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**THE SOURCES
OF CHRISTIAN
DOCTRINE**

Revelation

Every morning at its Matins Service the Orthodox Church proclaims: **“God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”** (Psalm 118:26-27) The first foundation of Christian doctrine is found in this biblical line: **God has revealed Himself to us.**

God has shown Himself to His creatures. He has not disclosed His very innermost being, for this innermost essence of God cannot be grasped by creatures. But God has truly shown what men can see and understand of His divine nature and will.

The fullness and perfection of God’s self-revelation is found in His Son Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the gradual and partial revelation of God in the Old Testament. Jesus is the one truly **“blessed...who comes in the name of the Lord.”**

The first title given to Jesus by the people is that of **Rabbi**, which literally means **teacher**. In the English New Testament the word **Master** also issued in relation to Jesus in the sense of one who teaches, such as a schoolmaster or holder of a master’s degree. Jesus’ followers are also called **disciples**, which literally means students or pupils.

Jesus came to men first of all as the Teacher sent from God. He teaches the will of God and makes God known to men. He reveals fully--as fully as men can grasp--the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

The coming of Jesus as teacher is one aspect of his being Christ the Messiah. The word **Christ** in Greek is the word for the Hebrew **Messiah** which means the Anointed of God. For when the messiah would come, it was foretold, men would be **“taught by God.”** (Isaiah 54:13; John 6:45)

Jesus comes to men as the divine teacher. He claimed on many occasions that his words were those of God. He spoke as **“one having authority”** not like the normal Jewish teachers. (Matthew 7:29) And he accused

those who rejected his teachings as rejecting God Himself.

He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees Him who sent me. I have come as light into the world ... for I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to speak. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.

(John 12:44-50)

Jesus taught men not only by his words, but also by his actions; and indeed by his very own person. He referred to himself as the Truth (John 14:6) and as the Light (John 8:12). He showed himself not merely to be speaking God's words, but to be himself the Living Word of God in human flesh, the Logos who is eternal and uncreated, but who has become man as Jesus of Nazareth in order to make God known to the world.

In the beginning was the Word (Logos) and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father.

And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (See John 1:1-18. The Easter Liturgy Gospel Reading in the Orthodox Church.)

Jesus, the divine Word of God in human flesh, comes to teach men by his presence, his words and his deeds. His disciples are sent into the world to proclaim Him and His **Gospel**, which means literally the “glad tidings” or the “good news” of the Kingdom of God. Those whom Jesus sends are called the **apostles**, which means literally “those who are sent.” The apostles are directly inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26), to “**make disciples of all nations**” teaching them what Christ has commanded. (Matthew 28:19)

The early Church, we are told, “**devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine.**” (Acts 2:42) **Doctrine** as a word simply means teaching or instruction. The apostles’ doctrine is the doctrine of Jesus and becomes the doctrine of the Christian Church. It is received by the disciples of every age and generation as the very doctrine of God. It is proclaimed everywhere and always as the doctrine of eternal life through which all men and the whole world are enlightened and saved.

At this point it must be mentioned that although God’s self-revelation in history through the chosen people of Israel—the revelation which culminates in the coming of Christ the Messiah—is of primary importance, it is also the doctrine of the Christian Church that all genuine strivings of men after the truth are fulfilled in Christ. Every genuine insight into the meaning of life finds its perfection in the Christian Gospel. Thus, the holy fathers of the Church taught that the yearnings of pagan religions and the wisdom of many philosophers are also capable of serving to prepare men for the doctrines of Jesus and are indeed valid and genuine ways to the one Truth of God.

In this way Christians considered certain Greek philosophers to have been enlightened by God to serve the cause of Truth and to lead men to fullness of life in God since the Word and Wisdom of God is revealed to all men and is found in all men who in the purity of their minds and hearts have been inspired by the Divine Light which enlightens every man who comes into this world. This Divine Light is the word of God, Jesus of Nazareth in human flesh, the perfection and fullness of God's self-revelation to the world.

