



Lecture on “Christ the Eternal Tao” by Hieromonk Damascene Christiensen

Father Damascene, who, as I am sure you are all aware, is an Eastern Orthodox Christian monk, began his life as John Christensen, and was nominally introduced to Western

Protestant Christianity as a child. By the time he began college, however, he believed that the highest spiritual reality was not a personal deity or God, but rather a transpersonal reality.



He considered himself a Buddhist, specifically, in the Zen tradition, and he had various experiences, which he writes, included darkness, infinite nothingness, existing outside of space and time, where everything is now, and time has no meaning. Despite these experiences, there was still something missing in the soul.



While in college at U.C. Santa Cruz, John Christensen met Eastern Orthodox Christian students and was invited by them to a lecture by an American priest and monk, who had also been a serious student of Eastern philosophy and Buddhism. It was through this lecture that Father Damascene met the man through whose influence his life would be radically altered.



This man was Father Seraphim Rose, spiritual seeker, Eastern Religious scholar, Orthodox monk and priest, and author of many books and articles on spirituality and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It was through this meeting, his ongoing studies, and many pilgrimages to the monastery Father Seraphim founded in the secluded woods of Northern California, that John Christensen came to discover that truth was not just an abstract idea, sought and known by the mind, but something personal, even a person, sought and loved by the heart.



This discovery that truth is personal, not impersonal or abstract, was the conclusion that Father Seraphim also reached after extensive study of Taoism and Lao Tzu, under a genuine transmitter of the Tao's philosophy tradition, Ji Ming Shen. It was this thread of study that Father Damascene used as the basis of his book, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, which is the subject of our seminar series this weekend.



Now please, I would like to remind you of some etiquette. We do not applaud in the nave of an Orthodox Church. It is my pleasure to introduce to you our guest speaker, Father Damascene.



Father Damascene: In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thank you for that excellent introduction. I did not know

you were going to be saying all those things about me. (laughter)
It was all true, you got it all right. (laughter) Thank all of you for coming. Thank you, Father Wayne and Father Michael, for your invitation to be here. With the blessing of His Grace, Bishop Joseph, many pilgrims have been coming to our monastery from this parish for many years, and it is a great blessing for me to finally be here among you all, and also to welcome all the people who do not go to this parish, but have come as guests to hear this talk, and to take part in the seminar.



Tonight I will be talking about Christ the Eternal Tao, specifically about the ancient book of Chinese philosophy, The Tao Te Ching, of Lao Tzu, in the light of Christian revelation, as found in its fullness in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and tomorrow I will be talking more about the teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church and even more so about the practice. I will be talking about the Orthodox world view, the understanding of the purpose of man's life, our creation, our original state, our fall, our redemption and salvation by Christ, and our path to union with God, which has been opened to us by Christ, and specifically, I will be talking a lot about watchfulness and prayer on the path of that union to God. Tonight I will talk about it briefly, but tomorrow I will go into much more depth about it.



The talk tonight is based on the book that I wrote, Christ the Eternal Tao, which was first published in 1999. I wrote this book with two purposes in mind. First of all, it was meant to reach out to spiritual seekers in the West who were looking into Eastern religions, particularly westerners who have had some exposure to Christianity in the past, who have a longing for Christ, but have been put off by modern Western forms of Christianity, and who have been looking into Eastern religions to fill the void in their hearts, and provide answers to the ultimate questions of life. To such people, this book affirms that whatever truths they may have found in Eastern religions, find their fulfillment, their ultimate and final expression, in the revelation given by God to man in Jesus Christ, and specifically, in the Orthodox Church.



So this book is not a book of religious syncretism, rather it is a bridge book, a book intended to bring spiritual seekers of our times to a true understanding and experience of Christ in the

Orthodox Church.



The second reason I wrote the book is to present the Orthodox faith to Chinese people through the eyes of their own ancient sage, Lao Tzu. The book is now being translated into Chinese, and parts of this translation have recently been posted on the internet. It is on the website logostao.cn. I chose to use the Tao Te Ching as a springboard to Orthodox Christianity because, in my opinion, it resonates with Christian revelation more fully than do other works of ancient Eastern philosophy and religion.



As I will attempt to show in this talk, Lao Tzu's understanding of the Tao is a foreshadowing of what would later be revealed of God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Incidentally, in this talk, I will not be treating the religious Taoism which developed several centuries after Lao Tzu in China. I will be limiting my discourse to what is commonly known as philosophical Taoism, and specifically, to the philosophy of Lao Tzu.



In choosing the Tao Te Ching as my bridge between Eastern philosophy and Orthodox Christianity, I was inspired not only by my own admiration and an appreciation for this intriguing work of ancient Chinese philosophy, but also, as was mentioned, by the life and work of my late spiritual father, Father Seraphim Rose. Father Seraphim was the person most instrumental in my own conversion to Orthodox Christianity 28 years ago, and was the co-founder of the St. Herman monastery, where I live.



As was mentioned, Father Seraphim was, himself, a convert to the Orthodox faith. Before his conversion, he was a fervent seeker of truth. His search for truth led him to ancient Chinese philosophy, where he found great profundity and, as he later said, "A noble idea of man." The Chinese classic he was drawn to most was the Tao Te Ching. He became a scholar of Chinese philosophy and mastered the ancient form of the Chinese language, with the primary aim of reading the Tao Te Ching in the original language.



He was fortunate to be guided in his studies by a traditional Chinese philosopher by the name of Ji Ming Shen. Before coming to the West, Ji Ming had studied under sages in China, as well as under some of the greatest Chinese thinkers of the 20th century.



A humble and virtuous man, Ji Ming was regarded by Father Seraphim as having a better understanding of Chinese philosophy, probably, than anyone else outside of China. Father Seraphim helped Ji Ming to translate the Tao Te Ching into English and Ji Ming opened to him the deeper meaning of its contents. Later, Ji Ming disappeared mysteriously, to the great sadness of Father Seraphim, who to the end of his days remembered him with the deepest admiration and gratitude.



Father Seraphim went on to become an Orthodox Christian monk and writer, and as many of you know, he is today one of the best-loved spiritual writers in the Orthodox countries of Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Georgia. In this talk, in addition to referring to Orthodox Christian sources, I will be drawing on Ji Ming Shen's analysis of the Tao Te Ching, which is to be found both in Ji Ming's articles, and in the notes that Father Seraphim took during his classes, which we have preserved in the monastery. Also, at times, I will be referring to Ji Ming's English translation of the Tao Te Ching.



In Ji Ming's transmission of the ancient Chinese tradition, one is struck by how closely this tradition resembles the ancient Greek tradition. In fact, Ji Ming taught that the early Chinese and Greek philosophers were basically alike in their view of the universe. "In the history of ancient China," Father Seraphim once said, "there are moments when it is absolutely incredible how the same things happened in Chinese life as happened in the West, even though there was no outward connection between the two civilizations. The first of the Greek philosophers, Thales, lived about the 6th century B.C., just about the time Confucius was in China and the Buddha was in India. It is as though there really was a spirit of the times."



One of the first Greek philosophers was Heraclitus. Heraclitus was born in the middle of the 6th century B.C. For the riddling character of his writings, he was surnamed The Obscure, even in antiquity. He based his philosophy on the logos, a Greek word which, itself, means "word," but which suggests measured, proportion, and pattern. According to one textbook of Greek philosophy, the logos of Heraclitus is the first principle of knowledge. Understanding of the world involves understanding

of the structure or pattern of the world, a pattern concealed from the eyes of ordinary men.



The logos is also the first principle of existence, the unity of the world. This unity lies beneath the surface, for it is a unity of diverse and conflicting opposites, in whose strife the logos maintains a continual balance. The logos maintains the equilibrium of the universe at every moment.



But at the same time that Heraclitus lived in Greece, there lived in China the philosopher, Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu wrote of the same universal pattern or ordering principle that Heraclitus styled, the logos. “I do not know its name,” Lao Tzu wrote, “but characterize it as the Way, or the Tao,” the Tao being a symbol basic to Chinese thought as the logos was to ancient Greek thought.



For Lao Tzu, the way was precisely what its adopted name signified, in the ultimate sense of the word: The way, path, or pattern of heaven, the course that all things follow. The way is the uncreated cause of all things. It is the Way that creates, and it is the Way that nourishes, develops, cares for, shelters, comforts and protects the creation. These are Lao Tzu’s own words: “Balancing the strife of opposites, by itself not contending.”



As Ji Ming Shen taught Father Seraphim, this Tao of Lao Tzu is to be identified with the Logos of Heraclitus, and the other ancient Greek philosophers. Of the writings of Heraclitus, only a handful of fragments have come down to us, but from Lao Tzu we have a full 81 chapters of the



. Of all the ancient philosophers, one may say that Lao Tzu came the closest to finding the essence of reality and describing the Tao, or Logos. His Tao Te Ching represents the height of what a human being can know through intuition, through glimpsing the universal principle and pattern of creation.



Six centuries after Heraclitus and Lao Tzu, there lived on the Greek Island of Patmos, the holy apostle and evangelist, John the Theologian. While exiled in a cave on the island, John dictated to his disciple, Prochorus, what he had received from direct revelation from God, and thus spoke to the world words that it never thought to hear:



In the beginning was the Logos, the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.



