maccabees have no bearing on the deposit of the Christian Faith. These books are helpful but do not determine or affect Christian doctrine. Likewise, the minor variants found in the New Testament are interesting to

consider but likewise, they do not determine or affect Christian doctrine.

**034. In the lists provided by such authorities as St Cyril, St Athanasius or St John of Damascus, why is there no notice taken in this enumeration of the books of the Old Testament of the book of the Wisdom of the son of Sirach, and of certain others?**

As we have seen, these Fathers were concerned to attend to the Jewish reception of certain books as authoritative (and rejection of others as non-authoritative) so that a common basis could exist for reference to the Old Testament.

**035. How are we to regard these last-named books?**

The following books are called “deuterocanonical,” “anaginoskomena (to be read),” or “ecclesiastical.” The council of Jassy (1642) confirmed that these books are “genuine parts of scripture.” They are:

✠ Judith, 1 Esdras, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach), Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah. The LXX editions of Esther and Daniel also contain additional material. Mention should also be made of Psalm 151 and of the Prayer of Manasseh (or Manasses).

*Please note that 4 Maccabees may be included as an Appendix.*

These books are part of the sacred heritage of the Church. In the life of Church where the Spirit is the guide and revealer of truth, Orthodox Christians find spiritually encouraging and indispensable information. Wisdom of Solomon, for instance, contains a powerful and inspired testimony to the passion of the Lord:

*As for the upright man who is poor, let us oppress him; let us not spare the widow, nor respect old age, white-haired with many years. Let our might be the yardstick of right, since weakness argues its own futility. Let us lay traps for the upright man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our sins against the Law and accuses us of sins against our upbringing. He claims to have knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord. We see him as a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; for his kind of life is not like other people's and his ways are quite different. In his opinion we are counterfeit; he avoids our ways as he would filth; he proclaims the final end of the upright as blessed and boasts of having God as his father.*

*Let us see if what he says is true and test him to see what sort of end he will have. If the upright man is God's son, God will help him and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. Let us test him with cruelty and with torture and thus explore this gentleness of his and put his patience to the test. Let us condemn him to a shameful death since God will rescue him -- or so he claims.'*

*This is the way they reason, but they are misled, since their malice makes them blind. They do not know the hidden things of God, they do not hope for the reward of holiness, they do not believe in a reward for blameless souls. For God created human beings to be immortal, he made them as an image of his own nature; Death came into the world only through the Devil's envy, as those who belong to him find to their cost. (Wisdom of Solomon, 2:10-24)*

The same book of Wisdom helps us understand the writings of the Apostle John, for instance the comparison between Jacob-Israel and Jesus Christ and the meaning of the Woman clothed with the Sun in Revelation 13 (compare Wisdom 6-7).

As we have also seen, these books are needed in our sacred collection to under such texts as John 10:22 and Hebrew 11:35.

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**036. Is there any division of the books of the Old Testament by which you can give a more distinct account of their contents?**

In the Gospels of Luke, the Lord gives the following threefold division:

*These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled. (Luke 24:24)*

However, another common way to study the books of the Old Testament is to group them into the four following classes:

- The Books of the Law
- The Books of History
- The Books of Wisdom (and Doctrine / Truth)
- The Books of Prophecy

Note: The deuterocanonical books may either be interwoven among the other books (as was the case in the Septuagint) or placed in a separate section of the Old Testament. The ordering of the books has no dogmatic significance.

**037. Which are the Books of the Law?**

The five books written by Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Jesus Christ himself gives to these books the general name of the Law of Moses.

**038. What in particular is contained in the book of Genesis?**

Genesis is a spiritual record of the the creation of the world and of the human race. It also explains the drama of the Fall and

recounts the story of Noah, Abraham and his descendants. Genesis already announces the coming of the Savior:

*I [God] will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)*

### **039. What is contained in the other four books of Moses?**

These books speak of history of God's relationship with man, especially Abraham's descendants, during the lifetime of the Prophet Moses. These books contain contains the Law given by God through Moses as well as practical and ceremonial regulations.

### **040. Which are the Books of History?**

They are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Kingdoms (1 and 2 Samuel), 3 and 4 Kingdoms (1 and 2 Kings), 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The Chronicles are sometimes called Paralipomenon (from the Greek, meaning "what has been left out").

Orthodox Bibles contain 1 Esdras (from the Septuagint) which similar to the Book of Ezra, but uses a different arrangement and contains 99 additional verses.

The deutocanonical books for this group are: Tobit, Judith and the Maccabees.

### **041. Which are the Books of Wisdom and Truth?**

The Books of Wisdom are of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. In the ordering of the LXX, Job comes after the Psalms.

The deutocanonical books for this group are: Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom of Sirach.

**042. What is remarkable about the Psalms?**

This book contains the inspired prayers of many servants of God and prophets, especially David.