It cannot be overstressed that divine revelation in the Old Testament, in the Church of the New Testament, in the lives of the saints, in the wisdom of the fathers, in the beauty of creation . . . and most fully and perfectly in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the revelation of God Himself. God has spoken. God has acted. God has manifested Himself and continues to manifest Himself in the lives of His people.

If we want to hear God's voice and see God's actions of self-revelation in the world, we must purify our minds and hearts from everything that is wicked and false. We must strive to love the truth, to love one another, and to love everything in God's good creation. According to the Orthodox faith, purification from falsehood and sin is the way to the knowledge of God. If we open ourselves to divine grace and purify ourselves from all evils, then it is certain that we will be able to interpret the scriptures properly and come into living communion with the true and living God who has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself to those who love Him.

Tradition

The ongoing life of God's People is called **Holy Tradition**. The Holy Tradition of the Old Testament is expressed in the Old Testamental part of the Bible and in the ongoing life of the People of Israel until the birth of Christ. This tradition is fulfilled, completed and transcended in the time of the Messiah and in the Christian Church.

The New Testamental or Christian Tradition is also called the **apostolic tradition** and the **tradition of the Church**. The central written part of this tradition is the New Testamental writings in the Bible. The gospels and the other writings of the apostolic church form the heart of the Christian tradition and are the main written source and inspiration of all that developed in later ages.

This Christian tradition is given over from people to people, through space and time. **Tradition** as a word means exactly this: it is that which is "passed on" and "given over" from one to another. **Holy Tradition** is, therefore, that which is passed on and given over within the Church from the time of Christ's apostles right down to the present day.

Although containing many written documents, Holy Tradition is not at all limited to what is written; it is not merely a body of literature. It is, on the contrary, the total life and experience of the entire Church transferred from place to place and from generation to generation. **Tradition** is the very life of the Church itself as it is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Not everything in the Church belongs to its Holy Tradition for not everything in the Church is done by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and not everything in the Church pertains essentially and necessarily to the Kingdom of God. Some things in the Church are just temporal and temporary things, merely human customs and traditions of no eternal and everlasting value. Such things in themselves are not sinful or wrong. On the contrary, they may be very positive and very

helpful to the life of the Church as long as they are not taken to be what they are not. Thus, it is very important in the Church to make the distinction between traditions which are merely earthly and human and passing away and the genuine Holy Tradition which pertains to the heavenly and eternal Kingdom of God.

It is also important to recognize that there are also things in the Church which not only do not belong to Holy Tradition, but which are not even to be counted among its positive human traditions. These things which are just sinful and wrong are brought into the life of the Church from the evil world. The Church in its human form, as an earthly institution, is not immune to the sins of its unholy members. These deviations and errors which creep into the life of the Church stand under the judgment and condemnation of the authentic and genuine Holy Tradition which comes from God.

Among the elements which make up the Holy Tradition of the Church, the Bible holds the first place. Next comes the Church's liturgical life and its prayer, then its dogmatic decisions and the acts of its approved churchly councils, the writings of the church fathers, the lives of the saints, the canon laws, and finally the iconographic tradition together with the other inspired forms of creative artistic expression such as music and architecture.

All of the elements of Holy Tradition are organically linked together in real life. None of them stands alone. None may be separated or isolated from the other or from the wholeness of the life of the Church. All come alive in the actual living of the life of the Church in every age and generation, in every time and place. As the Church continues to live by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Tradition of the Church will continue to grow and develop. This process will go on until the establishment of the Kingdom of God at the end of the ages.

Bible

The written record of God's revelation is the **Bible**, which means the book, or the books. The Bible is also called the **Holy Scriptures**. **Scripture** as a word simply means writings.

The Bible was written over thousands of years by many different people. It is divided into two **testaments** or **covenants**. These words signify agreements, pacts, or we might say, "deals." The two basic covenants are the old and the new; each has its own scriptures. As a book, the Bible contains many different kinds of writings: law, prophecy, history, poetry, stories, aphorisms, prayers, letters and symbolical visions.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament scripture begins with the five books of the **Law** called the **Pentateuch**, which means the five books; also called the **Torah**, which means the Law. Sometimes these books are also called the **Books of Moses** since they are centered on the exodus and the Mosaic laws.

