

Answers to Questions and Reflections Volume I Doctrine & Scripture

The Orthodox Faith Series by Father Thomas Hopko

Chapter 1: Sources of Christian Doctrine

1. Isaiah said that men (meaning all human beings) would be “taught by God.”
2. They said that the yearnings of pagan religions and the wisdom of many philosophers could be valid and genuine paths to the Truth of God. Saint Basil the Great said that in pagan writings truth could be perceived “as it were in shadows and in mirrors.” He advised young men, whose minds were not yet mature, to “receive those words from pagan authors which contain suggestions of the virtues.” This would prepare their minds to understand, later, the truly precious words of the Holy Scriptures, which lead to salvation.
3. No; some things are temporal and temporary, and don’t pertain to God’s Kingdom.
4. The Bible comes first.
5. Primarily, the word *prophet* describes a person who speaks the Word of God by direct divine inspiration. Secondarily it describes one who foretells the future.
6. Everything in the Bible (law, history, wisdom and prophecy) prepares us for Jesus Christ. Therefore the Gospels, which tell us how He fulfilled that preparation, are enthroned on the altar.
7. The Church’s liturgy, which means the common work of prayer and worship, retains the liturgical life of the Old Testament, but in a new and eternal perspective.
8. An *apologist* is one who offers answers about, or defends, something. Some Church Fathers wrote what are called *apologies*, meaning explanations or defenses of the Christian faith.
9. The Church Fathers lived as Christians are called to live. With righteousness of life they combined purity of soul and intellectual brilliance. This gives them great authority, though the Church does not claim that they are infallible.
10. The *fools for Christ’s sake* had no regard for things considered by most of us to be basic necessities—food, clothing, shelter—or for social reputation and status. Some of them “spoke truth to power” in risky ways; many were often treated with hostility.
11. No. Canons of a moral and ethical character don’t change. Those of a practical nature sometimes do.
12. An icon, unlike a holy picture, is not a pictorial representation. It has a deeper realism, and depicts a person or event as earthly and yet heavenly, physical and yet spiritual.

Chapter 2: The Symbol of Faith (the Creed)

1. The earliest creed was probably the simple confession that Jesus Christ is Messiah and Lord.
2. The Symbol of Faith, the Creed, is said in the first person because each person must believe for himself or herself. The community of faith begins with and rests upon each member's personal confession of faith.
3. God is above existence, above being. Therefore the Orthodox Church would be reluctant to use the term "supreme being" because it implies that God is merely the greatest in the chain of "being" to which everything and everyone belongs.
4. No. God created the first foundations of existence. Then, over periods of time—perhaps millions of years—through His power these foundations brought forth other elements of His creation.
5. The prayer addresses the Spirit of God, "who art everywhere and fillest all things." Similarly, Psalm 139 expresses God's omnipresence, as well as His constant care for us.
6. There are nine ranks of bodiless powers; angels are just one of these ranks.
7. The Scriptures tell us that our destiny, being made in God's image, is to rule creation. Nothing like this is said about angels. We are created for a life superior to that of any creature, including the angels who glorify God and serve the cause of our salvation. We do not become angels when we die; we are forever different from angels.
8. There are no limits to the divinity of our Creator, and by His grace there are no limits to what we, in our humanity, can become. We have been created to grow and develop, through participation in the nature of God, for all eternity.
9. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity, while perfectly equal, are not the same. They are in complete unity of nature and being. Yet there are distinctions as to how each Person lives and expresses the common nature of God. Similarly, men and women are completely equal and are called to spiritual perfection, of which they both are capable. Yet they are two different "modes of existence" within one and the same humanity just as the Three Persons of the Trinity are three different "modes of existence" within one and the same divinity.
10. Though we may think of the word *eternity* as meaning endless time, it actually means the condition of no time at all. Therefore, for God, there is no past or future; all time is *now*. This means, for example, that there has never been a time when the Son of God was not—His coming forth from the Father is eternal. This is why the Church had to condemn the teachings of Arius, who said that there had been a time when there was no Son of God.

11. No, because “the world was made through Him” (Jn 1:10) and He was always present, and active, as the “life and light of man” (I Jn 4). When the Old Testament saints experienced divine manifestations (Moses, for example) or when God’s word was revealed to them (as in Isaiah 55: 10-11), these were revelations of God by His Son, the Divine Word.
12. To save the world, the Messiah could not be someone in need of salvation like everyone else. The Savior had to be “not of this world” and must be able to overcome death. This doesn’t alter the fact that He became a real and perfect man.
13. The hymn expresses the truth that Jesus Christ is both perfect God and perfect man.
14. The defenders of icons said that because God became a true man of flesh and blood (which we call the Incarnation), it was appropriate to depict Him. In fact, to deny the possibility of depicting Him was to deny the truth of His having come to us as a man.
15. The event is Christ’s baptism in the Jordan by John.
16. In baptism and chrismation we enter into the saving life of the Church. We are enlightened and enabled to see, believe and love the Truth of God. The Church calls this enlightenment *holy illumination*.
17. Romans 6: 23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. By taking our sins on Himself and then dying a sinless death of His own free will, not through any necessity, Jesus Christ defeated the power of death. In that way He made death the source and the way into life eternal.
18. Ezekiel says that God will open the graves and raise up those buried in them. The raised people will receive God’s Spirit and live. This is exactly what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for us.
19. We are His most precious possession.
20. It is recreated with “a few drops of Blood”—the Blood of the crucified Christ, shed for our salvation.
21. It means that Christ has completed His work on earth and is reunited with His Father in heaven, bearing the wounded and glorified humanity which He assumed. Through this, we human beings are restored to communion with God.
22. Not being told the time of “the end” is a gift to us—it allows us to be vigilant and to be constant in our good works. That way we will be prepared for the end no matter when it comes.
23. Saint Isaac says that God’s love acts as suffering in “the reprovéd”—those who have sinned against love--and as joy in the blessed, who have loved God.