They contain many prophecies concerning our Savior Christ. The Psalter is a perfect manual of prayer and praise, and on this account is in continual use in the divine services of the Church.

**043. Which are the Books of Prophecy?**

The Books of Prophecy are Isaiah (or Isaias), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the twelve so-called “small” prophets. Christians should be aware that the LXX text of Jeremiah is somewhat different than the Masoretic/Hebrew version.

The deutocanonical books for this group are associated with Jeremiah: Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah.

**044. How many are the books of the New Testament?**

There are twenty-seven books in the New Testament, and this list was first officially given by Saint Athanasius the Pope of Alexandria in 367 AD.

**045. Are there preeminent writings which form the basis of the New Testament?**

Yes. The Holy Gospel, which is proclaimed in the four books of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Only the four gospels are placed on the Altar Table in the Sanctuary as supreme witnesses to our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

**046. What does the word “Gospel” mean?**

It is from the Greek work *Evangelion* and means good or joyful tidings. It also conveys the idea of a royal proclamation of good news.

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### **047. What good news is proclaimed in the books called the Gospel?**

The good is centered on the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, from his conception to his death on the cross, resurrection, ascension and second coming.

To understand the good news, we must be aware of the bad news of our enslavement to sin and death. The Great High Priest, Word of God and Lord has entered into our world and taken flesh from the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary to save (meaning also deliver, rescue) us from “the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The books of the Gospel proclaim the ineffable love of God the Father:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)*

### **048. Why are these books called the Gospel?**

The Gospel is “Good News” because no one can find better or more joyful news than to encounter the Divine Savior and everlasting salvation. For the same reason, whenever the Gospel is read in the divine services, it is prefaced and accompanied by the joyful exclamation, Alleluia and “Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you!”

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**049. Are any of the books of the New Testament historical?**

Yes. One: the book of the Acts of the holy Apostles which was written by St Luke who was a companion of St Paul. The book of the Acts is the continuation or second part of the gospel of Luke.

**050. What is this book about?**

The book of Acts recounts among many things the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost, and through their ministry of the extension of Christ's Church.

**051. What is an Apostle?**

The word means some who has been sent. The word apostle can be use of anyone who has been sent (such as St Barnabas and St Paul), but the expression "The Twelve" or "Twelve Apostles" refers to the following men:

*First, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew [also called Nathaniel]; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and [Matthias who was chosen to replace] Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2)*

The Twelve have a special role in the Lord's plan of salvation:

*Then one of the seven came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." In the spirit, he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites... And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the*

*twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.  
(Revelation 21:9-14)*

There is also mention of the seventy disciples or apostles who are also commemorated in the divine services:

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. (Luke 10:1)*

Apostle is therefore the name given to those disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ whom he sent to preach the Gospel.

### **052. Which books of the New Testament can be considered doctrinal?**

The seven general (sometimes called “catholic”) Epistles: one of the Apostle James, two of Peter, three of John, and one of Jude; and fourteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul: namely, one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon, and one to the Hebrews.

### **053. Are there also among the books of the New Testament any apocalypse or prophecy?**

The book of the Apocalypse (or Revelation) of St John is an apocalypse and a prophecy.

### **054. What is the meaning of the word Apocalypse?**

It is Greek, and means “drawing the curtain” or “removing the veil” as in the Temple where a curtain separated the Holy place from the Holy of Holy which in threvelation.

### **055. What are the contents of this book?**

A mystical representation of the future destinies of the Christian Church; and of the whole world.

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**056. What rules must we observe in reading Holy Scripture?**

First, we must read it devoutly, as the Word of God, and with prayer to understand it correctly.

Secondly, we must read it with a pure desire of instruction in faith so as to be encouraged to good works.

Thirdly, we must take and understand it in such sense as agrees with the consistent interpretation of the holy teachers and fathers of the Holy Church.

Since the Holy Spirit has inspired the Holy Scriptures, it takes the same Holy Spirit to properly understand or “decode” the message of the Holy Scriptures.

In the Orthodox tradition this acquisition of the Holy Spirit to properly understand the Scriptures takes place in the life of the Church and it is called *theoria* (a Greek word meaning “contemplation”).

**057. What signs do we have that the Holy Scriptures are inspired, reliable and truly the written preservation of the Word of God?**

Signs of this are the following:

1. The sublimity of this doctrine, which bears witness that it can not be any invention of mere human reason.

2. The purity of this doctrine, which shows that it is from the all-pure mind of God.

3. Prophecies.

4. Miracles.

5. The mighty effect of this doctrine upon the hearts of people which is beyond all but divine power.

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**058. In what way are prophecies signs of a true revelation from God?**

Some of most striking prophecies which were accurately fulfilled are:

The long-suffering passion of the Lord (Isaiah 53)

The crucifixion of the Lord by the piercing of his hands and feet (Psalm 22)

The prediction by our Lord of Jerusalem's destruction. (Matthew 24, Luke 21)

**059. What are miracles?**

In the proper sense, miracles are acts which cannot be accomplished by human power but only by the almighty power of God: for example, to raise the dead or to cure incurable conditions such as blindness from birth. However, supernatural acts can also be accomplished by demonic supernatural forces, if only to confuse people and to attempt to mimic God's power (Exodus 7:10-15; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:13-16).

