

## PARTICULAR ISSUES OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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### A TRINITARIAN VIEW OF WORSHIP FROM AN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

The article examines the phenomenon of worship from a biblical and practical perspective comparing the Eastern and Western reflections. The author studies biblical and historical approaches to worship, and particular attention is paid to unacceptable changes in the object of worship, which often occurred in biblical history and in the history of Christianity. In particular, such changes are characteristic of the Slavic tradition, when worship of an unseen and incomprehensible deity is transferred to sacred objects.

The second part of the article is devoted to the analysis of the biblical object of worship. As a hermeneutic lens, the author uses the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, traditional for this part of the world. He demonstrates the understanding of Trinitarian theology common to the whole Christian world, and some understanding specific to this region concerning the Holy Spirit proceeding from a single center of divinity – from God the Father.

**Keywords:** Worship, adoration, idols, Slavic Baptist, Trinitarian theology, filioque.

The last fifty to sixty years have brought so many dramatic changes into the church life and ministry of Eastern churches that it is now quite difficult to see in proper perspective and rightly interpret the impact which these changes have exerted on our world view and the history of the Christian movement. Worship is one of the most unstable spheres of church life: it has undergone and is still undergoing the most drastic changes.

Some experts note that «the last thirty years have seen an explosion in interest in, and focus on, worship in churches. A. W. Tozer, who bemoaned the state of worship in his day by calling it ‘The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church,’ would certainly be amazed at the worship reformation (or revolution) which has transpired since his prophetic call in the 1950’s»<sup>1</sup>. But irrespective of theological or theoretical meanings of the idea, liturgical (or ecclesiastical) practice in Baptist churches is undergoing even more drastic changes, thus accentuating the importance of elements of worship and praise. In many Western churches there is a special position in the church – «Pastor of Worship» – and quite a considerable number of books and brochures on church worship are published every year. In the minds of ordinary people worship is often viewed as a specific form of a musical or prayer worship service accompanied by some ecstatic elements, such as lifting hands, falling on the floor with loud exclamations and cries of «Hallelujah», etc.

#### **The meaning and essence of worship**

An idea of worship is present in all languages and nations – from the primitive savages of Oceania to highly organized inhabitants of Old Europe. Webster’s Dictionary defines the verb «to worship» literally as «adore, idolize, esteem worthy, reverence, homage,» etc. Dal’s Dictionary of the Old Russian language says, that «to worship means to revere somebody as God, adore, acknowledge as God or deity.» The biblical and theological meaning of the term «worship» is, of course, much wider since it embraces both an act and inner attitude toward the object of worship. Strong’s Lexicon translates the Greek word *proskuneo*, as to worship, to bow down, render homage, kneel, and bow low. The Hebrew *shahah* has the same

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<sup>1</sup> Man, R. (2016). What the Church Needs Now. *Experiencing Worship* (website). <<http://www.experiencingworship.com/worship-articles/general/2001-8-What-the-Church.html>>.

meaning. Gerhard Kittel explains that the word *proskuneo* «is used only in relation to a divine object»<sup>1</sup> in the ancient tradition as well as the LXX and the text of the New Testament. In early church history this term was used both in relation to God and (in the negative sense) idols.

However, the development of cults rapidly led to a radical shift in worship. The accent in worship was shifted from God to the mediators (Mary and the saints) and sacred objects (icons, relics of saints' bodies, etc.). It led to the second Council of Nicea in 787 allowing and even recommending «*proskuneo*» regarding icons. The last *horos* (decision) of the Council proclaimed it obligatory «to give them respect and worshipful honor (*proskuneo*) but not real adoration (*latrea*), which according to our faith is due only to the Divine Nature»<sup>2</sup>.

A real shift from the process of worship to its object became apparent when Christianity had totally isolated itself from Judaism and started to identify itself as a part of Greco-Roman society, an element of Mediterranean civilisation. Discussions began to revolve not so much around the theme «how we worship» as the theme «who we worship». For a person in the Greco-Roman world it was difficult to worship without having a clear understanding of the object of worship. The tendency to visualize was too strong. Therefore, the iconoclastic movement, which existed for only thirty-three years, was doomed to failure, even though the iconoclastic doctrine was rigorously enforced at the Constantinople Council in 754. «Whoever in future dares to make such a thing, or to venerate it, ... shall, if bishop, presbyter, or deacon, be deposed; if monk or layman, be anathematized»<sup>3</sup>.

Analysing the notion of worship from the biblical and secular perspectives, we should note that the substance of the notion may easily be distorted by ordinary consciousness. The problem lies in the fact that worship, especially in ancient times, was always connected with bodily actions. As a rule, those were «prostrating oneself, kneeling, and kissing»<sup>4</sup>. However, these activities, meant to acknowledge the greatness of the one who is adored, required vision of the object of worship or at least a clear idea about it. It did not take too long for the Jews, whom God led out of Egypt, to lapse into idolatry. As soon as Moses passed out of their sight, the Israelites cried out for a visible god who would «go before us» (Exod. 32:1), and Aaron made them a golden calf. God, knowing the human inclination to visualize the object of worship, strictly forbade his people to worship anyone or anything but the invisible God, true and eternal Yahweh, blessed be His name! «You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God» (Exod. 20:3-5).