This was that very Logos of which Heraclitus had said that the people always proved to be uncomprehending. This was the very Tao that Lao Tzu had said no one in the world was able to understand. It is not without reason that sensitive Chinese translators of St. John's gospel, knowing that Tao meant to the Chinese what Logos meant to the Greeks, have rendered the first sentence of the gospel to read, "In the beginning was the Tao, and the Tao was with God, and the Tao was God." And later, "And the Tao became flesh and dwelt among us."



When the apostle, John, wrote his gospel, he was no doubt aware of the common philosophical symbol in the Greek language of the Logos, but as can be clearly seen by comparison of that gospel with the riddles of Heraclitus, or the writings of other philosophers, when St. John spoke from revelation, he was not merely borrowing an old term, rather he was transforming it—bringing it into the light of the fullness of divine knowledge. When he spoke of the Logos, it was now no longer in riddles, as from one who had only glimpsed its traces in nature, for now the Logos, creator, sustainer, pattern, and ordering principle of nature, was made flesh and dwelt among us, for the only time in history.



And John, His disciple, had seen Him. He had beheld His glory, and heard the words which proceeded from His mouth, being offered the ultimate closeness to Him who had only been dimly seen before. He had even lain on His breast, and in the greatest of mysteries, had received Him into himself at the last supper. Thus, while Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching represents the highest that a person can know through intuition, St. John's gospel represents the highest that a person can know through revelation, that is, through making God, Himself, known and experienced in

the most tangible way possible.



Now let us look in more detail at the connection between the intuitive awareness of Lao Tzu and the revelation of Christ. I will attempt to do this chronologically. I will begin by discussing what the Tao Te Ching calls the primitive origin of man, and then I will speak about the philosophy of Lao Tzu, and then about Christ's revelation, and finally about the life of man in union with Christ, the incarnate Tao.



We will begin at the beginning. The holy fathers of the Orthodox Church say that man was created in a state of pristine simplicity—pure awareness. In the beginning, his thoughts and memories were not diversified and fragmented as they are today, but were simple and one-pointed. He knew no mental distraction. While being wiser than any human being today, he was in a state of innocence, like a child, and in this state he lived in deep personal communion with God, and in harmony with the rest of creation.



Being in such close communion with God, primordial man participated directly in God's grace, which he experienced as a divine and ineffable light dwelling within his very being. Here I am referring to the Orthodox Christian understanding of Grace, as the uncreated energy or power of God, in which God, Himself, is fully present. The holy fathers of the Church say that we can never know God's essence, but we can know and experience God through His uncreated energy. Through God's uncreated energy, or grace, we can participate in the divine life of God, Himself.



So in the beginning man had this grace dwelling with him, united with his soul. He was created in grace, and he possessed it as his own personal strength or power, but through the wrong use of his free will, he fell from the state of grace. Before, he had had communion with God. He had acted in accordance with the Way, the Tao, in accordance with the divine Logos. His fall was a departure from the Way, and this departure resulted in a corruption of his nature. Now grace was foreign to his nature, and he no longer had it living within him. He became spiritually dead, and this spiritual death made him subject to physical death.



With man's departure from the Way, he lost the primal

simplicity and became fragmented. His awareness was no longer single and one-pointed. As St. Macarius the Great wrote in the 4th century, “After his transgression, man’s thoughts became base and material, and the simplicity and goodness of his mind were intertwined with evil, worldly concerns.”



Also with his departure from the Way, man fell under the illusion of his self-sufficiency. Before, when he had lived in communion with God, he did not regard himself as self-sufficient. Living in harmony with the Way, he had acted spontaneously, without striving and without self-interest. When he stepped away from God, he fell to the lie that he could exist of himself. This is a lie, because without God willing him into existence, he would be nothing at all. Now man acted with calculation, no longer spontaneously, striving for the sake of personal gain, and pitting himself against others.



Man had been made to desire and to seek God, to rise ever higher toward God in the communion of love. But when he departed from the Way, he fell to love of himself, and to desire for created things. Since the desire for created things is against man’s original nature, it leads to suffering. It can never bring true, complete, and lasting happiness.



Having laid the foundation by looking at the state of man before and after the fall, that is, his departure from the Way, let us turn to Lao Tzu, the ancient sage who taught the return to the Way. As I have mentioned, according to Chinese tradition, Lao Tzu lived in the 6th century B.C., about the time of Confucius. Both Lao Tzu and Confucius harkened back to a time when people were closer to heaven and to nature. For like most ancient cultures, the Chinese had preserved a memory of a time in dim antiquity, a golden age, when man had been in a pure state. Lao Tzu wrote, “Immeasurable, indeed, were the ancients. Subtle, mysterious, fathomless, impenetrating.”



While Confucius poured over the classics in order to return to the time when man was closer to heaven, Lao Tzu took a very different route. In order to return to the state when man was nearer heaven, he took the path of direct intuition. Lao Tzu sought to return not merely to the primal period of Chinese history, for that was comparatively late in the history of mankind, dating, as we know, from the Bible to the time after

the global flood. Ultimately, he was harkening back to the state in which man was first created, before he first departed from the Way. “The primitive origin,” he wrote, “here, indeed, is the clue to the Way.”



According to Ji Ming Shen’s interpretation, this primitive origin was the primitive origin of man. Lao Tzu knew that in his primitive origin, man was in a state of pure, one-pointed consciousness of direct apprehension of reality. He called this the pristine simplicity, the uncarved block, the return to the babe. There are indications in the Tao Te Ching as to how Lao Tzu endeavored to return to this state. In one place, for example, he says to block the passages, shut the doors, that is, the passages and doors of the senses, and to attain utmost emptiness, observe true quiet, meaning to allow one’s spiritual awareness, or higher mind, to rise about the multiple deliberations, images and concepts in one’s head.



Lao Tzu, in rising above compulsive thinking and desire for created things, was able to glimpse the common nature of all humanity. No longer did he feel the need to assert his individuality, or to strive against others for rights and privileges. Thus, while keeping an awareness of himself as an immortal spirit, he sought to be selfless. This can be seen from several passages of the Tao Te Ching. Lao Tzu wrote, “The sage has no fixed will. He regards the peoples’ will as his own. He who takes upon himself the humiliation, or the dirt, of the people, is fit to be the master of the people. The man of the highest virtue is like water, which dwells in lowly places. In his dwelling he is like the earth, below everyone. In giving, he is human-hearted. His heart is immeasurable.”



From what we read in the Tao Te Ching it is clear that Lao Tzu was, to some extent, able to return to the state of the uncarved block in which man had lived before his departure from the Tao. Through the cultivation of objective awareness, Lao Tzu attained to intuitive perception somewhat like that of primordial man. “Use your light,” he said, “to return to the light of insight”—that is, using the natural light of the human spirit, or the human mind, that is, the highest faculty of the soul, in Greek, the nous—return to unified consciousness, or direct apprehension of reality.



By realizing the human nature common to all, Lao Tzu rose to intuitive knowledge of the divine. Having intuited the presence of the original ordering principle behind all creation, he also realized the inner principles of created things, the ideas of things which must exist prior to the things themselves. “He who apprehends the mother,” he wrote, “thereby knows the sons.”



Ji Ming Shen explains further. He writes, “Order is natural, and necessarily requires a directing principle, for it is unimaginable that order is produced by the ordered individuals themselves. If there were no directing principle, how could there be proportion, symmetry, and the adaptation of one thing to another? There must, therefore, be an organizing power which orders, as for example, in the seasons. The principle of seasons, from which the seasons proceed in an orderly and never-failing fashion, must exist before the seasons, themselves. The ultimate principle is, therefore, of prime importance,” and it is this that Lao Tzu calls the Tao.



According to Chinese Taoist philosophy, “The Tao, or the One, is prior to all things, and from the Tao, or One, all things derive their order. We may say, therefore, that the Tao, or the One, produces all things.” That is the end of a quote from Ji Ming Shen.



The realization of this creator principle was, of course, not new with Lao Tzu. Chinese sages before him, as well as the philosophers of Greece and other cultures, had spoken of the same first cause. None of these philosophers, however, had actually described it in human terms, as well as did Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching. The greatest achievement of this man who so valued non-achievement, was that he came closer than any sage before him, to defining the indefinable Tao, without the aid of special revelation.



Lao Tzu did not know, nor could he have attained purely through intuition, the state of intimate personal union with the Tao that primordial man had enjoyed when he had been filled with the uncreated energy or grace. However, Lao Tzu did partake of and experience this energy or grace acting on him from the outside. I believe that what he called “Te”, in those places where he employed it to speak of the uncreated power of the Tao, corresponds to the English word grace. By the way, the

title of the Tao Te Ching includes the first two words, Tao, Te, and then the last word is Ching, which means book. So the title of the book means, the book of the Tao and the Te.



So as I said, the word Te, I believe, in many places in the Tao Te Ching, where it speaks of the power of the Tao, corresponds with the English word, grace. Lao Tzu wrote, “All things arise from Tao, they are nourished by Te, thus the ten thousand things all respect Tao and honor Te. Respect of Tao and honor of Te are not demanded, but they are in the nature of things. Deep and far-reaching is mysterious Te. It leads all things to return, until they come back to the great harmony.” “Te,” says Ji Ming Shen, “is the realizing principle, and principle of manifestation of the Tao. The essence of the Tao cannot be directly known by man, but the Tao can be experienced through the manifestation of its power, or Te.”