In the Old Testament there are also books of the history of Israel; books called the **Wisdom** books such as the Psalms, Proverbs and the Book of Job; and books of the prophecies which carry the names of the Old Testament prophets. A **prophet** is one who speaks the Word of God by direct divine inspiration. Only secondarily does the word prophet mean one who foretells the future.

The Orthodox Church also numbers among the genuine books of the Old Testament the so-called **apocryphal** books, meaning literally the secret or hidden writings. Other Christians put these books in a secondary place or reject completely their being of divine inspiration. (see chart)

The New Testament

The center of the New Testament part of the Bible is the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who are called the four **evangelists**, which means those who wrote the gospels. Gospel in Greek is **evangelion** which, as we have seen, means the “glad tidings” or the “good news.”

In the New Testament scripture there is also the book of the **Acts of the Apostles**, written by St. Luke. There are fourteen letters called the **epistles** (which simply means letters) of the Apostle Paul, though perhaps some, such as the **Letter to the Hebrews**, were not written directly by him. Three letters are also ascribed to the Apostle John; two to the Apostle Peter; and one each to the Apostles James and Jude. Finally there is the **Book of Revelation**, also called the **Apocalypse**, which is ascribed to St. John as well. (see chart)

For the Orthodox, the Bible is the main written source of divine doctrine since God Himself inspired its writing by His Holy Spirit. (see II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:20) This is the doctrine of the **inspiration** of the Bible, namely that men inspired by God wrote the words which are truly their own human words—all words are human!--but which nevertheless may be called all together the **Word of God**. Thus, the Bible is the Word of God in written form because it contains not merely the thoughts and experiences of men, but the very self-revelation of God.

The center of the Bible as the written Word of God in human form is the person of the Living Word of God in human form, Jesus Christ. All parts of the Bible are interpreted in the Orthodox Church in the light of Christ since everything in the Bible leads up to Christ and speaks about Him. (Luke 24:44) This fact is symbolized in the Orthodox Church by the fact that only the book of the four gospels is enthroned on the altars of our churches and not the entire Bible. This is so because everything in the Bible is fulfilled in Christ.

The Liturgy

When the Church, which means literally the gathering or assembly of people who are called together to perform a specific task, assembles as God's People to worship, this gathering is called the **liturgy** of the Church. As a word **liturgy** means the common work or action of a particular group of people for the sake of all. Thus the **divine liturgy** of the Christian Church means the common work of God done by the people of God.

The liturgy of the Old Testament people was the official worship in the temple of Jerusalem according to the Mosaic Law, as well as the annual feasts and fasts and the private prayers and services held by the Israelites at home or in the synagogues. **Synagogues** by definition are houses of gathering; they are not temples since according to the Law there was just the one temple in Jerusalem where the priestly worship was conducted. In the synagogues the Israelites gathered for prayer and scriptural study, preaching and contemplation of the Word of God.

In the New Testament Church the liturgy is centered in the person of Christ and is primarily a "christening" of the Old Testament liturgical life. The Christian Church retains the liturgical life of the Old Testament in a new and eternal perspective. Thus, the prayers of the Old Testament, the scriptures and the psalms, are read and sung in the light of Christ. The sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ replaces the Old Testament sacrifices in the temple. And the Lord's Day, Sunday, replaces the old Jewish sabbath which is Saturday.

The Jewish feasts also take on new meaning in the Christian Church with the central feast of Passover, for example, becoming the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection; and the feast of Pentecost becoming the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit which fulfills the Old Testamental Law. The Christian liturgical year is also patterned after the Old Testamental prototype.

From the basic foundation of the Old Testament liturgy the Church developed its own sacramental life with baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, chrismation, holy communion, marriage, repentance, healing and the Churchly ministry and priesthood taking on specifically Christian forms and meaning. In addition, a great wealth of specifically Christian prayers, hymns and blessings were developed, together with specifically Christian feasts and celebrations in remembrance of New Testamental events and saints.