This strict and repeatedly stressed prohibition not only formed a practice of worshipping God without contemplating His visible image but also inculcated an understanding of true worship in Israel. From the standpoint of the Old Testament, idolatry is recognition of greatness, power, glory, and other divine attributes in some other deities besides the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. «There is no god but Yahweh» – this formula, which centuries later was repeated by Mohammed, reflects the heart and kernel of Judaism, the first commandment of the Decalogue. To consider someone else worthy of worship is a real abomination and blasphemy (Ezek. 8:9-17). Was not this truth demonstrated by Mordecai's refusal to bow down before Haman (Esther 3:2-5) and the courageous conduct of the three Jewish youths before the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:18)?

True worship was not limited to bodily movements. All instances of worship in the Bible describe various reactions to God's presence. It was this Presence that initiated worship. When God revealed Himself in glory to His chosen ones, they could not but worship Him. Worship became a reality of the experience of God's glory. Theophanies (appearances of God in a visible form to human beings) led Abram to «[fall] on his face» (Gen. 17:1-3) when God appeared to him. When God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, «Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God» (Exod. 3:5-6). Isaiah had a similar experience too. When he beheld the glory of God he cried out: «Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts» (Is. 6:5). The same reaction was with the Apostle John when he «turned to see the voice

<sup>1</sup> Kittel, G., Friedrich, G. (eds.); Bromiley, Geoffrey W. (trans.) (1973). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

<sup>2</sup> Veneration of Images. *New Advent* (website). <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07664a.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Medieval Sourcebook: Iconoclastic Council, 754. *Fordham University* (website). <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/icono-cnc1754.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Léon-Dufour Xavier, et al. (1974). *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*. Belgium: Cerf, 822.

that was speaking with me» (Rev. 1:12) and saw Jesus, whom he had known so intimately. But John was extremely terrified by the vision of the glory of the risen One and he «fell at His feet like a dead man» (Rev. 1:17). All these examples indicate that true worship is contiguity with God's glory and not ritual bows, traditional psalms or canticles, theatrical gestures, and habitual exclamations of «Hallelujah».

### Is it necessary to know whom to worship?

Worship as an experience of the presence of the glorified God can happen spontaneously, but it can also be an anticipated, deliberate act. A spontaneous worship is the result of God's self-manifestation. It was experienced by Isaiah, and John on the island of Patmos.

A planned or prepared worship takes place when man is constantly seeking to meet with God and the Lord grants him an opportunity to encounter Him. Such was the experience of Moses and the people of Israel at Sinai, and Daniel as he was praying and fasting to receive a revelation from God.

In the first case man may not even know the One who is gloriously revealing Himself to him, but he is impelled to worship. No one can remain indifferent to the appearance of the Lord. From the standpoint of epistemology it may be admitted that this kind of encounter with the Absolute opens the door to a direct knowledge of the Deity. In the second case a person usually possesses some information or an idea of the One from whom he desires to receive a response. Speaking epistemologically man can know God indirectly, through his reflections.

Thus the phenomenon of worship has to do with the problem of *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God) and *Deus revelatus* (the revealed God). The Apostle Paul came across this very problem in Athens where he found not only the Acropolis full of false gods-idols, but also some people in the Areopagus who seemed to have known these gods and have been in earnest about worshipping them. Among the Athenian objects of worship Paul found an altar to «An Unknown God». Some authors, such as Pausanias in his «Description of Greece» and Philostratus<sup>1</sup>, mention the existence of this altar. This fact has led some commentators to think that the Athenians admitted a limited character of their knowledge of gods, and did not exclude the existence of a god not known to them<sup>2</sup>. However, the existence of such a deity was most likely conceived in terms of Hellenistic or, it is better to say, Platonic philosophy as the existence of a totally unknowable god – the First Cause or the Prime Mover of all beings. Therefore an altar to this deity could not have a visible image or a certain appellation. That is to say that for the Athenians this god was not just a god, one of the gods, but he was the God, an absolutely transcendental and «Unknown God». At this point the Old Testament, depicting God as abiding in thick gloom and cloud covering, is strikingly close to the ideas of God that were widespread among the most intellectual people of Hellenistic society.

An idea of the Original God, an active masculine principle, which was the originator of all other specific and local gods, was present in all nations, but characteristically in very vague terms. While speaking much about the Original Mother, goddess, who gave life to all gods, mythology always presents God the Father in symbols and obscurity. The Upanishads assert that He is «neither this nor that». «He surpasses being itself», said Plato<sup>3</sup>. This conception was adopted by patristic and then Byzantine theology. For instance, Origen taught that God is higher than every conceivable thing. This approach, which is often called apophatic or negative, allowing only negative terms in relation to God (what God is not), had a great effect on a body of Greek writings written by an unknown author but traditionally ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite. The most famous expert in the Byzantine tradition, the late John Meyendorff, wrote: «In their apophatic theology the Greek Fathers affirm both that God surpasses the human language and intellect by virtue of a defective state of human nature and that He is unreachable in Himself. For the Pseudo-Dionysius God is 'non-being', He is 'neither being nor essence'»<sup>4</sup>.