Ji Ming’s teaching concerning Te is in keeping with that of other Chinese commentators on the Tao Te Ching. The 13th century writer, Wu Cheng, commenting on chapter 51 of the Tao Te Ching, asserts that Te is divine and uncreated, as is the Tao, itself. The Tao and Te are mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. He wrote, “But only the Tao is mentioned later. This is because Te is also the Tao.”



Classical scholar, Yen Ling Fung writes, “Te is the manifestation of the Way. The Tao is what Te contains.” In the Orthodox Christian tradition, we say the same thing about the grace or uncreated energy of God. “Uncreated energy,” writes the Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lasky, “is the manifestation of the essence of God, in which everything that exists partakes, thus making God known. This energy is inseparable from God’s essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates and gives Himself. As for the manifestation, itself, it is eternal, for it is the glory of God.”



So both the essence and the energy of God are God. There is no separation in God, it is just, as Vladimir Lasky says elsewhere in his book, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, “The energy of God is the mode of existence of God, in which he communicates Himself.” Again, this is the same as the Chinese conception of Te.



As St. Seraphim of Sarov affirms, “God’s seekers who lived before Christ knew what is meant to cultivate grace or divine energy in themselves. “They had,” he says, “a clear and rational comprehension of how our Lord, God, the Holy Spirit, acts in man, and by means of what inner and outer feelings one can be sure that this is really the action of the Lord, God, the Holy Spirit, and not a delusion of the enemy.” Here he is speaking about people before the coming of Christ, and we see this is in Lao Tzu.



This understanding of the cultivation of grace is found in several places of the Tao Te Ching. Here, according to the Tao Te Ching, we have translated Te as grace. Lao Tzu wrote, “Cultivate grace in your own person, and grace becomes real. He who follows the Way is at one with the Way. He who cultivates grace is at one with grace. When you become the valley of the world, eternal grace will never depart. Such is the return to the babe.”



Many times in the Tao Te Ching Lao Tzu speaks of nothingness, or emptiness, in Chinese, wu, in connection with the Tao. Modern Western interpreters, and some Chinese, as well, have made the mistake of thereby assuming that the Tao is to be equated with nothingness, or non-being. As Ji Ming Shen makes clear, however, this interpretation is far from the real meaning of nothingness in Lao Tzu. For although the Tao is infinite and indefinable, it remains in the realm of existence with particular things. We may say the Tao, of the metaphysical One, is the infinite and all-embracing principle. However, despite the fact that we cannot give it a definite, particular name, the all-embracing principle does exist, and therefore, is not the meaning of nothingness.



Ji Ming Shen observes that while nothingness is not the Tao, it is in the nature or essence of the Tao. He writes, “The nature of being is said to be nothingness because being is absolutely complete, in need of nothing, conscious of no wants.” This is why the principle of nothingness in the philosophy of Lao Tzu is nameless. “The real meaning of nothingness, or non-being,” Ji Ming Shen says, “is based on spontaneity. Spontaneity is the nature of being. The full development of spontaneity results in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness results in a feeling of nothingness.”



In other words, because the Tao is self-existent, self-sufficient, and conscious of no wants, it can create, give and sustain life, and at the same time, seek nothing of its own. As Ji Ming Shen says, the Tao forgets itself and its own existence, being totally spontaneous and selfless. In chapter 34 of the Tao Te Ching we read, “The great Tao follows everywhere. All things depend on it for life. None is refused. When its work is accomplished, it does not take possession. It clothes and feeds all things, yet does not claim them as its own. Ever without desire, it may be named small. Yet when all things return to it, even though it claims no leadership, it may be named great.” Lao Tzu saw the selflessness, self-forgetfulness and spontaneity of primordial man as an image and a reflection of the creator Tao, itself. In this sense, as in others, man had been made in the image of God.



Lao Tzu, then, had arrived at a profound affirmation concerning absolute being. It is selflessness. From this realization alone, however, he could not fully realize another primary fact about the Tao—the fact that the Tao is a person. As stated earlier, Lao Tzu did not experience the personal union with the Tao that man had known before the primordial departure from the Way. However, he did approach the realization of the ultimate divine personhood of the Tao, for as he observed the Tao at work in nature, he saw actions that were benevolent, like those of a person. He wrote, “All things arise from Tao, by the power of Tao, that is, Te. They are nourished, developed, cared for, sheltered, comforted, grown and protected.”



Elsewhere, Lao Tzu wrote of the Tao's benevolence. “The Tao of heaven is to benefit, not to harm. He also said that the Tao, while not being a respecter of persons, that is, paying no attention to distinctions of race, class, creed, wealth, etc., aligns itself to those who are good. The Tao of heaven makes no distinctions of persons. It always helps the virtuous.”



Lao Tzu had gone far on the path of return to the Way, the path to the state of man before the departure from the Way, but much more was needed to return man to what he had lost, and beyond this, to take man to where he had originally been meant to go. What was needed could not be accomplished by a mere man. It had to be accomplished by the creator, Himself. The Tao of the ancient Chinese, the Logos of the ancient Greeks, had to accomplish it, and He would do this by coming to earth as man.



And so He appeared, He to whom the world owed its creation. The Tao, or Logos, now, in a way, surpassing nature, took flesh in Jesus Christ. Christ even referred to himself as the Way, or the Tao. “I am the Way,” he said, “and the Truth and the Life.” Christ’s coming announces the beginning of a fresh period in the history of mankind. With the coming of Christ, all was changed.



The new revelation affected the destiny of the whole cosmos. In taking flesh, Christ, the incarnate Tao, united human energy with divine energy in one person. Divine energy did not act upon him as it had upon Lao Tzu. Rather, this was Christ’s own energy, the uncreated power, Te, of the Tao. It was by this Te, the same that Lao Tzu had said nourished all creation, that Christ performed His miracles. The gospels record that the whole multitude sought to touch him for power—in Greek, dynamis, which, as I said, corresponds with the Chinese Te—for power went out of Him and healed them all. When a woman touched Him and was instantly healed, Christ, Himself, said, “Somebody has touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out of me.”



The people around Christ could not see this energy. On the mountain of Tabor, however, Christ opened the spiritual eyes of his apostles to let them see it, and they beheld it as light. As the scriptures say, “And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light.”



When the Tao became flesh in Christ, He embodied in His divine/human person, what Lao Tzu had said of the Tao. He came in selflessness, in humility. “The Tao,” wrote Lao Tzu, “is like water, which greatly benefits all things, but does not compete with them, dwelling in lowly places that all disdain.” Likewise, when Christ came, He came in utter meekness and poverty, with nowhere to lay His head. He had no authority, neither in the state, nor even in the temple, founded on revelation from on high. He did not fight those who spurned him. He made himself of no reputation, as the scripture says, and took upon himself the form of a servant, submitting finally to scourging and execution. As the creator and true master of all that exists, He had no need of force, no need to display the power to punish opposition.



Christ said of Himself, “The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them, but I am among you as He who serves.” Likewise, Lao Tzu had written of the Tao before His coming in the flesh, “The great Tao clothes and feeds all things, yet does not claim them as its own. All things return to it, yet it claims no leadership over them.” Christ said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Likewise, Lao Tzu had said of the Tao, “The Tao does not show greatness and it is therefore truly great. It does not contend, and yet it overcomes.” “For the Son of Man,” said Christ of Himself, “is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”



Unlike the ancient Hebrews, Lao Tzu did not live in expectation of a Messiah, a savior, and yet, as Father Seraphim Rose believed, Lao Tzu would have followed Christ if he had seen Him, for he would have recognized in Him the humble, selfless Tao, which he had intuited in purity of mind.



Having taken human form, the Tao, or Logos, made the personhood of God far more tangible than it had ever been known before. In so doing, he had also brought the meaning of human personhood into sharper focus than had previously been known. He gave a personal dimension to Lao Tzu’s nothingness. In the scriptures, this personal dimension of self-emptying is called perfect love, love for everyone equally.



Lao Tzu understood that a person who asserts himself as an individual, far from becoming a full person, becomes impoverished. It is only in renouncing his possessiveness, giving himself freely and ceasing to exist for himself, that is, being reduced to nothingness, that the person finds full expression in the one human nature common to all. In giving up his own advantage, he expands infinitely. Of such a person, Lao Tzu said, as I quoted earlier, “His heart is immeasurable.”



The touchstone of this perfect love is love for one’s enemies. When the Tao became flesh, He brought out the full meaning of Lao Tzu’s precept, “Requite injury with kindness.” Christ said the same thing that Lao Tzu had said, but he spoke in terms of love. “Love your enemies,” Christ said, “do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”



During His life on earth, Christ's selflessness, or nothingness, was seen, first of all, in His total self-renunciation before His heavenly father. He renounced His will in order to accomplish the will of the Father, by being obedient to Him. Speaking of Christ's obedience to the Father, we must be careful to not view it in only human terms. For as we know from revelation, the Logos, who incarnated in Christ, is the only begotten Son of God, of one essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit.



As Winnie Merloski writes, "For Christ, the renunciation of His own will was not a choice or an act, but is, so to speak, the very being of the persons of the Trinity, who have only one will proper to their common nature. Also, Christ's human will was in perfect harmony with His divine will, since the two wills were united inseparably in one person. Therefore, to employ the term Ji Ming Shen used to describe the Tao, we might say that Christ's renunciation of His will was spontaneous. "Self-emptying," says Winnie Merloski, "is the very mode of existence of the divine person who was sent into the world, the person in whom was accomplished the common will of the Trinity, whose source is the Father. Christ saying, 'My Father is greater than I,' expresses this renunciation of His own will. The outpouring, self-emptying of Himself, only produces the greater manifestation of the deity of the Son to all who are able to recognize greatness in abasement, wealth in being robbed, liberty in obedience."