The living experience of the Christian sacramental and liturgical life is a primary source of Christian doctrine. In the liturgy of the Church, the Bible and the Holy Tradition come alive and are given to the living experience of the Christian people. Thus, through prayer and sacramental worship men are "taught by God" as it was predicted for the messianic age. (John 6:45)

In addition to the living experience of the liturgy, the texts of the services and sacraments provide a written source of doctrine in that they may be studied and contemplated by one who desires an understanding of Christian teachings. According to the common opinion of the Orthodox Church, the sacramental and liturgical texts--the hymns, blessings, prayers, symbols, and rituals--contain no formal errors or deformations of the Christian faith and can be trusted absolutely to reveal the genuine doctrine of the Orthodox Church. It may well be that some of the historical information contained in church feasts is inaccurate or merely symbolical, but there is no question in the Church that the doctrinal and spiritual meaning of all of the feasts is genuine and authentic and provides true experience and knowledge of God.

The Councils

As the Church progressed through history it was faced with many difficult decisions. The Church always settled difficulties and made decisions by reaching a consensus of opinion among all the believers inspired by God who were led by their appointed leaders, first the apostles and then the bishops.

The first church council in history was held in the apostolic church to decide the conditions under which the gentiles, that is, the non-Jews, could enter the Christian Church. (see Acts 15) From that time on, all through history councils were held on every level of church life to make important decisions. Bishops met regularly with their priests, also called presbyters or elders, and people. It became the practice, and even the law, very early in church history that bishops in given regions should meet in councils held on a regular basis.

At times in church history councils of all of the bishops in the church were called. All the bishops were not able to attend these councils, of course, and not all such councils were automatically approved and accepted by the Church in its Holy Tradition. In the Orthodox Church only seven such councils, some of which were actually quite small in terms of the number of bishops attending, have received the universal approval of the entire Church in all times and places. These councils have been termed the **Seven Ecumenical Councils**. (see chart)

The dogmatic definitions (**dogma** means official teaching) and the canon laws of the ecumenical councils are understood to be inspired by God and to be expressive of His will for men. Thus, they are essential sources of Orthodox Christian doctrine.

Besides the seven ecumenical councils, there are other local church councils whose decisions have also received the approval of all Orthodox Churches in the world, and so are considered to be genuine expressions of the Orthodox faith and life. The decisions of

these councils are mostly of a moral or structural character. Nevertheless, they too reveal the teaching of the Orthodox Church.

The Seven Ecumenical Councils

Nicea I	325	Formulated the First Part of the Creed, defining the divinity of the Son of God.
Constantinople I	381	Formulated the Second Part of the Creed, defining the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesus	431	Defined Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and Mary as Theotokos.
Chalcedon	451	Defined Christ as Perfect God and Perfect Man in One Person.
Constantinople II	553	Reconfirmed the Doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ.
Constantinople III	680	Affirmed the True Humanity of Jesus by insisting upon the reality of His human will and action.
Nicea II	787	Affirmed the propriety of icons as genuine expressions of the Christian Faith.

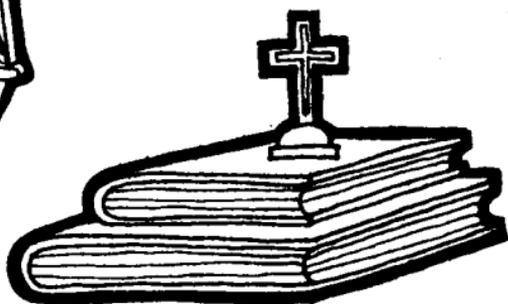
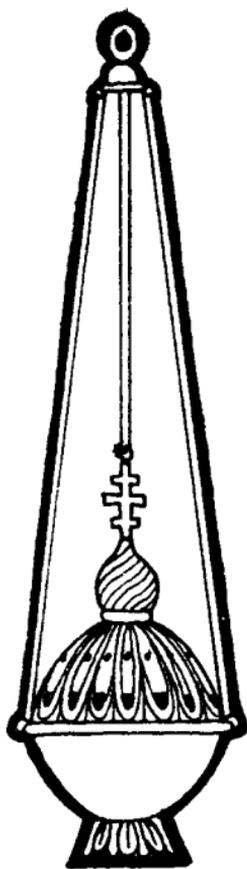
Fathers

There are in the Church a number of saints who were theologians and spiritual teachers who defended and explained the doctrines of the Christian Faith. These saints are called the **holy fathers** of the Church and their teachings are called the **patristic** teachings. (Patristic is from the Greek word for father.)