Naturally this concept is either a deliberate or unconscious borrowing from the Neoplatonic thought. This fact was noticed by Barlaam the Calabrian who had entered a debate with the main ideologist of apophatic theology and practice of Hesychasm Gregory Palamas in the 40s of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In his

<sup>1</sup> Pausanias, *Hellados Periegesis* (1,24); Philostratus, *Жизнь Аполлония* (The Life of Apollonius), VI:3, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Gareth, L. (1966). Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ann Arbor: Braun-Brumfield), 168.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of the topic, see the five-volume edition of Alexander Men's *История религий* (The History of Religion), especially V. 1, 117; V. 5, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Meyendorff, J. (1979). *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press, 12.

second letter to Palamas Barlaam wrote, «If you want to know whether the Greeks understood that supersubstantial and uncalled God surpasses reason, science, and all other achievements, read the Pythagoreans – Brotinus, Philolaus, Philoxenus, ... who dealt with this issue. There you will find the same expressions which the great Dionysius used in his «Mystic Theology»<sup>1</sup>. Plato understood divine transcendence in the same way. And Palamas was forced to agree with this argument. Indeed, the Eastern Fathers just as the pagan Athenian philosophers not only admitted but also considered it necessary to worship the Unknown God – the God who cannot be known rationally.

Thus answering the question: What is God, whom we worship, like? The Eastern tradition following Plato says: We cannot know what He is like. But in contrast to the Platonic dualism that sees the created and transcendent worlds as being opposed to each other, the Byzantine thinking adds: Worship is a positive encounter with the Unknown, and contemplation of God is higher than the knowledge of Him<sup>2</sup>. Some Western medieval mystics, for example, Nikolaus of Cusa, also wrote about it<sup>3</sup>. In the East, worship of God was conceived more in personal and existential rather than rational terms. But denying a possibility of knowing the inwardness of God, the Eastern theology, nevertheless, did not negate a possibility of knowing His will, His acts, and His desires. Gregory of Nyssa wrote: «If in our discussions about God there arises a question concerning His essence – this is the right time to be silent, but if we talk about His acts, the knowledge of which may come down to us, then this is time to speak of His omnipotence, to tell about His creation and interpret His deeds, using words for this»<sup>4</sup>.

Those Fathers who had been influenced by the Bible more than Hellenism did not share such radical views on the transcendence of God. Thus Irenaeus argued that God according to His love and immeasurable grace came to the knowledge of men – not according to his greatness and essence because no one has ever measured or perceived Him. Later the medieval scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas, gave a classical example of logical constructions, which were meant to bring a person to the knowledge of God and a meeting with Him.

The Reformation very clearly formulated a harmony between apophatic and kataphatic approaches, having asserted that «we do not know God as He is; we know God only by what He has revealed of Himself»<sup>5</sup>. Both Luther and Calvin were vigorously opposed to any speculations about God which exceeded the bounds of His revelation.

Thus worship of God is possible within the limits of His revelation as well as through an immediate, mystical contact with Him, passing all bounds. At present there exists an overly stressed opinion that the worshiper should know for sure whom he worships. Contemporary leaders of worship often ask: «How can you worship whom you don't know?» Kelly Carpenter, well-known songwriter, worship leader, and musician, asked: «Do we truly understand this God that we worship?» And answered: «Yes, we do ... I believe that how we worship is based upon our conception of who we worship. In other words, our conception of God will drive the way we worship Him»<sup>6</sup>. The idea that we can and should comprehend the God, whom we worship, was established by Scholasticism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Nevertheless, we should not reject a rational form of worship. We need to have knowledge of God not to initiate worship or improve it but to give the right shape to our worship. Eugene Peterson writes, «The theologian offers his mind in the service of saying 'God' in such a way that God is not reduced or packaged or banalized, but known and contemplated and adored, with the consequence that our lives are not cramped into what we can explain but exalted by what we worship»<sup>7</sup>.

Even though every encounter with the glorious angelic world causes fear, terror, trembling, and prostrating, we should worship only the true God by acknowledging His divine dignity, glory, and greatness. When Balaam saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, «he bowed all the way to the ground» (Num. 22:31). The same thing happened to Joshua when he met

<sup>1</sup> Meyendorff, J. (1979). *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Palamas, G. (1983). *The Triads*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 67.

<sup>3</sup> Nikolaus of Cusa wrote: «God can be approached only by those who understand that He is incomprehensible».

<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (1991). *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Hellenic College Press, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (1991). *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Hellenic College Press, 101.