The very fact that Christ was sent into the world by the Father, shows His obedience to Him. When He emptied Himself into His own creation by taking on human flesh subject to death, and doing His father's will throughout His earthly life, He endured mockery, opposition and persecution at every turn. This culminated in the ultimate self-emptying of undergoing the most humiliating and painful death known at the time—being scourged, stripped naked, and crucified in public view.



The Apostle Paul sums up the whole act of Christ's self-emptying. "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."



If Lao Tzu had known that the Tao, which he said dwells in

lowly places that all disdain, would one day take the form of a man, he could have conceived of no greater self-emptying, no greater lowliness, no greater nothingness, than the incarnate Tao being nailed to a cross and dying in a body that would rise again.



Father Seraphim Rose once wrote that nothingness, in the meaning that Lao-Tzu gives it, is the point of convergence, or axis, of the universe. This recalls Lao Tzu's words in the Tao Te Ching, "Thirty spokes join in a single hub. It is the center hole that is the space where there is nothing, that makes the wheel useful." If nothingness, or self-emptying, is the axis of the universe, then the cross of Christ, the greatest sign of man of the self-emptying of God, now becomes that axis. Christ stands at the axis, and there in the space where there is nothing, we find not an impersonal void, but the personal heart of the selfless, self-forgetting God.



Now, having looked at what Christ revealed of the Tao, let us look more closely at what He has made possible for those who follow Him. Christ was the fulfillment of what Lao-Tzu had been pointing to. Through Christ's coming, man not only achieves the one-pointed awareness and the cultivation of Te that Lao Tzu valued so much, but now in a way unknown before, man's immortal spirit can become wholly filled with grace, or Te. To such an extent that man becomes deified by participation in the uncreated energy of God. With Christ, man not only returns to the primordial state which Lao Tzu sought, now he rises beyond even this, in the mystical union with a personal God, that was originally intended for man. Finally, through Christ, the way to heaven becomes open to man, and man experiences what Lao Tzu called the Tao of heaven, in all the fullness of His being.



By coming in the flesh and dying on the cross, the Tao of heaven took on Himself the sentence of physical death that man had brought upon himself with the fall, at his departure from the Way. And yet, the Tao, having never in the slightest departed from the Way, for how could the Way depart from Himself, was wholly undeserving of the sentence. And being the author of life, he could not be held by death. Thus, in dying as a man, and the rising from the dead, the incarnate Tao abolished the sentence of a spiritual and bodily death that had lain on human nature, offering man freedom from all the consequences of his

primordial departure from the Way.



Through Christ, our union with the Tao, or Logos, can begin in this life, only to continue forever in the life to come. During his time on earth, Christ spoke of special means by which he would affect this union—Holy Baptism, which Christ called being born of water and the Spirit, Holy Confession, which Christ spoke of when He said that His disciples would have the power to bind and loose sins, and Holy Communion, which He spoke of as eating His body and drinking His blood.



From the moment one enters into these Holy Mysteries, into the sacramental life of the church, divine energy or grace no longer acts on one from the outside in, as it did upon Lao Tzu and other righteous people before the coming of Christ. Now it works from the inside out. This was the experience of Christ's disciples, and it became the common inheritance of all followers of the incarnate Son of God.



What the early followers of Christ discovered was that the grace of the Holy Spirit was like a seed which had been implanted in their souls at baptism. Moreover, they found that they could nurture this seed through regular partaking of Holy Mysteries, repentance, self-denial, to the practice of the virtues and good deeds done in Christ's name, and through watchfulness and prayer.



Before concluding this talk on the Tao Te Ching in the light of Christian revelation, I would like to say a few words about the last of these means of nurturing, or cultivating, divine grade—watchfulness and prayer. Tomorrow, I will speak about these in more depth.



In the Tao Te Ching, as in Orthodox Christianity, the foundation of spiritual life is watchfulness, or tension over thoughts, a state of inner vigilance and sobriety. Lao Tzu well knew this virtue. Speaking of the ancients who followed the Tao, Lao Tzu called them, "Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream—alert, like men aware of danger."



When the Tao became flesh in Jesus Christ, He spoke much concerning watchfulness. To impress upon the people the need for watchfulness, He told parables about it, such as the story of

the five wise virgins who trimmed and guarded their lamps, or the tale of the unwise steward who failed to keep watch while his master was away.



Being in a state of watchfulness, Lao Tzu communed with the Tao through intuitive knowing in his higher mind, or nous. He did not speak to, or invoke the Tao, for as we have seen, the mystery of the Tao as a personal absolute, was not fully revealed to him. Now, with the coming of the Tao in the flesh, our communion with Him becomes a person-to-person connection centered in the heart. We call this prayer.



Nevertheless, even with the intimately personal communion with the Tao that has been made possible for all peoples through Christ, the basis for that communion remains the same as it was for Lao Tzu, since prayer has its foundation in watchfulness. When the Tao became man, He did not only tell us to pray, instead he said, “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation. The spirit surely is ready, but the flesh is weak.” First watch, He tells us, then pray while watching.



Prayer cannot be pure if the mind is actively engaged in following thoughts. For prayer to be pure, it must arise from a pure spirit, or nous, and this can only occur when one first stands watch, and this rises above thoughts and images. That is why Christ said, “Watch and pray.” Prayer and watchfulness are inseparably bound together. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov writes, “The essential, indispensable property of prayer is attention. Without attention, there is no prayer.”



The Tao is spirit. In Jesus Christ, that spirit enters into flesh. So, too, with the inward life of his followers, who before His coming, followers of the Tao, like Lao Tzu, cultivated open, objective awareness. After His coming, that spiritual awareness takes flesh, as it were, in the form of prayer, bringing it to a new dimension. The difference between Lao Tzu and those who followed Christ after His coming, is that the latter bring into Lao Tzu’s state of observant mind, a personal communion with the Tao, usually through direct invocation. Lao Tzu said that he did not know the name of the Tao. Now we do know it, and so we invoke it, Lord Jesus Christ, all the while remembering that in order to prayer it truly, we must pray it in the spirit, and so we must first do what Lao Tzu did—be watchful.



In conclusion, let us look at the final end of man, the way to which has been opened by Christ. This end is deification. In the Orthodox Christian tradition, deification can never be an absorption into the divine essence. Divine absorption is impersonal, while true deification is a personal communion with God, face-to-face, a communion of love. Man does not become God by nature or in essence, as Christ was and is. Rather, he becomes one with God through His energy, His grace.



The deification that Christ offers us begins in this life with our entrance into the Holy Mysteries of the Church. In the Church we are called toward an ever-closer union with God, a progress that is to continue forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. “Indeed,” said St. Simeon, the New Theologian, a saint of the 10th century, “over the ages, the progress will be endless, for an end of this growing toward the end without nothing, would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable. On the contrary, to be filled with Him, and to be glorified in His light, will cause unfathomable progress.”



In His last talk with his disciples before His crucifixion, Christ told them, “In my father’s house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also, and where I go, you know, and the way, you know.” When Christ said this, his disciple, Thomas, asked Him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?” Christ replied, “I am the way.” And thus, the Way of heaven, as he had been called by Lao Tzu, became the way to heaven.



That which the ancient Greeks called the Logos, and the ancient Chinese called the Tao, came to earth to open heaven to us. He became man so that we could forever dwell in Him, and He in us. He became man so that we could experience, throughout eternity, a full participation in Him through His uncreated energy. The final end of man is eternal union with God through Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the unoriginate Father, the Way and Word of God, who became man for our sake. Amen.



Host: Before we start the questions, I would like to encourage everybody—Father Damascene just unloaded a lot on everybody

(laughter), so I would encourage you to not allow embarrassment to impede you from asking questions. For those of you who are not Christians, Taoism as understood by Lao Tzu, is the most noble and subtle of philosophies. Father Damascene unfolded that for us. I personally know Father Damascene, I know he will be able to really break that down for you.

¶

For those of you who are not Orthodox, this is a prime time for you to ask questions, and especially in this context, because this shows our greater understanding of God's creation and the unification that Christ came to bring to all mankind.

¶

Now, for you Orthodox, don't allow you being Orthodox to keep you from asking questions, because this talk that Father Damascene just gave us, I believe, is one of the key principals to what brought so many of us to the faith, and the fact that it reveals the greater revelation of Jesus Christ and the unification and dominance in [respect to the idea?] that He brought to this planet for our salvation. So, with that, I would remind you, one question per guest, and please do not be afraid to come and ask questions.

¶

Questioner #1: The Tao Te Chingsays that the Tao is not understandable, and that anyone that understands the Tao, doesn't really understand the Tao. I wonder if you could speak to that, especially in the light of the role of natural revelation, as opposed to special revelation?

¶

Father Damascene: We also say in the Orthodox Church that the essence of God, that is, God Himself, the nature of God, is not understandable, is not knowable. So in that sense, we would agree with that statement of Lao Tzu, but we also say that we can know God through His energies, the mode of existence of God in which He communicates Himself to us, and that He communicated Himself as tangibly as possible in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

¶

So, although the essence of God is not knowable, we can become partakers of the divine nature [...] through Jesus Christ, and we can know as much about God as we can know, as much about the Tao as we can know, through the revelation of Jesus Christ. And we can, not only know, but participate, in God's life.