**060. How do miracles serve as a sign that the word spoken is from God?**

Although it may take discernment to distinguish deceitful signs from those who are from God, it can be said that whoever performs true miracles works by the power of God. Consequently, such a person is in favor with God and partaker of the divine Spirit. To such individuals, it must belong to speak the truth; and so, when such a person speaks in God's name, we are sure that the Word of God is truly being proclaimed.

On this account, our Lord Jesus Christ himself presents miracles as a powerful testimony to his divine mission:

The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the father hath sent me (John 5:36)

**061. Where can we especially witness the powerful effect of the doctrine of Christ?**

From this: that twelve Apostles, taken from among poor and unlearned people, of the lowest class, by this doctrine overcame and subdued to Christ the mighty, the wise, and the rich, kings and their kingdoms.

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## **V. THE COMPOSITION OF THE CATECHISM**

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### **062. What may be a good order for setting forth a catechetical instruction in religion?**

This text follows the “Orthodox Confession” approved by the Eastern Patriarchs and takes as its basis the saying of the Apostle Paul that the whole energies of a Christian, during this present life, consist in these three: faith, hope, love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Christians need to learn the following: (1), the Doctrine on faith in God, and on the Sacraments (or Mysteries) which He has revealed in the Church; (2), the Doctrine on hope towards God, and on the means of being grounded in it; (3), the Doctrine on love for God and for all that He commands us to love.

### **063. What does the Church use as her instrument to enable us to confess the doctrine of faith?**

The Creed of Nicea-Constantinople (325-381) is the primary and fundamental confession of the Orthodox Christian faith.

### **064. What may we take as a guide for the doctrine of hope?**

We will consider the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer.

### **065. Where may we find the elements of the doctrine of love (or charity)?**

We will consider the Ten Commandments of the Law of God which are rooted in the principle of Love.

## **PART I: ON FAITH**

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## VI. THE CREED

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### 066. What is the Creed?

The Creed is an exposition, in few but precise words, of that doctrine which all Christians are bound to believe.

Its first part (until “And in the Holy Spirit”) was proclaimed by the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325. It was completed at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Creed was originally used as a confession of faith at baptism and it is also recited at every Divine Liturgy.

### 067. What are the words of this confession of exposition of faith?

They are as follows and this entire creed should be memorized:

1. I believe in one God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made;

3. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

4. And was crucified for us, under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried;

5. And rose again the third day according to the Scripture;

6. And ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;

7. And he shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

8. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the Prophets.

9. I believe one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

10. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

11. I look for the resurrection of the dead;

12. And the life of the age to come. Amen.

### **068. Where does this exposition of the faith come from?**

The so-called Nicene Creed is completely biblical and in accordance with the Tradition received from the Apostles. Some of the biblical references are provided here:

We believe in one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5; James 2:19) the Father Almighty (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; John 17:3), maker of all things both seen and unseen (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 44:24; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), and in one Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4) Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:5), the Son of God (Hebrews 1:2-8), the Only Son begotten of the Father (John 3:16), begotten of the Father before all worlds (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:3), God from God<sup>1</sup> (John 1:1-2; 1:18; Hebrews 1:8-9), Light from Light (John 1:5; 8:12; 1 John 1:5), true God from true God (John 17:3 cf. 17:21; 1 John 5:20), begotten not made (John 1:2-3; 1:14-15; Colossians 1:13-17), *homoousion* with the Father (John 1:1;

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<sup>1</sup> The clause "God from God" was present in the Creed of 325 but is absent in the normative Greek text of 381.

8:58; 10:30; 14:9-10; Hebrews 1:3), through whom all things were made (John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven (John 16:28) and was incarnate (John 1:14), became man (Philippians 2:6-7), suffered (Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:45; Romans 8:32; Philippians 2:8) and rose again on the third day (Mark 10:34; Luke 24:46; 1 Corinthians 15:4), ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9) and will come again to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:25-29; Revelation 22:12), and [we believe] in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; John 15:26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 13:14).

As we have seen, we have received this Creed from the Fathers of the first and second ecumenical Councils. It is based on even more ancient confessions of faith used in various ancient Churches, such as the Apostle Creed which a more basic confession of faith:

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. 2. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. 3. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. 4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. 5. He descended into hades. On the third day he rose again. 6. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. 7. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit, 9. the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, 10. the forgiveness of sins, 11. the resurrection of the body, 12. and the life everlasting. Amen.