<sup>6</sup> Carpenter, K. (2003). *Who We worship*. Boise: Vineyard, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, E. (1988). *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 3-4.

the captain of the host of the Lord (Josh. 5:14). When the Apostle John beheld the glory of the angel, who proclaimed the marriage supper of the Lamb, he fell at his feet to worship him. But the angel said: «Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy» (Rev. 19:10). The Lord is a jealous God and he will not endure a false worship in any way: neither in the case of deliberate and planned worship nor in the case of a blind and unthinking worship of spiritual powers, throwing men into confusion. As it turns out, not all revelations, miracles, and unidentified mystical objects should bring us to worship. We are to demonstrate reasonableness and discretion in this matter. We should have a correct idea about the God whom we revere.

False gods or inadequate views of the one true God can nullify even the most sincere efforts to worship. The cult member often has a twisted perception of God's character. An idolater fails to see how inadequate his god is when compared to the greatness of the God of Scripture. A materialist holds on to the god that Jesus called «Mammon» instead of the God who offers treasure in heaven (Mt. 6.24).

### **Who is the God we worship?**

You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.

Mt. 4:10

God has the right to be the only object of our worship because He alone is worthy. And that worthiness is clearly seen as we reflect on His revelation and His nature. The incomprehensible God willed to make Himself, through general revelation, known to every human being coming into the world. Paul writes: «that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen» (Rom. 1:19-20). Besides, God «did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good» (Acts 14:17). Hence, observing God's creation all men without exception can have a certain understanding of God in order to worship Him. This truth was especially vital for the people living, as John Fletcher said, in the dispensation of God the Father<sup>1</sup>. This dispensation is not necessarily a certain period of time, even though it is usually considered that the dispensation of God the Father is comprised of the people of the Old Testament. As with any other dispensation the one in question has to be regarded as a connection or relation based on a certain form of revelation for some people, even if they live in the period of the Holy Spirit and, owing to the force of circumstances, know nothing about Jesus. Using Barth's terminology, the dispensation of God the Father presents «God in the highest».

Luther wrote that all people possess a general knowledge of God, i.e., they know that God exists, that He created the heaven and the earth, that He is just, and that He punishes sinners. But they do not know what the true knowledge of God is, what God thinks about us, what He gives us, or what He does to set us free from sin and death and save us<sup>2</sup>. In that way, in order to know God truly and worship Him rightly, man has to be given special revelation. One of the most accurate and available forms of special revelation, which was given to the prophets, is the Bible. Karl Barth even defined God as the One «who is to be found in the book of the Old and New Testaments, which speaks of Him»<sup>3</sup>. Outside of Scripture it is impossible to gain a right understanding of God.

### **God the Father**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth<sup>4</sup>.

Speaking about some features of self-manifestation of God in the dispensation of the Father, it should first of all be noted that we are not discussing divine qualities or attributes, i.e., His immutable characteristics. God's qualities cannot be acquired or forfeited because they constitute an inner, objective characteristic of God, not dependent on our perception and interpretation.

One of the main features of God is that He is a living and active God. Some theologians believe that «perhaps the most typical for identifying the God of the Old Testament is the word 'living'. This signifies the God who acts in history, who performs mighty deeds of deliverance, and who manifests his power

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<sup>1</sup> Fletcher, J. (1833). *Works*. Carlton and Porter, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, M. (1860). *Commentary on the Epistle to Galatians*. Miller & Burlock, *Chapter 2, Ver. 16*.

<sup>3</sup> Barth, K. (1959). *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper & Row, 37.

<sup>4</sup> The first article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

among men»<sup>1</sup>. This truth can be seen very clearly in the self-disclosure of God by the name «I am» (Exod. 3:14), i.e., «everlasting», «I am the LORD (hwhy) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt» (Exod. 20:2). The Lord is the God of the Old Testament – an acting God, not an abstract idea or a dead idol. This is a reality working in people's lives. More than sixty times in the oaths, where the proper name of God is used, the following words are repeated: «As I live». The same idea of the living God as opposed to idols is always emphasized in the Bible: «But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King» (Jer. 10:10).

Unity is another distinctive feature of the God of the Old Testament. God is the one and only God. The golden verse of Judaism, which is called «Shma Israel», says: «Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!» (Deut. 6:4). Speaking theologically this verse teaches strict monotheism.

Of course, the history of the people of Israel is full of examples of constant deviation from monotheism and worship of other gods. This very fact indicates that the truth about the one God (monotheism, not polytheism or even Henotheism<sup>2</sup>) is not a product of historical development or a result of Moses' genius, but it is God's revelation. The idea of monotheism as such was not characteristic of the people of Israel, taking into account the natural (fallen) state of all humanity.

«The prohibition of idolatry, the second commandment (Exod. 20:4), rests upon the uniqueness of Jehovah. He will not tolerate any worship of manmade objects, for he alone is God. He is the only member of a unique class. God repeatedly demonstrates his superiority to other claimants to deity»<sup>3</sup>. In his *Dogmatics in Outline* Karl Barth gives a very lucid explanation of the essence of monotheism. He writes that monotheism «has nothing to do with the number 'one', but with this subject in His sheer uniqueness and otherness over against all others, different from all the ridiculous deities whom man invents»<sup>4</sup>.

The third feature of God the Father is His personhood. A person is someone possessing self-consciousness and will and ability to feel, choose, and maintain personal relations with other social beings.