24. We will be judged by Christ, by One who has fully shared our life and knows its sorrows, temptations and difficulties. Some people who don't know much about Christianity fail to understand this, and ask how God can fairly judge us when He is reigning "up there" and we are struggling "down here." Father Hopko makes the important point that we are not judged by God "sitting on a cloud" but by Christ who suffered every human hardship yet emerged victorious.
25. John 15: 26 says that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father" and this is our Orthodox understanding.
26. Pentecost was the fulfillment of Christ's earthly mission and the beginning of the Christian Church.
27. *Catholic* means full and complete, lacking nothing.
28. The Church is called "the pillar and bulwark of the truth."
29. This passage is not describing total annihilation of God's creation, which He loves and wants to save. Rather it is telling of a catastrophe that all of creation will have to endure in order to be purified, cleansed and saved. It also tells of eternal fire in which the ungodly will suffer.

Chapter 3: The Holy Trinity

1. We can do this through work and prayer, passing beyond words and concepts about God and coming to know Him for ourselves.
2. No, because the Son and the Spirit are not creatures. Like God the Father, they are *uncreated*.
3. If we ask who God is, the answer is that He is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
4. Human beings are *logical* in that they participate in God's *Logos*—His Son and Word. They reflect God's nature on the creaturely level as the *Logos* does on the divine level.
5. We have this special empowerment because we are given the gift of being inspired by the Holy Spirit, unlike every other creature.

Chapter 4: The Bible

1. We do not mean that it fell from heaven ready made, and we do not mean that it was dictated by God to men who were just His passive instruments. Rather, God inspired His People to produce the Scriptures.

2. This is because the Church considers the Bible to be entirely inspired by God; in that sense He is its original author. The identity of the human author doesn't determine the authenticity or validity of a book which is considered to be part of the Bible.

Chapter 5: Old Testament

1. Moses.
2. No. In most cases they were written well after the events they describe.
3. *Apocalyptic* means that which refers to the final revelation of God and His judgment over all creation.
4. Christ referred to the book of Jonah as the sign of His messianic mission in the world. On Holy Saturday we are preparing to celebrate His rising from the dead, and the salvation offered to all people—the fulfillment of His mission.

Chapter 6: New Testament

1. The gospels were written not just to tell the story of Jesus' life. His Spirit-filled disciples wrote to bear witness that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah and Savior of the world.
2. The Gospel of Matthew is intended to show that Jesus Christ (son of David, son of Abraham) is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and is truly the Christ.
3. Because the second disciple on the road is not named, it is assumed that he is Luke, the writer of the gospel.
4. He is called the Theologian.
5. While upholding the validity and holiness of the Mosaic Law, Saint Paul defends the doctrine that salvation comes only in Jesus Christ, by faith and by grace.
6. The words "bishops and deacons" indicate the growing structure of the Church.
7. The main theme is a comparison of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the sacrifices of the Old Testament priests.
8. The teaching is that the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" will be purged of all that is contrary to God's divine goodness and holiness, and will be "very good" as was the first creation. The only things "dissolved with fire" will be evil and sin.
9. The image of Babylon has a universal application—it stands for every society which fights against God and for every body of persons united in wickedness and fleshliness.

10. Father Hopko says that the number 144,000 is the symbol of total completion and of the full number of the saved.

Chapter 7: Salvation History

1. The first Adam was a *type* (a figure which anticipates a greater figure to come) of the True Adam, Jesus Christ—the One who was to come. The first was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.
2. The event was the visit of three angels of God to Abraham under the oaks of Mamre. Here again, the event “prefigures” something great to come—the revelation of the Holy Trinity.
3. Jesus says that the Jews who ate manna in the wilderness still died. But He is the Living Bread from heaven, and those who eat it will not die but will live forever.
4. Saint Paul says that the rock was Christ; Jesus Christ is the Living Water as well as the Living Bread.
5. The giving of the law to Moses is fulfilled in the giving of the Holy Spirit to Christ’s Disciples on Pentecost.
6. He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.
7. We, God’s people, are now God’s temple.
8. Christ’s sacrifice secured an eternal redemption.
9. The public action was “the sign which He had done”—the feeding of the 5000.
10. In the Kingdom, the final and perfect presence of God, which had been prophesied, will actually be given.
11. The promise is that we can become partakers of the divine nature, participants in God’s own holiness.