## **069. What is an Ecumenical Council?**

The expression Ecumenical Council refers to gathering of bishops which took place during the first thousand years of Christian history. The goal of these Councils was to deal with particular heresies (false teachings) which threatened the proclamation of the true faith and “the unity of the holy Churches of God.” These Councils took place in the context of

the Roman Empire so that bishops from all over the Empire and even beyond its border could attend. The reception of the dogmatic teaching of these Councils by the people of God indicates in hindsight that these Councils proclaimed the true faith, and this indicates that the Holy Spirit was at work since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

### **070. How many Ecumenical Councils are recognized as such among the Orthodox?**

Orthodox Christians recognize seven Ecumenical Councils:

1, Nicea (325); 2, Constantinople (381); 3, Ephesus (431); 4, Chalcedon (451); 5, Constantinople II; 6, Constantinople III; and 7, Nicea II (787).

The *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848* makes reference to “the eighth Ecumenical Council, congregated at Constantinople for the pacification of the Eastern and Western Churches” but this idea has not gained much ground since then.

There were also local (provincial) councils held after 787, for instance, the councils of Constantinople in 1341 and 1351, of Jassy in 1642 and of Jerusalem in 1672.

Frequently, the Orthodox primates assemble to discuss matters of common concerns and make issue joint proclamations. These gatherings which are presided over by the first among equals of the Orthodox episcopate, namely the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, are important manifestations of the worldwide unity and communion of the Holy Churches. However, these are not to be confused with Ecumenical Councils.

It is important

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**071. Where does the rule to assembling Councils come from?**

The conciliar model comes from the Holy Scriptures, specifically from the example of the Apostles who held a Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Councils help bishops and presbyters make important decisions for the life of the (local) Church. In turn, this reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ himself, which give to the decisions of the Church such weight that whosoever disobeys them is left as a heathen:

*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church. If he refuses to hear the Church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I tell you that whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:17-18)*

**072. What were the particular occasions for assembling the first and second ecumenical Councils, at which the Creed was defined?**

The first Council was at the invitation of Emperor Constantine mainly to settle the controversy caused by the teaching of Arius who was a presbyter from Alexandria. Arius taught that although Jesus Christ could be called “God” or “divine,” this did not mean that he was eternal. He taught that “there was a time when he [Jesus] was not,” in other words that God the Father had created the Word/Jesus in time, and that for eternities past God the Father had existed without His Only-Begotten Son. This heresy was condemned by the 318 bishops (often called “Holy Fathers”) assembled at Nicea. The language used in the Creed specifically refutes the false teachings of Arius and the Greek term homoousion (of the same essence) was introduced to signify that the Son is uncreated like the Father.

The council of Nicea also promulgated important canons or ecclesiastical decrees for the good order of the Holy Churches.

The second Council confirmed the true doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit, especially against the teachings of Macedonius and others. This Council expanded the Creed to its final form and taught, according to the Scriptures and Apostolic Teaching, that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the Prophets.” The Holy Fathers of the second Council of Constantinople thus confirmed the teachings of Saint Basil who has written a very important work called “On the Holy Spirit.”

### **073. What then makes a council Ecumenical?**

Most Orthodox theologians would agree that ‘reception and acceptance by the whole people of God’ is an essential aspect. In other words, the ‘mind and life of the Faithful’ must agree with a council, which is why councils were acknowledged as Ecumenical only in hindsight. Thus, a new council could not immediately be considered Ecumenical because it necessarily takes time to see if the people of God will receive it. However, the concurrent decisions of the bishops gathered in council are binding at the disciplinary level, as is taught in Matthew 18:17-18.

During the first thousand years, the conciliar approval of the five patriarchates was considered a good indication that a particular doctrine was true. Also, and since the Church of Rome (and therefore the Bishop of Rome) represented the Churches of the West and held a “primacy of love” in the common union of Churches, the representation and approval of the Bishop of Rome was very important for a Council to be eventually received as Ecumenical.

Note: The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem is not considered to be the First Ecumenical Council because its authority and dogmatic certainty were intrinsic (on the account of the participation of the Holy Apostles) and immediate.

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## VII. ON THE ARTICLES OF THE CREED

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### **074. What method shall we follow in order the better to understand the ecumenical Creed?**

We can notice its division into twelve articles or parts, and consider each article separately.

### **075. What is spoken of in each several article of the Creed?**

The first article of the Creed speaks of God the Father as the prime origin or cause. More particularly, it speaks of the first Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, and of God as the Creator of the world;

Article 2-7 speak of the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Articles 3-7 speak of the incarnation, sufferings and death of the Lord; followed by the resurrection, the ascension and second coming.

The eighth article speaks of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

The ninth article, confesses our faith in the Church a central element of the Christian faith.

The tenth article speak of Baptism, under which are implied the other Sacraments as well.