So the Orthodox Christian life, the life in Christ, is a life of participating in God's life, having God dwell within us, and knowing God experientially. But still, we have a distinction which the early fathers made, and even my patron saint, St. John Damascene made this distinction, and it was fleshed out more fully by St. Gregory Palamas, the distinction between God's essence and energies. St. Gregory said that we cannot know God's essence, but we can experience Him through His energies.



Questioner #2: Father Damascene, earlier you mentioned that Lao Tzu said that the Tao helps those that are virtuous. The Greeks, to my understanding, had a struggle with what virtue was. I was wondering if you could clarify his understanding of virtue.



Father Damascene: Lao Tzu's understanding of virtue was basically what he described in the Tao Te Ching. He gave very clear images of a sage—the sage was the wise person. He also gave teachings to rulers, leaders of people, how to behave. Virtuous, in Lao Tzu's understanding, would be a person who was selfless, who did not think of himself, who cared about others, who gave up his own will for the sake of those around him, who did not pit himself against others, who did not have possessiveness, ambition. "His heart is immeasurable," Lao Tzu said.



[...]



Father Damascene: By the way, in this sense, Lao Tzu's teaching was more like Christ's teaching than Confucius' teaching was, because Confucius was once asked, "If somebody does something bad to us, should we repay that with kindness?" Confucius said, "No because if you do that, then how are you going to repay the virtuous?" That's a very practical point of view, but Lao Tzu, I think, came closer to understanding the nature of the Tao, the nature of the Logos, of Christ, and because of this, he was able to come to this higher teaching, which is to basically repay evil with good. So that would be a key to your question about what Lao Tzu would regard as virtue.

Questioner #3: The term, the Tao, is referred to as "the" and it seems to me like he was trying to describe maybe a state of being or something rather than a thing, so if you could clarify

that for me—what he was trying to get to. Do you understand my question?

¶

Father Damascene: Yes, I understand. Of course, in Chinese, we do not have articles like “the” and “a,” but we do in Greek, we talk about the Logos, the Word, so Christ is called the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, so these are just words to describe the ultimate, the absolute. Perhaps there are some places when you read the Tao Te Ching that you might think he is referring to a way of being, but there are some places where he definitely talks about a kind of creator, not a creator as we know it in the Judeo-Christian revelation of creation ex nihilo.

¶

I do not know if he fully taught that doctrine, because there is one place where Lao Tzu said, “All things arise from Tao.” Not quite the same as created and creating. But as Ji Ming Shen said, we could say that the Tao produces all things. So for Lao Tzu, the Tao existed prior to all things and all things came from Him, and all things were ordered by Him, or It. Lao Tzu might say It, but we would say Him, because we have a fuller understanding of God.

¶

As I said, Lao Tzu did not fully understand God, or the Tao, as a person, but he described the Tao in ways that showed that he saw that the Tao had qualities like that of a person. The Tao was benevolent. The Tao only gave, never took. He cares for, shelters, nourishes, protects all things, but never seeks anything for Himself. So, as Ji Ming Shen said, the Tao of Lao Tzu is in the realm of being. The Tao is a being, the Tao is not just nothingness. The Tao has a quality of nothingness, the quality of nothingness, meaning spontaneity or selflessness, forgetting Himself.

Host: Last evening’s lecture introduced to us the work of Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, and a spiritual apprehension that only became clear with the revelation of Christ centuries later. In Part II today, Father Damascene will speak of the first created state of man, the fall, redemption, and the future age. Then he will speak about how Christ’s saving work is actualized in the Church through the Holy Mysteries, and through various types of prayer. After the lecture, there will be a time for questions and we will take a lunch break, and a BBQ lunch will be available, as I said earlier, so please stay with us. Now it is my honor to

introduce our guest speaker, again, Father Damascene.

Father Damascene: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Today's over-arching theme is the Orthodox Christian teaching on union with God, and so, as was said in the beginning, I will outline the Orthodox Christian world view, by which we are to understand what it means to have union with God, and how we are to have this, and the reasons, or rather the cause, the possibility that we have for union with God.

As well, I will be speaking about the state of man before the fall, the fall and its consequences, and our redemption from the consequences of the fall by Christ. Then I will be speaking about how we can actualize these possibilities that have been made real for us by Christ through His redemptive work, through our life in the Church, and I will go into most detail when talking about watchfulness and prayer as a path to union with God.

And then finally, I will talk about the state beyond the resurrection, in which all the consequences of Christ's redemptive work are realized, and man is restored to his original state, and the state that man was supposed to attain in the beginning is also brought into being through Christ.

So let's begin by looking at the spiritual state of man before the fall. In this talk, I will be going through a few of the handouts. I will be going through part I in this morning's talk, and in order to give more time for watchfulness and prayer, will go partway into part II. We will talk about cultivating the seat of divine energy, foundations of the path to union with God, introduction to prayer, and then the afternoon session, we will devote entirely to watchfulness and prayer and union with God.

First of all, we will talk about the spiritual state of man before the fall. According to the world view of the Orthodox Church, as found in the Holy Scriptures and the writings of her holy fathers, the entire visible universe was made for the sake of man, and man was made for union with God. This is really key to the whole presentation today, and I also brought this up yesterday. We have to keep in mind that this is the reason that we were created, for union with God, and everything was created for us, and we are to bring the entire creation into union with God, as well.

The holy fathers teach that "man was created in divine grace, and that the glory from above garbed Adam and Eve better than any garment." Those are the words of St. John Chrysostom. My patron saint, St. John Damascene, states that, "In paradise,

Adam had the indwelling God as a dwelling place, and wore Him as a glorious garment. He was wrapped about with His grace.”

As I mentioned last night, the Orthodox Church understands grace to be the very energy of God, distinct, yet inseparable, from the divine essence. God is wholly present in His energies. Therefore, when man was created in grace, he had God, himself, within him. He was meant to participate in God’s life through the divine energies, to be fully and perfectly penetrated by grace, and thus to attain to union with God through love, a union which the holy fathers do not hesitate to call deification, or theosis.

St. John Damascene teaches that Adam was not deified at his creation, but was created for deification. In St. John Damascene’s words he was to complete the mystery by being deified through reversion to God—this, however, not by being transformed into the divine essence, but by participation in the divine illumination. This is what I brought out last night, that we do not believe that we are absorbed into God, or that we become God by essence, but we believe that we can become one with God through His grace, or His energies.

We do not become sons of God by nature, like Christ was, but we become sons of God by adoption, by grace. According to the teaching of the Orthodox holy fathers, based on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, both man and the entire cosmos, the entire visible creation, were incorrupt, or without decay, in the beginning. It was only later, at the fall of man, that death entered the world and the creation was made subject to the “bondage of corruption,” as we read in the epistle of the holy Apostle Paul to the Romans.

It is the unquestionable testimony of the Church that Adam and Eve were created conditionally immortal. That is, if they had not sinned they could have lived forever in incorrupt bodies, partaking of the Tree of Life in Paradise, and eventually attaining to Heaven, as well. There was no necessity either in their remaining incorrupt, or in their falling into corruption. Their free will was the determining factor. Originally, the incorrupt bodies of Adam and Eve did not have, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, “the coarser flesh, mortal and resistant,” that our bodies now have.

In the words of St. Maximus the Confessor, “they did not have the temperament which makes the flesh denser, mortal and tough.” It was a different kind of body, and a different kind of flesh. From the writings of many holy fathers, we know that

before the fall, Adam and Eve were free from the bodily needs of shelter and clothing, and even of sleep. They had no sexual relations, or even sexual passions. They had no afflictions, infirmities, illness, disease, physical defects or maimings of the body. They knew no difficulty, sorrows, labors, sweat, hunger or thirst. They did not experience physical pain. They were not subject to cold or heat, or to the elements. Therefore, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, before the fall, man's existence was akin to that of the angels.

From St. John Chrysostom we learn that Adam was originally created with ineffable intelligence, which endowed him with a capability to name all the animals, and with prophetic grace which enabled him to prophecy about Eve after her creation. St. Gregory of Sinai speaks of man's memory in the state before the fall. The memory, St. Gregory says, was originally simple and one-pointed, but as a result of the fall, its natural powers have been perverted. It has lost its recollectedness in God, and has become compound instead of simple, diversified instead of one-pointed.

We are told by a more recent holy father, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, that before the fall, the human mind was not held under the sway of imagination. In the theology of the holy fathers, the imagination is seen as a faculty belonging to the irrational part of the soul, which stores up images like treasures and brings them forth interiorly, even where there is no corresponding body present. These are the words of St. John Damascene and St. Gregory Palamas.

Drawing from the common patristic teaching on the imagination, St. Nicodemus writes, "The first-formed man was created by God without imagination. His mind, pure and unified, functioned as mind, and so had, itself, acquired no impression or form under the influence of the senses, or from the images of sensory things. Making no use of this lower power of the imagination, he did not visualize the outline, color, shape or dimension of things, but with the higher power of the soul, that is, the intellect, he contemplated, immaterially, purely, and spiritually, only the bare, simple essences (or in Greek, *logoi*) of beings.