Some of the holy fathers are called **apologists** because they defended the Christian teachings against those outside the Church who ridiculed the faith. Their writings are called **apologies** which means “answers” or “defenses.”

Others of the holy fathers defended the Christian faith against certain members of the Church who deformed the truth and life of Christianity by choosing certain parts of the Christian revelation and doctrine while denying other aspects. Those who deformed the Christian faith in this way and thereby destroyed the integrity of the Christian Church are called the heretics, and their doctrines are called heresies. By definition **heresy** means “choice,” and a **heretic** is one who chooses what he wants according to his own ideas and opinions, selecting certain parts of the Christian Tradition while rejecting others. By his actions a heretic not only destroys the fullness of the Christian truth but also divides the life of the Church and causes division in the community.

Generally speaking, the Orthodox tradition regards the teachers of heresies as not merely being mistaken or ignorant or misguided; it accuses them of being actively aware of their actions and therefore sinful. A person merely misguided or mistaken or teaching what he believes to be the truth without being challenged or opposed as to his possible errors is not considered to be a heretic in the true sense of the word. Many of the saints and even the holy fathers have elements in their teachings which Christians of later times have considered as being false or inaccurate. This, of course, does not make them heretics.



Not all of the holy fathers were defenders against falsehood or heresy. Some of them were simply the very positive teachers of the Christian faith, developing and explaining its meaning in a deeper and fuller way. Others were teachers of the spiritual life, giving instruction to the faithful about the meaning and method of communion with God through prayer and Christian living. Those teachers who concentrated on the struggle of spiritual life are called the **ascetical fathers**, **asceticism** being the exercise and training of the “spiritual athletes”; and those who concentrated on the way of spiritual communion with God are called the **mystical fathers**, **mysticism** being defined as the genuine, experiential union with the Divine.

All of the holy fathers, whether they are classified as theological, pastoral, ascetical or mystical gave their teachings from the sources of their own living Christian experience. They defended and described and explained the theological doctrines and ways of spiritual life from their own living knowledge of these realities. They blended together the brilliance of the intellect with the purity of the soul and the righteousness of life. This is what makes them the holy fathers of the Church.

The writings of the Church Fathers are not infallible, and it has even been said that in any given one of them some things could be found which could be questioned in the light of the fullness of the Tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the writings of the Fathers which are built upon the biblical and liturgical foundations of Christian faith and life have great authority within the Orthodox Church and are primary sources for the discovery of the Church’s doctrine.

The writings of some of those fathers who have received the universal approval and praise of the Church through the ages are of particular importance, such as those of Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons,

Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Photius of Constantinople and Gregory Palamas; and those of the ascetical and spiritual fathers such as Anthony of Egypt, Macarius of Egypt, John of the Ladder, Isaac of Syria, Ephraim of Syria, Simeon the New Theologian and others.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to read the writings of the fathers of the Church since their problems were often complicated and their manner of writing very different in style from our own. Also most of the spiritual and ascetical writings are put in the monastic setting and have to be transposed in order to be understandable and usable to those of us who are not monks or nuns. Nevertheless, it is important to read the writings of the fathers directly. One should do so slowly, a little at a time, with careful thought and consideration and without making quick and capricious conclusions . . . the same way that one would read the Bible. Among the church fathers, Saint John Chrysostom's writings are very clear and direct and can be read by many with great profit if the proper care is given. Also the **Philokalia**, an anthology of spiritual writings, exists in English, at least in part, and with proper care, it can be helpful to a mature Christian in search of deeper insights into the spiritual life. (See Book IV on *Spirituality*)

The Saints

The doctrine of the Church comes alive in the lives of the true believers, the **saints**. The saints are those who literally share the holiness of God. **“Be holy, for I your God am holy.”** (Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1:16) The lives of the saints bear witness to the authenticity and truth of the Christian gospel, the sure gift of God’s holiness to men.