Finally, the eleventh and twelfth articles speak of the future resurrection of the dead and of the life of the age to come.

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## VIII. ON THE FIRST ARTICLE

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### 076. What does it mean to believe in God?

To believe in God is to have a lively belief of his existence, his attributes, and works. It means to receive with all the heart his revealed Word respecting the salvation of men. Mere intellectual awareness that God exists is not sufficient since St James writes:

*Do you believe that God is one? You do well. Even the demons believe, and they shudder. (James 2:19)*

Furthermore, it can be said that all human beings would believe in God if they did not suppress this knowledge. As St Paul writes:

*However, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For since the creation of the world, his invisible things are clearly seen. They are perceived through created things, even his everlasting power and divinity. This is so that they may be without excuse, because knowing God, they did not glorify him as God or give [him] thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Thinking themselves to be wise, they became fools! (Romans 1:18-22)*

As the Psalm says:

*The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. (Psalms 14:1; 53:1)*

Therefore, it is wise and necessary to confess that we believe in God, and this is more than intellectual assent, it is an act of faith.

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**077. Can you show from Holy Scripture that faith in God must consist in this?**

The Apostle Paul writes:

*Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them, that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

The same Apostle expresses the effect of faith on Christians in the following prayer for them to God:

*And so, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, asking that according to the riches of his glory, he would grant you to be inwardly strengthened with power through his Spirit. I also pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you may be rooted and grounded in love. (Ephesians 3:14-17)*

**078. What must be the immediate and constant effect of a deeply seated faith in God?**

Faith should lead us to confess and live out this same faith.

**079. What is the confession of the faith?**

It means that we should openly admit and, when appropriate, confess that we are Christians who hold to the Orthodox faith. We should do this with such sincerity and firmness that neither seductions, nor threats, nor tortures, nor death itself may be able to make us deny our faith in the true God and Father and in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**080. Why is the confession of the faith necessary?**

The Apostle Paul witnesses that it is necessary for salvation.

*If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart, one believes, resulting in*

*righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)*

**081. Why is it necessary to salvation not only to believe, but also to confess the faith?**

Confession of faith in Jesus Christ, even unto death, is at the heart of Christian life:

*For the accuser of our brethren has been cast down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony. They did not love their life, even to death. (Revelation 12:10-11)*

Likewise in St Paul:

*[Christ] himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)*

Thus, if in order to preserve his temporal life or earthly goods, anyone who would shrink from confessing the orthodox faith would reveal a lack of true faith in God the Savior, and the life of the age to come. This is why the martyrs, as supreme witness to their faith in Christ, have a unique place in the commemorations of the Holy Church.

**082. Why is it not said in the Creed simply, I believe in God, rather than with the addition, in one God?**

The Creed confesses our faith in “one God the Father” in order to contradict the error of those who are called polytheists (also pagans, or heathen), who incorrectly believe that there are many gods.

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**083. What does Holy Scripture teach us of the unity of God?**

This is the central teaching of the Old Testament revelation:

*Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh. (Deuteronomy 6:4, NJB)*

*Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God is one LORD. (LXX)*

Moreover, the very words of the Creed on this point are taken from the following passage of the Apostle Paul:

*There is only one God. Indeed, although there are [many] things called “gods,” in the heavens or on earth; and there are many [so-called] “gods” and many “lords.” Yet, to us, there is one God the Father, from whom are all things; and we [are] for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and we live through him. However, such knowledge is not found in everyone. (1 Corinthians 8:4-7)*

**084. Can we understand the very essence of God?**

No. It is above all knowledge, not of men only, but of angels.

**085. How does Holy Scripture speak on this point?**

The Apostle Paul says:

*To him who is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, alone possessing immortality and dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no one has seen, nor can see: to him be honor and eternal power. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15-16)*

**086. What idea of the essence and essential attributes of God may be derived from divine revelation?**

That God is a Spirit, eternal, all-good and loving, omniscient, all-just, almighty, omnipresent, unchangeable, all-sufficing to himself, all-blessed.

**087. Show all this from Holy Scripture.**

Jesus Christ himself has said that “God is [a] Spirit.” (John 4:24).