The personal nature of God is revealed in the Scriptures in a variety of ways. For example, God has a name, by which He reveals Himself and thus demonstrates that He is not an impersonal power or an abstract and unknowable being. His deeds also speak of His personal traits. He had fellowship with the first human beings in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3). He gives heed to human prayers (Ps. 66:19). He speaks (Gen. 1:22). He is closely associated with humanity. He possesses all personal traits: God knows, feels, desires, and acts. As a Person God can regret (Gen. 6:6), love (Rev. 3:19), hate (Pr. 6:16), be jealous (Deut. 6:15), and be angry (1 Kings 11:9). All personal pronouns indicate that God is personal. This should make us reconsider narrow views of God as a «power that created everything» and perceive God as a real Person.

The summarizing feature of the God of the Old Testament, who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, is His fatherhood. In fact, this characteristic determines all other features of God.

The fatherhood presupposes that God is a living and acting God, that He is one and personal, and that He is the source of life, being, and all that exists. The term «fatherhood» does not characterize God in relation to humanity. By nature all people are His creation, not His children. God is the Father by nature, by Himself, independent of mankind and all His creation. Even if the created world had not existed at all, God would have been the Father anyway. The Bible speaks about God the Father as the source of all reality. Being the Father God is also the source of divinity. The Father begets the Son and sends the Holy Spirit.

Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian) writes: «. . . the three have one Nature—God. And the union is the Father from Whom and to Whom the order of the Persons runs its course, not so as to be confounded, but so as to be possessed, without distinction of time, of will, or of power»<sup>5</sup>.

### God the Son

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Baab, Otto J. (1949). *The Theology of the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 24.

<sup>2</sup> Henotheism—the worship of one god, while acknowledging or believing in the existence of other gods.

<sup>3</sup> Erickson, Millard J. (1985). *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 323.

<sup>4</sup> Barth, K. (1959). *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper & Row, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, «Oration 42 'The Last Farewell'». *New Advent* (website). <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310242.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> The second article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Worship based on the Old Testament idea of God is like «a shadow of the good things to come» (Heb. 10:1). It is true but incomplete and too limited in scope. But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His only begotten Son, through whom all people have received a true knowledge of God. Jesus said: «He who has seen Me has seen the Father» (John 14:9). The prophets of the Old Testament came with the message from God, and declared something on behalf of God, but Jesus Christ was God who came in the flesh to mankind. Those who had seen His love, holiness, power, etc., could see God in His acts and self-manifestation.

Karl Barth writes: «When in countless passages the New Testament speaks about Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Church recognizes and confesses to be Jesus the Christ, it is using the same word which the Old Testament expresses by 'Jehovah'»<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the life of Christ as the Son of God was in the full sense of the word a bodily manifestation of «God in the highest». And in this theophany par excellence Christ did not forfeit His divinity. He was not a herald or representative of God, He was God Himself. «The Creator Himself, without encroaching upon His deity, becomes, not a demi-god, not an angel, but very soberly, very really a man»<sup>2</sup>.

As the Son of God Jesus manifested the Father through His personality and His deeds. Actually, the personality of Christ and His deeds are closely interwoven and are equally important for the knowledge of God. When scholastic theology started to study Christ's deeds apart from His personality, such an approach created the impression that it is not as important for us to know who Jesus was as to know what He did. But it was a profoundly erroneous impression. The things Jesus did cannot be separated from who He really was. As Philip Melancthon said: «To know Christ is to know his benefits.»

Assuming (possessing) the title «Son of God» Jesus accentuated ontological or, as it is now popular to say, genetic unity with the Father. It means unity in essence or divine nature. Even though Jesus never referred to Himself as God, we can find more than enough statements in the Gospels affirming this idea, which otherwise would have been absolutely inappropriate if Jesus had not been God by nature. He forgave sins, and did it defiantly so as to point out that He had all rights to confer forgiveness; Jesus proved His right to forgive by healing a man's paralysis (cf. Mark 2:5-12). He referred to God's angels as His angels (Mt. 13:41); He demonstrates authority in His judgment over the world (Mt. 25:31-46); Jesus contended that He was entitled to change the status of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28); His existence was from eternity (John 8:58). All these instances plainly point out that Jesus acknowledged Himself to be God in the full sense of this word. By words and deeds, directly and indirectly, Jesus exercised His power over life and death, which, according to the Scriptures (1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 119), belongs only to God.

Jesus' behavior at the trial before the Sanhedrin is yet another eloquent testimony to His divinity. The crime that was imputed to Jesus was that «He made Himself out to be the Son of God» (John 19:7). His judges knew perfectly well who Jesus thought He was. By a simple denial of the accusation Jesus could have used a wonderful opportunity to escape execution. If He had said, «No, I am not the Son of God,» the supreme council, the Sanhedrin, would have gladly justified and freed Him. But Jesus' reply, which was taken as an admission that He was the Son of God, entailed capital punishment.