It might be surprising to hear that imagination is a lower part of the soul, or irrational part of the soul. But if you think about it, animals, which are considered by the holy fathers to be irrational creatures, have imagination. You might have seen your dog having a dream, having a nightmare. Well, he is imagining

things, he is having images in his mind. So the holy fathers say that this imagination did not influence man's mind in the beginning. He just beheld things, perceived things as they were. This was the condition of man in the beginning. By drawing ever closer to God in love, by naturally directing his desire and longing to Him, rather than unnaturally turning it aside to the things of the senses, man was to become ever more holy and spiritual, ever more in the likeness of God, ever more transformed by the grace of God.

Earlier, we quoted the words of St. John Damascene, that man was to complete the mystery by being deified. Expanding on this theme, St. Maximus states that man, by freely following God's commandment in Eden, would have become a deified Son of God, a God not by nature, but by grace. So, if man would have followed the commandment of God, stayed in the Garden of Eden, he would have eventually become deified and become spiritual, as well.

St. Symeon, the New Theologian, gives us an image of what life would have been like if the first people had fulfilled their original calling. Just think, he writes, what sort of life and way of living we might have had, if we had been preserved incorruptible and immortal in an incorrupt world, going through life manifestly without sin or sorrow, free of cares and untroubled.

Think, too, how by progress in keeping God's commandments, and the putting into practice of our good intentions, we would have led up, in due time, to a more perfect glory and transformation, drawing nearer to God and to the rays which spring from His divinity. The soul of each would have become brighter, and the perceptible and material body of each altered and changed into an immaterial and spiritual one, into something beyond sense perception.

He was saying that eventually, we, and the entire cosmos would have become spiritual, beyond sense perception, and we would have become deified if we had kept the commandment of God. Later, at the end of this seminar, we will talk about how eventually that will be brought into being in spite of man's fall, by the coming, the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This will come into being, of course, at the time of the general resurrection.

Although the first created world was made incorrupt in the beginning, as was man, it was, again, like man, not created in its final and perfected state. Since the visible creation was made for

man, according to God's ordering of His creation, it was through man that the creation was to reach its final condition, possessing both body and soul, man was the link between the originally incorrupt material world, and the noetic, or spiritual world, of the angels. As he became spiritualized and divinized, by drawing closer to God in love, man was to lead all of creation into such a spiritualized, divinized state, as well.

Such was man's lofty original calling, but as we know and experience every day, the first man fell from this state and brought himself, and all of creation, into a state of corruption and death, again, what St. Paul calls the bondage to corruption in the 8th chapter of Romans. In partaking of the fruit that God had forbidden him to eat, man acted in a way contrary to his own nature, which had been created very good by God, as we read in the book of Genesis. With the entrance of sin through the free decision of Adam and Eve, human nature became corrupted.

St Cyril of Alexander writes of this in the 4th century, as follows: "Our forefather, Adam, by neglecting the commandment given him, struck out against God, for he slipped down into corruption. Then was sin also driven into the nature of man.

Thus many were made sinners, according to St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans. "Thence forward, pleasures and filthiness invaded the nature of the flesh, and there arose then, the savage law in our members. Our nature thus became diseased by sin through the disobedience of one, that is, of Adam. Hence, all were made sinners, not as co-transgressors with Adam, for they did not yet exist then, but because they were of his nature, which had fallen under the law of sin. In Adam, human nature became sick with corruption through disobedience, and therefore the passions entered in."

Here, we might make a distinction between the Orthodox theology and the theology which developed in the West, where there was an idea that was put forth that we share the guilt of Adam's sin, but as we read here in this teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria, we do not believe that we share in the guilt of his sin. We are not co-transgressors with Adam, because we did not exist then. Adam and Eve bear the guilt of their own sin. We do not bear that guilt. However, because we are of one nature with Adam and Eve, we all come from them, we bear the consequences of their sin, and our nature became corrupted.

These consequences I will talk about now. At the fall, Adam and Eve acquired a tendency, or inclination, toward sin, and all their

descendants, that is, all of us, inherited that inclination. In man's now corrupted state, his mind, while still possessed of the faculty of reason, fell under the sway of the imagination, which, as we have seen, is a lower, irrational power of the soul.

St. Nicodemus of Mount Athos writes about this. "Just as the man-slaying devil fell through the imagination, that is, imagining himself to be God, so he caused Adam also to form in his mind that he was equal to God, and to fall through this same imagination. And thus, from that noetic, angel-like, unified, rational, and formless life of the mind, the wretched man, that is, Adam, was cast down to this sensory, many-sided and multiform imagination, and to the state of irrational animals. For imagination is a trait proper to a irrational animals, and not to rational beings. After man, through one act, fell to such a state, who can tell to what passions, what evils, and what delusions he was cast down by means of the imagination?"

The reason I am going into so much detail about the imagination, here, is because it relates very closely to what we will be talking about later, on the subject of watchfulness.

"Because of the corruption of his nature at the fall, man lost the grace in which he had been created. He became separated from God. Grace was not foreign to his nature, and so it did not dwell within him as it had before."

St. John Damascene, who, as we have seen, said that man was wrapped about with God's grace at his creation, says later in the same work, that man was stripped of grace at the fall. This stripping of grace constituted a kind of spiritual death in the first created man. In the book of Genesis, God told Adam, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

In fact, Adam did not die physically on the day he ate from the tree. According to the patristic teaching, however, God's words were true. Adam did die on the day he ate of the fruit. He experienced spiritual death, the death of his soul. As St. Gregory Palamas writes, "It was, indeed, Adam's soul that died by becoming, through his transgression, separated from God, for bodily, he continued to live after that time, even for 930 years."

Elsewhere, St. Gregory Palamas speaks further on what is meant by the death of the soul. "The death of the soul is when God leaves the soul and is separated from it, although in another way, the soul remains immortal. Once separated from God, it becomes more ugly and useless than a dead body, but unlike such a body, it does not disintegrate after death." That is, the

soul lives on, but it is not true life because the soul is separated from God.

Here it should be noted that the death of the soul that man suffered at the fall did not destroy the image of God in him. St. Gregory Palamas says that the human soul possesses the image of God inalienably, even if it does not recognize its own dignity or think and live in a manner worthy of the creator's image within it.

As Vladimir Lossky says, in the book I showed you last night, the image of God in us is indestructible. Even the worst sinner, the worst criminal, still bears the image of God. So also, we do not believe in the idea that developed in Western theology, of complete depravity. We believe that our nature is corrupted, but still we have the image of God preserved in us. We still have an innate goodness in our being and in our soul.

At the fall, man's spiritual death, which is the separation of the soul from God, made him, in turn, subject to physical death, which is the separation of the soul from the body. St. Gregory Palamas writes of this as follows: The death, however, that befell the soul because of the transgression, not only crippled the soul and made man accursed, it also rendered the body, itself, subject to fatigue, suffering, and corruptibility, and finally, handed it over to death.

As indicated in the passage of St. Gregory Palamas, physical pain and fatigue were introduced into human experience, together with bodily death. We find this expressed in the Genesis account in a sentence that God pronounces on Adam and Eve after their fall. Addressing Eve, God says, "I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy groaning. In pain thou shalt bring forth children." And to Adam he says, "Cursed is the earth in thy labors. In toil shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the earth out of which thou wast taken, for earth thou art, and unto earth shalt thou return."

Also, in being given over to pain and death, fallen man has also been given over to physical corruption or decay after death. St. Maximus the Confessor says, "God, at the very moment that man fell, gave the body the capacity to suffer, undergo corruption, and to be wholly dissolved."

When man fell from his original state of incorruption, his body became more grossly material. In the words of St. John Damascene, after the primordial fall, man was clothed in the roughness of this wretched life, and put on death, that is to say,

the mortality and the grossness of the flesh. He was excluded from Paradise by the just judgment of God, and was condemned to death and made subject to corruption or decay. In such a condition of bearing grosser or denser flesh, man became subject not only to pain, death and corruption, but also to the bodily needs that we know today. St. John Chrysostom goes so far as to say that God refashioned man's body at the fall to accord with his new condition and needs.

In addition to changing man's spiritual and physical condition and handing him over to physical death and decay, man's fall into corruption also determined the state of his soul after death, making it unable to partake of eternal union with God. Adam had been barred from Paradise during his earthly life, and he remained barred from both Paradise and heaven after death. After physical death the souls of Adam, Eve, and all their posterity went down into Hades where they continued to exist in a state of spiritual death.

Now, let's look at the question of why God allowed the entrance of death and suffering into the world. Although the holy fathers declare, along with St. Paul, that death is an enemy which is to be destroyed, as we read in I Corinthians, they also affirm that the introduction of death was allowed providentially by God. Death, as we have said, was not part of God's original ordering of His creation. However, after the fall, God used it for the benefit of man.

St. Irenaeus, a holy father of the 2nd century A.D., sees God's love toward mankind in the fact that he allowed death to enter the world. St. Irenaeus writes, "God also drove Adam out of Paradise and placed him far from the Tree of Life, not because he envied him the Tree of Life, as some dare to claim, but because He pitied him, and did not desire that he should persevere forever as a sinner, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil unending and incurable, but He set a bounds to man's sin by interposing death, thus causing sin to cease. So death puts an end to sin, so evil is not immortal. St. Gregory the Theologian says the same, "Hereto he, Adam, makes a gain, namely death, and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy I am persuaded that God inflicts punishment. So God does not inflict punishment for the sake of inflicting punishment, He does it out of mercy, for good.