In the Church there are different classifications of saints. In addition to the holy fathers who are quite specifically glorified for their teaching, there are a number of classifications of the various types of holy people according to the particular aspects of their holiness.

Thus, there are the **apostles** who are sent to proclaim the Christian faith, the **evangelists** who specifically announce and even write down the gospels, the **prophets** who are directly inspired to speak God’s word to men. There are the **confessors** who suffer for the faith and the **martyrs** who die for it. There are the so-called **“holy ones”**, the saints from among the monks and nuns; and the **“righteous”** those from among the lay people.

In addition, the church service books have a special title for saints from among the ordained clergy and another special title for the holy rulers and statesmen. Also there is the strange classification of the **fools for Christ’s sake**. These are they who through their total disregard for the things that people consider so necessary—clothes, food, money, houses, security, public reputation, etc.—have been able to witness without compromise to the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. They take their name from the sentence of the Apostle Paul: **“We are fools for Christ’s sake..”** (I Corinthians 4:10; 3:18)

There are volumes on lives of the saints in the Orthodox tradition. They may be used very fruitfully for the discovery of the meaning of the Christian faith and life. In these **“lives”** the Christian vision of God,

man, and the world stands out very clearly. Because these volumes were written down in times quite different from our own, it is necessary to read them carefully to distinguish the essential points from the artificial and sometimes even fanciful embellishments which are often contained in them. In the Middle Ages, for instance, it was customary to pattern the lives of saints after literary works of previous times and even to dress up the lives of the lesser known saints after the manner of earlier saints of the same type. It also was the custom to add many elements, particularly supernatural and miraculous events of the most extraordinary sort, to confirm the true holiness of the saint, to gain strength for his spiritual goodness and truth, and to foster imitation of his virtues in the lives of the hearers and readers. In many cases the miraculous is added to stress the ethical righteousness and innocence of the saint in the face of his detractors.

Generally speaking, it does not take much effort to distinguish the sound kernel of truth in the lives of the saints from the additions made in the spirit of piety and enthusiasm of the later periods; and the effort should be made to see the essential truth which the lives contain. Also, the fact that elements of a miraculous nature were added to the lives of saints during medieval times for the purposes of edification, entertainment and even amusement should not lead to the conclusion that all things miraculous in the lives of the saints are invented for literary or moralizing purposes. Again, a careful reading of the lives of the saints will almost always reveal what is authentic and true in the realm of the miraculous. Also, the point has been rightly made that men can learn almost as much about the real meaning of Christianity from the legends of the saints produced within the tradition of the Church as from the authentic lives themselves.

Canons

There are canon laws of ecumenical councils, of provincial and local councils, and of individual church fathers which have been received by the entire Orthodox Church as normative for Christian doctrine and practice. As a word **canon** means literally rule or norm or measure of judging. In this sense the canon laws are not positive laws in the juridical sense and cannot be easily identified with laws as understood and operative in human jurisprudence.

The canons of the Church are distinguished first between those of a dogmatic or doctrinal nature and those of a practical, ethical, or structural character. They are then further distinguished between those which may be changed and altered and those which are unchangeable and may not be altered under any conditions.

The dogmatic canons are those council definitions which speak about an article of the Christian faith; for example, the nature and person of Jesus Christ. Although such canons may be explained and developed in new and different words, particularly as the Church Tradition grows and moves through time, their essential meaning remains eternal and unchanging.

Some canons of a moral and ethical character also belong to those which cannot be changed. These are the moral canons whose meaning is absolute and eternal and whose violation can in no way be justified. The canons which forbid the sale of Church sacraments are of this kind.