Finally, the strongest proof of His divinity was demonstrated in the resurrection and the victory over death. The Apostle Paul connects the emergence of Christianity with the fact of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). The speedy growth of the Christian faith and the fearless proclamation of Christ's resurrection right after His death, as Wolfhart Pannenberg argues, irrefutably testify to the reality of His resurrection. Pannenberg notes that the Jewish polemic against the Christian message about Jesus' resurrection in no way suggests that the grave of Jesus had been untouched<sup>3</sup>.

In the Gospels and the Apostolic writings there are at least six texts in which Jesus Christ is explicitly called «God» (John 1:1-14; Heb. 1:8; Rom. 9:5; John 20:28; Tit. 2:13; 1 John 5:20). Paul's words are especially significant: «from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever» (Rom. 9:5).

At the same time Jesus is not only the true and perfect God, but also a true man. He was born, and He grew up as any other human being. The Word of God does not leave us a single record which would prove that Jesus performed any miracles or led an unusual life before His baptism. He had the appearance of an ordinary man, but there is no doubt that His pure and holy life was reflected in His face and eyes.

<sup>1</sup> Barth, K. (1959). *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper & Row, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, K. (1959). *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper & Row

<sup>3</sup> Pannenberg, W. (1968). *Jesus—God and Man*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 100-101.

The Samaritan woman took Jesus for a Jew by His appearance. The Bible says that Christ «has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin» (Heb. 4:15). Just like every one of us Christ experienced hunger (Mt. 4:2), thirst (John 18:28), and weariness after journeys (John 4:6). Jesus fell asleep because of tiredness (Mt. 8:24), wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35), and expected human sympathy in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-40). Therefore Jesus understands any temptation that is befalling us and «He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted» (Heb. 2:18).

At least eighty times in the Scriptures Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man, even though He did not mind being referred to by the title «Son of God». For instance, Nathaniel said to Jesus, «You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel». Jesus accepted this designation but He immediately changed it to the term «Son of Man» (John 1:49-51). Most likely, Jesus did not want to over-stress His divinity to His contemporaries, but He preferred to be, in the apt expression of Kierkegaard, a «divine incognito». Perhaps Jesus wanted to show that in order to come to Him by faith it is not sufficient just to contemplate His deeds and miracles, and even His personality. Looking at Jesus and being unable to refute His miraculous deeds, the people were very amazed, but such amazement did not lead them to faith. A true acknowledgment of Christ as God occurs only in case of revelation or a decisive step of faith. Jesus confirmed it, saying: «flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven» (Mt. 16:17).

It is very essential for our salvation to understand the human nature of Christ correctly. If Jesus had not been a real human being but only appeared to be a man, His substitutionary death would not have been sufficient for the salvation of humankind. But in the Patristic period the Church developed the theosis (deification) formula, most fully expressed by Athanasius of Alexandria: «God became man, so that man could become God». At the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon theologians formulated a verbal definition of the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ.

Following the holy Fathers we teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same [Person], that he is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching his Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching his manhood; ... must be confessed in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, distinctly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence (hypostasis)<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, worship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as God is not only acceptable and possible, but also available and necessary.

### **God the Holy Spirit**

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver-of-Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets<sup>2</sup>.

The dispensation of the Holy Spirit, which has been lasting for about two thousand years, is characterized by a special blessing given to men to be involved in close worship of God through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is one with the Father and the Son and His work is to realize the design of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not just an influence or a power of God the Father, but a divine Person of the Trinity. For us God is the Holy Spirit.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is not as obvious as that of the Father and the Son. «It might well be said that the deity of the Father is simply assumed in Scripture, that of the Son is affirmed and argued, while that of the Holy Spirit must be inferred from various indirect statements found in Scripture»<sup>3</sup>. However, there are certain reasons that allow us to come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is God in the same way as the Father and the Son.

First of all, we should note that references to God and the Holy Spirit are often used interchangeably. An excellent example of this may be found in the book of Acts. Ananias and Sapphira sold their property and brought a portion of the price to the Apostles. But Peter addressed Ananias with the following words: «Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?» (Acts 5:3). And further Peter says: «You have not lied to men, but to God» (Acts 5:4). It is clear that

<sup>1</sup> «The Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon» in Percival, Henry R. (ed.) (1991). *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 14*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 264-265.

<sup>2</sup> The eighth article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

<sup>3</sup> Erickson, M. J. (1985). *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 857.

for Peter, lying to the Holy Spirit and lying to God were one and the same. The Apostle Paul speaks of the analogous equality in his discourse on the body of the Christian in 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 1 Cor. 6:19-20. From reading these texts it becomes clear that the abiding of the Holy Spirit is equal to the presence of God. By equating the expression «the temple of God» and «the temple of the Holy Spirit» Paul clearly shows that the Holy Spirit is God.