Just as God used death for the benefit of man in his fallen state, so also did He use the other physical consequences of the fall:

suffering, bodily needs, labor, disease, etc. Like death, itself, these other consequences serve to humble man and bring him to repentance. At the fall, man succumbed to the temptation of pride expressed in the serpent's words, "Ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil."

All the physical consequences of the fall serve to remind man that he is not God, but a created being who is dependent upon God. Adam and Eve, indeed, succumbed to pride in partaking of the forbidden fruit, but that was not the only source of their fall. As will be recalled, in the first sin they also turned their desire away from God and toward created things, seeking pleasure in them as an end in itself.

This, too, is expressed in the Genesis narrative. "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree beautiful to contemplate." That is, the forbidden fruit. Thus, the temptation that brought about man's fall was two-fold. In the words of St. Mark, the Ascetic, in the Philokalia, all vice in the world is caused by self-esteem or pride, and sensual pleasure. Because of this, God employed the physical consequences of the fall as a two-fold remedy, not only to quell a man's pride, but also to dampen his desire for created things, and his pursuit of sensual pleasure for its own sake.

Physical death, then, puts an end to physical pain and labors. Here again, we see God's mercy, for in allowing the entrance of physical death so as to prevent sin from being immortal, God also prevented bodily pain and labor from necessarily lasting forever. Furthermore, in His foreknowledge of man's eventual salvation through Christ, God allowed man's body to die so that it could be refashioned at the general resurrection.

As St. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "By divine providence death was introduced as a dispensation into the nature of man so that sin, having flowed away at the breaking of the union of soul and body, man, through the resurrection, might be refashioned sound, passionless, stainless, and removed from any touch of evil.

Man's death opened the way to his refashioning into a better state. The actual refashioning of man, however, would occur not through the death of sinful men, but through the death and resurrection of the sinless God-man, Jesus Christ. Death, the ultimate physical consequence of man's fall, would thus become a means by which God would redeem mankind from all the effects of the fall, spiritually and bodily.

As we read in the Holy Scripture, St. Paul writes in Hebrews,

“Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” By means of death the redemption is accomplished.

Now, let’s look more at the Orthodox doctrine of our redemption and deification. How are we to understand this mystery of man’s redemption through Christ’s death and resurrection? To begin our examination of this question, let’s turn again to the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas on man’s fall. As you will recall, St. Gregory taught that through Adam’s one spiritual death, both spiritual and physical death were passed on to all men.

The same saint, however, affirmed that it is by means of death, Christ’s death, that the power of death is destroyed. He explains that as spiritual and physical death entered the world through Adam’s one spiritual death, so both kinds of death are overcome through Christ’s one physical death and His subsequent resurrection.

That is, Christ did not die spiritually on the cross, as some more modern Western theologians say, because he is God and His divine nature is inseparable from His human nature. In order to die spiritually, His divine nature would have to be somehow ripped away for a time from His human nature, which was impossible. So Christ did not die spiritually, He could not die spiritually, but by the providence of God, He died physically. So, through His one physical death He overcame the consequences of the fall, which is both spiritual and bodily death. Out of His infinite love for us, Christ died on our behalf so that we could be given eternal life, both of soul and of body. In the words of St. Paul, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Also St. Paul says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man.”

Speaking of the awesome mystery of His redemption of the world, Christ told His apostles, “The Son of man came to give His life as a ransom for many.” The image of Christ giving up His life as a ransom was later taken up by the Apostle Paul and also by the Orthodox holy fathers.

In the following passage, St. John Damascene makes use of this image of ransom, adding to it, the image of Christ’s body as bait attached to the hook of divinity. St. John Damascene writes:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin. He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. For we had sinned against Him and it was meet, or fitting, that He should receive a ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation. God forbid that the blood of the Lord should have been offered to the tyrant, that is, the devil. Therefore death approaches, and swallowing up the body as a bait, is transfixed on the hook of divinity, and after tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, perishes and brings up, again, all whom of old it had swallowed up. For just as darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, and brings life to all, but death to the destroyer.

He gives the image of a fish, and the fish here represents death. St. Gregory Palamas uses the same image and in his account the fish represents the devil. So death, or the devil, swallows every person who had ever lived, every person who lived after Adam dies. Death swallows them up, the devil swallows them up, and brings them down into Hades. All the souls from the time of Adam and Eve until the coming of Christ were, as I said, dragged down to Hades, which was a place of separation from God. And because sin is the proper food for death, and because all are sinners, and all are separated from God, all deserve to die, and then to go down into Hades.

When Christ died, and the devil helped to instigate that, of course, the death of Christ—when Christ died, the devil, or death, was just waiting to receive him into Hades, because that is where everybody else went. The devil really thought that he had defeated Christ, and Christ was there to mess of the devil's plans, the devil's operations. He thought he defeated Christ by causing Him to die. So the devil is here represented as a fish, just waiting to grab Christ, pull Him down into hell.

In this image, the flesh, or the body, of Christ, is the bait on the hook, that death, or the devil, is ready to grab. The devil sees the bait, but he does not see the hook. The hook is the divinity of Christ. When the devil, or death, grabs the bait, he also grabs the hook, which is the divinity of Christ, and because hell, or Hades, cannot hold God, obviously, death cannot hold God, therefore the fish basically explodes, it blow up. It destroys the power of death and the devil, and the devil has to basically release or

cough up those that he had received into Hades.

We believe that not all the souls that were in Hades between the time of Adam and the time of Christ were delivered from hell, but all the righteous ones, or the ones who were turned toward God, were delivered from that state, and we will talk about that a little bit later.

St. Gregory Palamas calls forth the same image of the bait and the fish, and also uses the image of ransom. “The Lord patiently endured, for our sake, a death that He was not obliged to undergo, because He was sinless. To redeem us who were obliged to suffer death from servitude to the devil and death, by which I mean both of the soul and of the body to [??] eternal. Since He gave his blood, which was sinless, and therefore guiltless, as a ransom for us who were liable to punishment because of our sins, He redeemed us from our guilt. He forgave our sins, tore up the record of them on the cross and delivered us from the devil’s tyranny.”

The devil was caught by the bait. It was as if he opened his mouth and hastened to pour out for himself our ransom, the master’s blood, which was not only guiltless, but full of divine power. Then, instead of being enriched by it, he was strongly bound and made an example in the cross of Christ.

Here he brings out, also as St. John Damascene did earlier, that everybody who lives is a sinner, and therefore is deserving of death. But Christ, because He was sinless, did not deserve death, and that is another reason why the devil could not hold Him in hell, and He could not be held in the tomb in death.

So there are two reasons why He conquered death, and both of these reasons are inseparably bound together—first of all, because Christ is God, and secondly, because He was sinless. It is because He was God that He was sinless, because, as I said earlier, Christ’s human nature was, and is, inseparably, but unconfusedly, bound with His divine nature.

In order to sin, Christ’s human nature would have to be parted from His divine nature, because sin is separation from God.

Because Christ’s human nature and divine nature are inseparable, therefore, Christ not only did not sin, but also He could not sin. He did not, and could not sin, even in thought. Therefore, Christ, because He was God, was totally sinless, and because of this, both because of His divinity, and consequently because of His sinlessness, He overcame the power of sin and death through His death on the cross, and His resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom further highlights this teaching with an

image of his own. He says, "It is as if, at a session of a court of justice, the devil should be addressed as follows: "Granted that you have destroyed all men because you found them guilty of sin, but why did you destroy Christ? Is it not very evident that you did so unjustly? Well then, through Him the whole world will be vindicated. "

From these, and the other teachings of the holy fathers based on scripture, the Orthodox doctrine of man's redemption through Christ's death and resurrection might be briefly stated, as follows: Death is the consequence of sin. When Christ died on the cross, He took upon Himself this consequence. However, since He was wholly without sin, He was undeserving of death, and since He was divine, He was unable to be held in the bonds of death and Hades.

Thus, the spiritual and physical death that had entered the world through the fall of man were abolished through Christ's death and resurrection, and all mankind was given the possibility of being delivered from them both.

The consequences of Christ's redemptive work could pass to all people because, as we have noted, concerning the consequences of the first man's sin, human nature is one. St. Paul writes, "If by one man's offense, death reigned by one, that is, Adam, much more, they which received abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign by one, Jesus Christ."

St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks specifically on how the consequences of Christ's death on the cross, like the consequences of Adam's fall, were able to pass to all men due to the unity of human nature. St. Cyril writes, "We were crucified with Christ at the moment when His flesh was crucified, because it somewhat included universal human nature in itself, just as universal human nature contracted the sickness of the curse in Adam at the same time that he drew upon himself the curse. In Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, all the consequences of the fall are overcome. These consequences, however, are not overcome all at once, but in a certain order, corresponding to the order in which man first experienced them.

St. Symeon, the New Theologian, teaches that, just as Adam experienced first the spiritual death, and later, physical death, so likewise, Christ first overcame spiritual death in His own person, when He resurrected, brought to life, and deified the human soul at His incarnation. And then He later overcame physical death in His person at His resurrection from the dead. St. Symeon goes on to say that the same order of redemption,

first of the soul, and then of the body, was observed in those who had died before Christ. For immediately after Christ's death, and while His body lay in the tomb, His soul descended into Hades, freed the souls of the saints held captive there, in everlasting bonds, raised them up, and established them in a place of rest and light without evening, but not yet their bodies, for those He allowed to remain in the grave until the general resurrection.