Of the eternity of God David says:

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, Thou art from everlasting and world without end (Psalms 90:2)*

In the Apocalypse we read the following doxology to God:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. (Revelation 4:8)*

Of the goodness of God Jesus Christ himself said:

*There is none good but one, that is God. (Matthew 19:17)*

The Apostle John says: “God is Love.” (1 John 4:16)

David sings:

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and of great goodness. The Lord is loving to everyone and his mercies permeate all of his works. (Psalms 145:8-9)*

Of the omniscience of God the Apostle John says:

*God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. (1 John 3:21)*

The Apostle Paul exclaims:

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out (Romans 11:33)*

Of the justice of God David sings:

*The righteous Lord loves righteousness; his countenance will behold the thing that is just. (Psalms 11:8)*

The Apostle Paul says that “God will render to everyone according to his deeds, and that there is no partiality (or discrimination) with God.” (Romans 2:6, 11)

Of the almighty power of God, the Psalmist exclaims:

*For he spoke and they were made; he commanded, and they were created. (Psalms 32:9 LXX)*

The archangel says in the Gospel:

*With God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:37)*

The prophet-king David describes the all-knowing omnipresence in these famous words:

*Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. 5 You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. (Psalm 139:4-12)*

The Apostle James also says that “with the Father of lights there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

**088. If God is a Spirit, how does Holy Scripture sometimes ascribe to him bodily parts, as heart, eyes, ears, hands?**

There are passages and forms of writing in Holy Scripture where this anthropological language is suitable since it is common human language. However, we are to understand such expressions in a higher and spiritual sense. For instance, a reference to the heart of God refers to his goodness or love; likewise eyes, ears or hands refer to his omniscience and almighty power.

**089. If God is everywhere, how do some people say that God is in heaven, or in the church?**

God is everywhere; but He has special forms or levels of presence. In the divine services and holy mysteries for example, a special presence is devoutly recognized and felt by believers, and sometimes manifested by extraordinary signs.

As our Lord Jesus Christ says:

*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20)*

**090. How are we to understand these words of the Creed, I believe in one God the Father?**

According to the Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition, God the Father is cause and origin (or “principle and source” in St Photius) of His Word (or Son) and and Wisdom (or Holy Spirit):

*It was not angels, therefore, who made us... [No angel] had power to make an image of God except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. Indeed, God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were*

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*always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, "Let Us make man after Our image and likeness..." (Genesis 1:26)(St Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV:20)*

God the Father is thus always with and inseparable from his Only-Begotten Son and Holy Spirit, since "God is love" and "love is not self-oriented" (1 Corinthians 13:5 EOB). God is always in communion.

St Basil and St Gregory Nazianzen explain that the unity of God is rooted in the unity of the person of person of the Father; there is one God because there is one Father. The unity of God is not that there is one divine essence from which the three divine persons come forth; the unity of God is located in the person of the Father. St John of Damascus writes:

The Son is derived from the Father after the manner of generation, and the Holy Spirit likewise is derived from the Father, yet not after the manner of generation, but after that of procession. And we have learned that there is a difference between generation and procession, but the nature of that difference we in no wise understand. Further, the generation of the Son from the Father and the procession of the Holy Spirit are simultaneous. All then that the Son and the Spirit have is from the Father, even their very being, and unless the Father is, neither the Son nor the Spirit is. (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Chapter 1)

This, then, is the mystery of the Trinity, that God the Father is always with His Word (or Only Begotten Son) and Spirit; they are uncreated and co-eternal, co-equal in the fact that they belong to the category of creator, not creature.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity can also be expressed in that God is one in substance but triune in persons: the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Spirit, a “Trinity, consubstantial and undivided.”

### **091. How does Holy Scripture speak of the Blessed Trinity?**

A very important text in the New Testament is the so-called Great Commission:

*Therefore, go and teach all nations, baptizing them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)*

However, there are other texts which are trinitarian in nature, such as:

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. (1 Corinthians 12:3-6)*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (1 Corinthians 13:13)*

### **092. Is the Holy Trinity mentioned in the Old Testament also?**

Yes, there are passing references to plurality in the unity of God:

*By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the Breath of his mouth (Psalms 33:6)*

*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3)*

### **093. Why do we say that there is one God in three Persons?**

The word “God” (Greek: *theos*) can be used in a personal sense or in a qualitative sense (like the word “Man”). When it is said

that “Jesus Christ is God” or that there is “one God in three Persons,” we use the word God in the qualitative sense of “uncreated” or “divine.”

In the Holy Scriptures, God (*theos*) is generally used in the personal sense of the Father. There are also passages where Jesus Christ is called “my/our God” and *theos* in the sense of this authority and uncreated divine nature. The Father as “true God” cannot be separated from His Only-Begotten (and Holy Spirit); to know God is to know the Lord Jesus Christ by the operation of the Holy Spirit:

*This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:3-6)*

*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)*

Also, we cannot comprehend or express this inner mystery of the Godhead with human language:

*Yet, God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit, because the Spirit searches all things, yes, [even] the deep things of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? Likewise, no one truly comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)*

#### **094. What *difference* is there between the Persons of the Holy Trinity?**

God the Father is neither begotten nor proceeds from any other Person, he is the cause, source and principle. This is called the Monarchy of the Father.

The Word or Son of God is from all eternity begotten of the Father.