The Holy Spirit possesses the qualities and attributes of God. One of these attributes is omniscience. In 1 Cor. 2:10-11 it is written, «For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.» Jesus also spoke about the omniscience of the Spirit (John 16:13). The New Testament quite definitely speaks about the power of the Holy Spirit. In Lk. 1:35 the expressions «the Holy Spirit» and «the power of the Most High» are connected in parallel and synonymous construction. The passage concerns the greatest miracle of the virgin birth. Paul acknowledged that his ministry was fulfilled «in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit» (Rom. 15:19). Moreover, Jesus pointed out the ability of the Holy Spirit to change men's hearts: He convicts the world (John 16:8-11) and regenerates us (John 3:5-8). We must not forget that Jesus repeatedly said that God is the only One who is able to change human hearts: «With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible» (Mt. 19:26; see also verses 16-25). Another quality that unites the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son is the Spirit's eternal existence. In Heb. 9:14 He is called «the eternal Spirit» through whom Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice. But only God is eternal (Heb. 1:10-12); all other created beings are finite. Hence, the Holy Spirit is God.

The Holy Spirit not only possesses the divine attributes. He performs the deeds which are usually attributed to God. He was involved in the process of creation and He still exerts influence upon the whole creation. In Gen. 1:2 it is written that «the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.» In Job 26:13 it is observed that by God's spirit (or breath) the heavens are cleared. The psalmist writes: «When you send your Spirit, they (all elements of creation listed in the previous verses) are created, and you renew the face of the earth» (Ps. 104:30). The Holy Spirit works in the souls of people, especially in regeneration (John 3:5-8; Tit. 3:5). The Spirit resurrected Jesus and will one day «also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit» (Rom. 8:11). Another work of the Holy Spirit is linked with the Scriptures. Paul writes: «All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness» (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter writes concerning the same task of the Holy Spirit, accentuating the role of the Spirit in influencing the author, not the final literary product: «no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God» (2 Pet. 1:21).

The last argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit's equality with the Father and the Son. One of the most evident confirmations of this idea is the baptism formula in the Great Commission: «Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit» (Mt. 28:19). Paul's benediction in 2 Cor. 13:14 is another confirmation: «The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all» (2 Cor. 13:14). And in 2 Cor. 12:4-6 Paul, discussing the spiritual gifts, combines the gifts in the three Persons of the Trinity: «Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.»

On a popular level the Holy Spirit is often conceived as a mystical power or the breath of God. But the Bible clearly shows that the Holy Spirit possesses personal qualities. In Scripture only masculine pronouns are used in relation to Him, even though the Greek word «pneuma» is neuter. However, John wrote the following words of Jesus about the Spirit: «But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes». Mind, will, and emotions are traditionally regarded as the basic elements of personality. The Holy Spirit displays all these elements. The Spirit can teach (John 14:26), show emotions (Eph. 4:30) – He can be grieved. We cannot do something like this to an impersonal power. For example, it is impossible to grieve electric current, or to lie to it. The Spirit shows will, distributing spiritual gifts to each one individually «just as He wills» (1 Cor. 2:11).

The fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person allows us to establish personal relations with Him; the fact that He is God not only allows but obliges us to worship Him.

### **The Trinity**

A correct, biblical idea of the Trinity permits us to organize worship in the right form since it gives a harmonious notion of each Person and their interaction.

The doctrine that God exists as three Persons united in one substance or being is a unique Christian idea not found in any other world religion. The uniqueness of the doctrine is so great that there is no other way to explain its emergence except to suggest that it was revealed by God, not created by man's carnal mind. The Bible contains this teaching as an inscrutable revelation of God, who is totally different from the gods invented by men. Someone has said, «If you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind. But if you deny it, you will lose your soul.»

The concept of the «only God» does not exclude the idea of the three Persons that we believe in. The word «one», which indicates a single thing or unit, is sometimes used in a collective sense in the Sacred Scriptures. For example, «and they (husband and wife) shall become one flesh» (Gen. 2:24), «behold, they are one people» (Gen. 11:6), «he who plants and he who waters are one» (1 Cor. 3:6-8).

The Old Testament does not contradict the Trinitarian understanding of God, but we will surely stretch a point if we try to see the whole doctrine of the Trinity in this part of the Bible. The New Testament does not set forth the teaching about the Trinity in a manifest form either, but the whole Bible points in the direction of the Trinity and does teach that the one God reveals Himself in three Persons. Historically, this doctrine was developed in the course of the debates on the divine nature of Christ. If we acknowledge the faith of the early Church, which was expressed in the simple statement «Jesus Christ is the Lord of everything and everyone», we must agree that the Son is God. This may be interpreted in a way that the Scriptures reveal several gods, which is absurd. Therefore, in its attempt to formulate an idea of God in terms that accord with reason and logic, the Church inevitably came to the concept of the Trinity.

The theologians of the Nicene period upheld the concept of consubstantiality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit against the position of subordinationism – the theological teaching that the first person of the Holy Trinity is superior to the Son and the Holy Spirit, who were viewed as the highest creations or the «second gods» (Origen). If we accept Arius's main thesis concerning Jesus that «there was a time when Jesus Christ was not», and thus regard Christ as a created being, then our worship of Christ will be equivalent to worshipping the creature, which is nothing else but idolatry. The First Nicene Council held in 325 rejected the idea of Jesus as the «second god», and accepted the Athanasian definition: «the Son is of one substance with the Father». The Second Ecumenical (Constantinople) Council (381) further developed the concept of consubstantiality by the formula «one essence, three hypostases». The Cappadocian Fathers explained the difference between the essence and hypostasis by defining them as the existence of One God in the three modes of being or, speaking about the unity of the Godhead, the Cappadocians noted that various energies of each hypostasis are the energies of one and the same essence.