There are, in addition, canons of a quite practical nature which may be changed and which, in fact, have been changed in the course of the life of the Church. There are also those which may be changed but which remain in force since the Church has shown the desire to retain them. An example of the former type is the canon which requires the priests of the church to be ordained to office only after reaching thirty years of age. It might be said that although this type of canon

remains normative and does set a certain ideal which theoretically may still be of value, the needs of the Church have led to its violation in actual life. The canon which requires that the bishops of the Church be unmarried is of the latter type.

It is not always clear which canons express essential marks of Christian life and which do not. There are often periods of controversy over certain canons as to their applicability in given times and conditions. These factors, however, should not lead the members of the Church to dismay or to the temptation either to enforce all canons blindly with identical force and value or to dismiss all the canons as meaningless and insignificant.

In the first place, the canons are "of the Church" and therefore cannot possibly be understood as "positive laws" in a juridical sense; secondly, the canons are certainly not exhaustive, and do not cover every possible aspect of Church faith and life; thirdly, the canons were produced for the most part in response to some particular dogmatic or moral question or deviation in the Church life and so usually bear the marks of some particular controversy in history which has conditioned not merely their particular formulation, but indeed their very existence.

Taken by themselves, the canon laws of the Church can be misleading and frustrating, and therefore superficial people will say "either enforce them all or discard them completely." But taken as a whole within the wholeness of Orthodox life—theological, historical, canonical, and spiritual—these canons do assume their proper place and purpose and show themselves to be a rich source for discovering the living Truth of God in the Church. In viewing the canons of the Church the key factors are Christian knowledge and wisdom which are borne from technical study and spiritual depth. There is no other "key" to their usage; and any other way would be according to the Orthodox faith both unorthodox and unchristian.

Church Art

The Orthodox Church has a rich tradition of iconography as well as other church arts: music, architecture, sculpture, needlework, poetry, etc. This artistic tradition is based on the Orthodox Christian doctrine of human creativity rooted in God's love for man and the world in creation.

Because man is created in the image and likeness of God, and because God so loved man and the world as to create, save and glorify them by His own coming in Christ and the Holy Spirit, the artistic expressions of man and the blessings and inspirations of God merge into a holy artistic creativity which truly expresses the deepest truths of the Christian vision of God, man, and nature.

The icon is Orthodoxy's highest artistic achievement. It is a gospel proclamation, a doctrinal teaching and a spiritual inspiration in colors and lines.

The traditional Orthodox icon is not a holy picture. It is not a pictorial portrayal of some Christian saint or event in a "photocopy" way. It is, on the contrary, the expression of the eternal and divine reality, significance, and purpose of the given person or event depicted. In the gracious freedom of the divine inspiration, the icon depicts its subject as at the same time both human and yet "full of God," earthly and yet heavenly, physical and yet spiritual, "bearing the cross" and yet full of grace, light, peace and joy. In this way the icon expresses a deeper "realism" than that which would be shown in the simple reproduction of the physical externals of the historic person or happening. Thus, in their own unique way the various types of Orthodox icons, through their form and style and manner of depiction as well as through their actual contents and use in the Church, are an inexhaustible source of revelation of the Orthodox doctrine and faith.

Musical expression may be added to the icon as a source of discovering the Orthodox Christian world-

view. Here, however, there is greater difficulty because of the loss in recent years of the liturgical and spiritual meaning of music in the Church. Just as the theological meaning of the traditional Orthodox icon is being rediscovered, so is the traditional doctrinal significance of Orthodox music. The process in the latter case, however, is much slower, much more difficult, and much less evident to the average person.

The traditional Orthodox architecture also expresses the doctrine of the Church, particularly in its emphasis on "God with us" and the complete communion of men and the world with God in Christ. The use of domed ceilings, the shape and layout of the buildings, the placing of the icons, the use of vestments, etc., all express the teachings of the Church. The traditional Orthodox church architecture and art work are expressions of the Orthodox Christian doctrines of creation, salvation and eternal life.

It is a very important spiritual exercise for Christians to study the holy icons and the hymns of the Church's liturgy. One can learn much about God and His gracious actions among men by a careful and prayerful contemplation of the artistic expressions of Church doctrine and life. (See Book II on *Worship*)