The Holy Spirit from all eternity proceeds from the Father. The Orthodox faith is that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father – not from the Father and the Son. However, in terms of the missions of the Holy Spirit in the world, we believe that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Son from the Father. This is according to the teaching of the Lord:

*When the Advocate (Comforter) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me... (John 15:26)*

#### **095. Are the three Hypostases or Persons of the Most Holy Trinity all of equal majesty? Why then does Jesus say “the Father is greater than I?”**

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share equal majesty as being the eternal, uncreated Savior and Lord. The Father is true God, the Son equally true God, and the Holy Spirit true God. This ontological or essential equality was expressed by the Church by the expression “homoousion” (of the same essence) to condemn Arianism and affirm that the Son is co-eternal and co-uncreated with the Father. This does not negate different roles or functions:

*Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm to the traditions as I delivered them to you. But I desire you to know that the head of every man is*

*Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:2-3)*

*'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is obvious that this excludes the one who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).*

When the Son says that the "Father is greater than I am," (John 14:28) he is referring to the fact that the Father is the cause and origin, as the Holy Fathers interpret this text:

The Son does not say, "My Father is better than I," lest we should conceive him to be foreign to his nature, but "greater," not indeed in greatness nor in time, but because of his generation from the Father himself. (St Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians*, 1.58)

Since the Son's origin (*arche*) is from the Father, in this respect the Father is greater, as cause and origin. This is why the Lord says, "My Father is greater than I." Indeed, what else does the word Father signify unless being the cause and origin of that which is begotten of Him? (St Basil, *Against Eunomius*, 1.25)

Superior greatness belongs to the cause, equality to the nature.... To say that [the Father] is greater than [the Son] in his humanity is certainly true, but it is not the point here, since it is no wonder that God is greater than man... (St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration*, 30.7)

If anyone says that the Father is greater in so far as He is the cause of the Son, we will not dispute this. But this, however, does not make the Son to be of a different essence. (St John Chrysostom, *Homily*, 70)

**096. Why is God called Almighty?**

God is almighty because he has created all things and has the power to accomplish all things according to his counsel and purpose:

*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose."*

Also, God upholds all things by his power and his will:

*His Son is the radiance of his glory, the exact counterpart of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:2-3)*

**097. What is expressed by the words of the Creed, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible?**

Everything was made by God through His Word and Spirit, and that nothing can exist without God:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was {what} God {was}. This one was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3)*

**098. Are not these words taken from Holy Scripture?**

Indeed, they are: the book of Genesis (1:1) begins thus:

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

The Apostle Paul, speaking of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, says:

*He is the image (icon) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him, all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, things visible and invisible, thrones,*

*dominions, principalities and powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17)*

**099. What is meant in the Creed by the word invisible?**

“Invisible” or “unseen” refers to the invisible or spiritual world, in particular the realm of angels.

**0100. What are the angels?**

Angels are spirits endowed with intelligence, will, and power.

**0101. What is the meaning of the word “angel?”**

Both the Hebrew and Greek for “angel” mean “messenger.” Thus the word “angel” refers to the function, not the nature of these beings.

**0102. Why are they called this way?**

Angels are sent by God to announce His will. For instance, Gabriel was sent to announce to the Most Holy Virgin Mary the conception of the Savior.

**0103. Which was created first, the visible world or the invisible?**

The invisible realm was created before the visible, and the angels before men.

**0104. Can we find any testimony to this in Holy Scripture?**

In the book of Job, God speaks of the creation of the earth as follows:

*Who laid its corner-stone? When the stars were created, all my angels praised me with a loud voice. (Job 38:6-7)*

**0105. Where does the name “guardian angel” come from?**

This expression comes from the following words of Holy Scripture:

*He shall give his angels charge over you, to guard (or protect) you in all thy ways. (Psalms 91:11)*

**0106. Does everyone have an angel?**

This view is found in the following words of Jesus Christ:

*Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)*

**0107. Are all angels good and beneficent?**

No, there are also evil spirits which are sometimes called devils.

**0108. How did these angelic spirits become evil?**

They were created good but they swerved from their duty of perfect obedience to God, and so fell away from him into self-will, pride and rebellion. It is possible that these angels rebelled at the thought as serving human beings and seeing humans ultimately enthroned with Christ on the very throne of God the Father (Matthew 4:11; Revelation 3:21).

According to the words of the Apostle Jude, they are “the angels which did not keep their original state but left their own habitation.” (Jude 6)

**0109. What is the meaning of the word or name “devil?”**

“Devil” is from the Greek *diabolos* which is the opposite of “symbol” (*symbolos*).

Devil means the disjunction between the word and the reality; it is a lie or liar which also means slanderer or deceiver.

Thus, the devil lied in the book of Genesis and this disintegration or disunion between the word and truth results in death.

### **0110. Why are the evil angels also called “devils” that is, slanderers or deceivers?**

Evils spirits or demons are ever laying snares for people, seeking to deceive them and to inspire them with false notions and evil desires.