Carefully avoiding subordinationism the Eastern fathers nevertheless taught that only the Father is the source or the beginning of divinity and all being. This served as the starting point in the «filioque» controversy, which flared up over the issue of whether the Holy Spirit proceeded «from the Father» or «from the Father and the Son». As it is known the controversy was formally considered the main issue in the break between the churches in 1054. Even though the difference between the two sides of the controversy does not seem too serious to a modern man, in reality it concerns the fundamentals of our understanding of the Trinity. The East has always held that the Father only is the sole and supreme cause of everything, including the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Spirit derive from the Father, but both in a different way. As a result of their search for an adequate expression of the relationship that exists between the Persons of the Trinity, the theologians decided in favor of two quite different images: The Son is begotten by the Father, while the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. This complicated terminological construction is based on the two Greek words «genesis» and «ekporeusis», which are difficult to translate into modern languages. In order to illustrate the difference between the two terms we should imagine a person pronouncing a word. He is breathing out the air for the word to be heard and understood. In this illustration there are some deep biblical ideas which indicate that the Son is the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit is the breath of God.

Discussing the Trinity from the perspective of the source of divinity, it is totally unthinkable to assume that the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and the Son. Why? Because in holding such a view we will completely compromise the principle of the sole source of divinity. This thought leads to the idea that there are two sources of divine nature in the Trinity, with all the ensuing internal contradictions. If the Son shares the exclusive ability of the Father to be the source of every divinity, then the ability is no longer unique. That is the reason why Byzantine theology regards the Western idea of the «double procession» of the Spirit almost as complete unbelief.

Augustine and most of the Western theologians who followed him emphasized the idea of the unity of God. Augustine developed the idea of the interrelation within the Trinity, arguing that the Persons of the Trinity are defined by their relations with each other. According to this view, the Spirit has to be considered the bond of love and fellowship between the Father and the Son, the connection, as Augustine said, which is the basis of the unity of love and design of the Father and the Son, as presented in the Gospel of John. Therefore he wrote that the Father is the cause of the Spirit's procession since he begets the Son and begetting Him the Father made Him the source from which the Holy Spirit proceeds.<sup>1</sup> This is the foundation upon which the Western understanding of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son has been built. The Eastern theologians could agree with the following wording of the formula: the Spirit proceeds «from the Father through the Son», but not «from the Son».

### Conclusion

The biblical concept of God has a deep practical meaning for worship. The essential incomprehensibility of God should make us be ready to worship Him and fall on our faces in praise at any time, especially if He desires to disclose Himself to any one of His people. At the same time the possibility to know the Unknowable in the limits of His revelation and to meet Him personally should encourage us to serve and seek a blessed encounter with the Lord.

The divine nature of every Person of the Trinity requires us to worship not only the Creator, God the Father, but also the Son and the Holy Spirit. But Christ as the Son of God should be the centre of our worship. He is the One by whom all things came into being, who is working out our salvation, and who is going to be given a central position in heaven. In contrast to the Jews who focus on Yahweh as the centre of their worship, and the pneumatics, worshipping the Holy Spirit, the Baptists, as the Early Church, remain Christocentric in their worship.

The conception of God as plurality in unity suggests an idea of collective worship of the Church – the assembly of believers gathered in the Name of the One (Christ). Thus, corporate worship corresponds with the very nature of God. The equality within the Trinity implies that it is inadmissible to limit the number of those involved in worship to a special group of chosen ones. Worship is a responsibility and privilege of all church members. It is organically connected with the typically Baptist idea of the priesthood of all believers. On the other hand, worship is always individual, as is every hypostasis of the Trinity, but this individuality does not grow into separatism and isolation of every worshipper.

The mystery that covers God and His essence makes it meaningless to regulate worship forms. They are to be diverse like the nature of the Godhead, but the diversity of forms should not turn into disorder and ecstasy. Forgetting that our God is a God of order and peace (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33), people tend to reduce worship to an unbridled euphoria of carnal feelings, which are closer to the netherworld than to heaven. One of the most well-known teachers of piety, Richard Foster, writes: «Certainly it is more fitting to come in reverential silence and awe before the Holy One of eternity than to rush into his Presence with hearts and minds askew and tongues full of words».<sup>2</sup> However, contemplation of the Lord should lead us to an irrepressible glorification and a sacrifice of praise – «the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name» (Heb. 13:15). As Warren Wiersbe said: «Worship is the believers' response of all that they are – mind, emotions, will, and body – to what God is, and says, and does.»<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, On the Trinity. Cf. «Wherefore let him who can understand the generation of the Son from the Father without time, understand also the procession of the Holy Spirit from both without time» (*On the Trinity*, XV, 26:47).

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