Speaking to the unbelieving Jews, Jesus Christ says:

*You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not remain in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own [self] since he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)*

This reminds us of the evil spirit which took hold of Cain and led him to kill his brother Abel, thus revealing him to be of the seed of serpent (Genesis 3:15).

### **0111. What has Holy Scripture revealed to us of the creation of the world?**

The book of Genesis is an account that is meant to convey essential and timeless truths about the origin of creation and the root cause of evil and death. It is written from the perspective of an observer placed on the earth.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; and the earth was without form and void. Afterwards God successively produced: on the first day of the world, light; on the second, the firmament or visible heaven (the sky or atmosphere); on the third, the gathering of waters on the earth, the dry land, and what grows on it; on the fourth, the sun, moon, and stars were made visible; on the fifth, fish and birds; on

the sixth, four-footed creatures living on the earth, and lastly, man. On the seventh day God rested from all his works. Hence the seventh day was called the Sabbath, which in Hebrew means rest. The Sabbath is the seal of the old creation which culminated in the creation of Adam and Eve. (Cf. Genesis 1-3)

### **0112. Was creation similar to what we see now?**

At the creation everything was very good, that is, pure, beautiful, and harmless. But the Fall has affected not only the human race but also all of creation. Thus, spiritual things have consequences in visible creation.

### **0113. What is unique in the creation of man?**

In His Divine Counsel, God said: "Let us make man in our own image, and after our likeness." (Gen. 1:26)

*God formed the man of dust of the earth, and breathed upon his face the breath of life, and the man became a living soul. And God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and placed there the man whom he had formed. God also made to spring up out of the earth every tree beautiful to the eye and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of learning the knowledge of good and evil. So the Lord God took the man whom he had formed, and placed him in the garden of Delight, to cultivate and keep it. Then the Lord God gave an instruction to Adam, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree which is in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil -- of it you shall not eat. In the very day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." The Lord God also said, "It is not good that the man should be alone, let us make for him a help suitable to him... God brought a trance upon Adam who fell asleep, and God took one of his ribs, and filled up the flesh in its place. So God formed the rib which he took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam. Adam then said, "This now is bone of my bones, and*

*flesh of my flesh! She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of her husband.”*

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”*  
(Genesis 2:22)

#### **0114. What is the image or “icon” of God?**

It is a spiritual image which is especially connected with “in righteousness and holiness of truth.” (Ephesians 4:24). Indeed, the unique “image” or “icon” of God is His Only Begotten Son and Word:

*He is the image (icon) of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)*

*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image (icon) of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)*

*He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very person, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3)*

As St Athanasius of Alexandria writes:

God made all things out of nothing through His own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ and of all these His earthly creatures He reserved especial mercy for the race of men. Upon them, therefore, upon men who, as animals, were essentially impermanent, He bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked—namely the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as He does.

Athanasius also explains the relationship between the image of God in Man and the saving work of Christ:

What, then, was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ? Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the Image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father Who could recreate man made after the Image.

In order to effect this re-creation, however, He had first to do away with death and corruption. Therefore He assumed a human body, in order that in it death might once for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image. The Image of the Father only was sufficient for this need. (*On the Incarnation*, 3, 13)

### **0115. What is the breath of life?**

Is the gift of the spirit:

*The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him (Zechariah 12:1)*

*Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (Hebrew 12:9)*

In both Hebrew and Greek, “breath,” “wind” and “spirit” are the same, respectively “*ruah*” and “*pneuma*.”

### **0116. What is Paradise?**

The word Paradise means “garden” and Eden means “delight” or “bliss.” It is the name given to the abode of the first man, which described in the book of Genesis as like a garden from which flow waters of life which are associated with the Wisdom of God:

*Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she opens*

*her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. It overflows, like the Pishon, with wisdom, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits. (Sirach 24:1-5, 25; compare Genesis 2:11)*

Eden is presented as a Temple placed on a mountain (Ezekiel 28) in which Man was placed with a highly priestly commission to extend the Rule of God to all creation.

In Eden, Man enjoyed the presence of God who "walking up and down in the garden at the breeze of the day" (Genesis 3:8).

### **0117. Was the Paradise in which man first lived material or spiritual? What is the story of the Fall?**

For the body it was material, a visible and blissful abode; but for the soul it was spiritual, a state of communion by grace with God, and spiritual contemplation of the creatures (St Gregory the Theologian, Sermon, 38:42; also in St John of Damascus).

In Genesis, the story of the Fall is as follows:

*Both Adam and his wife were naked, and they were not ashamed. Now, the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals on earth which the Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman: "Why has God said: 'Do not eat of every tree of the garden?'" The woman replied to the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but regarding the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden, God said: 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, for fear that you die.' The serpent then said to the woman: "You shall not surely die! Indeed, God knew that in the very day that you should eat of it, your eyes would be opened and you would be as gods, knowing good and evil."*