So he is saying the resurrection already begins to occur when Christ dies, right when He dies, when His body is still in the tomb, and those of you who are Orthodox know that in the Church, while Christ's body is still in the tomb, before Pascha, we are already wearing white vestment, or in some traditions, red vestments, representing Pascha. The time of the resurrection has already begun, although Christ's body is still lying in the tomb, His soul is in Hades, resurrecting, spiritually, all the righteous ones who had died between the time of Adam's fall and Christ's coming. In the Epistle of St. Peter, we read that even some of those who died in the global flood of Noah's time were delivered from Hades at that time while Christ's body was in the grave.

Finally, St. Symeon teaches this order of redemption is also observed in the life of each Christian. Man is first spiritually resurrected in the Church through the Holy Mysteries that have been made possible through Christ's redemptive work, and only later does he experience the physical resurrection that Christ also made possible. The beginning of our renewal, writes St. Gregory Palamas, is the mystery of holy baptism, wherein we are cleansed of sin through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. St. Gregory writes, Christ tore up the handwriting of our transgressions on the cross and made guiltless all those who are buried with Him through baptism.

In baptism we die and are buried with Christ, thus partaking of the saving power of His death, which frees us from sin. The Apostle Paul writes, "Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death. Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed." The mystery of baptism, however, does not only mean dying with Christ, it also means rising with Him and being given new life. The Apostle Paul affirms, "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we should

walk in newness of life.”

This spiritual resurrection in Christ is the uniting of man’s soul once again with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Because man is cleansed of sin in Holy Baptism through Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, grace is no longer foreign to his nature, and he becomes a fit receptacle of the Holy Spirit. In the mystery of baptism, together with the mystery of Chrismation that follows upon it, man receives the grace of the Holy Spirit, as he had it before the primordial fall—that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit united with his soul and his inward being.

St. Symeon, the New Theologian, explains how baptism, together with Chrismation, is both a death and resurrection for man, both granting man forgiveness of sins, and imparting to him the grace of the Holy Spirit that he had lost at the fall. St. Symeon writes:

The Son and Word of God, having become incarnate, offered Himself in the flesh as a sacrifice to the divinity of the Father, and of the Son, Himself, and of the Holy Spirit, in order that the first transgression of Adam might be benevolently forgiven for the sake of this great and fearful work, that is, for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ, and in order that, by its power, there might be performed another new birth and recreation of man in Holy Baptism, in which we are also cleansed by water mingled with the Holy Spirit. Christ called it being born again of water and the spirit.

From that time people are baptized in water, or immersed in it, and taken out from it three times, in the image of the three-day burial of the Lord, and after they die in it, to this whole evil world. In the third bringing out from it, they are already alive, as if resurrected from the dead, that is, their souls are brought to life, and again receive the grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam had it before the transgression, they are anointed with Holy Myrrh, or Holy Chrism, and by means of it are anointed with Jesus Christ, and are fragrant in a way above nature.

Two things occur in Holy Baptism. First, we are cleansed of sin, the consequences of sin, and secondly, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. I’m not talking chronologically, but those two things occur at the same time. Because we are cleansed of sin we can once more receive the grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam and Eve had it before the fall.

St. Symeon continues to write about how those who are baptized and Chrismated into Christ’s Church are united to God through the Holy Eucharist, or Holy Communion. He says, “Having

become, in this way, worthy of being associates of God, they taste His flesh and drink His blood, and by means of the sanctified bread and wine, become of one body and blood with God, who was incarnate, and offered Himself as a sacrifice.”

In a similar vein, St. Nicholas Cabasilas, holy father of the 14th century, speaks of how we partake of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross when receiving Holy Communion. He says, “Since therefore, the only begotten Son has left nothing undone which pertains to the Father’s glory, He alone has broken down the middle wall of division,” from the words of St. Paul, “and clears many from his sentence, that is, the sentence upon him for sin.

Christ’s body, then, is the only medicine against sin and His blood the only ransom from offenses. This is the body that was slain upon the cross. It paid the penalty of death, and that upon the cross. The blood springing out from the wounds darkened the sun and shook the earth. It hollowed the air and washed the whole world clean of the filth of sin.

Therefore,” St. Nicholas concludes, “the labors and tears of those who repent of sins after the baptismal washing, and plead for grace, stand in need of the blood of the new covenant, and of the body which was slain, since the labors and tears are of no avail without the body and blood.”

Elsewhere, St. Nicholas affirms that in the Holy Eucharist we also partake of Christ’s resurrection since we receive the risen one, Himself, the very benefactor, Himself, the very temple whereon is founded the whole compass of graces. Spiritual resurrection of Christ, uniting of man’s soul with the divine grace, reopens the way to deification, which had been closed to man at the fall. Through deification, or union, with God, we are to become, in the words of the Apostle Peter, partakers of the divine nature, from the second epistle of the holy Apostle Peter. Christ, the incarnate God wishes us to be united with Him in love. He wishes us to dwell in Him, and He in us. He said to His disciples, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and We will make Our abode with him.” A little later He said, “Abide in Me,” or “Live in Me, and I in you.”

Throughout their lives, Orthodox Christians are to grow toward a more full deification, a more perfect participation in God’s life. This participation in God is never to end, but passes into everlasting spiritual life in the Kingdom of Heaven. As will be remembered, mankind had been cut off from both Paradise and

Heaven at the fall. Now through Christ, both have been opened again to man.

When parted from the body at death, the souls of those redeemed by Christ not only pass to Paradise, which St. John Damascene describes as luxuriant, with ever-blooming plants, filled with fragrance, flooded with light, for they also pass through Heaven, the place in which the angelic powers dwell, and which is also described as a place full of light.

What we have described is only the first kind of resurrection, spiritual resurrection that has been made possible by Christ. The second kind, physical resurrection, will occur at the second coming, through the saving power of Christ's resurrection. This accords with the order of redemption outlined by St. Symeon above. We will return to the subject of the physical resurrection at the end of the seminar.

Now we have completed part I of the seminar today, and as I said earlier, before ending this session I will read the first couple of sections of part II, but now, since we have covered this theme and it is fresh in your minds, I would like to see if you have any questions on this, and then maybe about 15 minutes of questions or so, and then I will continue and read the first two sections of Part II.

Questioner #1: If Adam and Even did not fall, would we exist?

Father Damascene: Yes, we would. Yes, somehow we would exist, or more people would exist. A number of holy fathers, St. John Chrysostom, St. John Damascene, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Blessed Theodore of Cyrus, and I can't remember, there might be a few others—they say that if Adam and Eve had not fallen, then God would have increased the human race by some other means, not sexual reproduction, some other means He would have found.

St. John Chrysostom says that God created many angels, He did not need sexual reproduction, He created many angels. He created Eve out of Adam's rib. The holy fathers do not say exactly how the human race would have increased, but they do say that there would have been increase of the human race, by some other means.

Questioner #2: I was wondering about the irrational part—imagination? I come from a Protestant background, with the idea that we are to share in God's creative energy, so I always tied that closely with imagination, of thinking new things. How does that work in Orthodoxy? Not clear?

Father Damascene: Well, about the uncreated energy, I am not

sure, like thinking of new things is part of the uncreated energy?
Questioner #2: No, I am speaking of imagination—I consider that as being very creative, but you are saying that is a lower form?

Father Damascene: Well, the Holy Fathers, when they talk about imagination—in Greek it is *phantasticon* or *fantasia*—they are referring to the formation of mental images after the corresponding body is not present. You can see something and then you can imagine it in your mind. After the fall, man's mind came under the sway of the imagination.

The imagination can be used in all different ways, but it is not quite the same as the creative faculty. Adam did give names to all the animals and St. John Chrysostom says that God endowed Adam with ineffable intelligence, so that he could name all the animals and remember all the names, and describe the qualities of those animals with the names.

St. Ephrem the Syrian says that this was also with God's inspiration that he was able to name the animals. So you could say that there was a kind of creative faculty in Adam, but he did not do it through the imagination. In other words, the imagination is something between the reality and the mind.

When you have an image of something, it is not the reality, itself. You can remember that thing through the imagination, but it is not the reality, itself.

What St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain was saying is that Adam and Eve, before the fall, could perceive the essences, what we call the *logoi*, of the created things, directly, without the use of the imagination. Again, there was a creative faculty in Adam, but not through the imagination.

Questioner #3: I have a question in regards to the restoration and deification, with both the spiritual and the physical, the soul and the body, and in regards to when that is happening with the soul, and as you say, with the body that is not going to happen until total restoration of mankind. I am not sure how to pose the question, but is it an accepted pattern, or a state of being, that as the soul is restored more, or coming closer to Christ, the physical might tend to be more corrupted because of that growth? Is the physical just going to be where it is going to be, or is that affected as the soul is...?

Father Damascene: Like the soul of a Christian coming closer to God, is that what you are talking about?

Questioner #3: Correct.

Father Damascene: St. Symeon the Theologian says that in this

order of redemption that he talks about—and you rightly recapped what I was saying—first the spiritual death came in through Adam’s fall, and then as a result of that, physical death came in. Christ first overcame spiritual death, and then He will overcome physical death in the future. So, for now, all Christians and even the greatest saints die, but God does grant, in some cases, a certain relative incorruption to the bodies of the saints.

That is why we have these incorrupt bodies of the saints in the Church. Some are quite amazing, like St. Alexander of Svir, who died 500 years ago. His body was hidden away somewhere during the Soviet area and they recently found it again, and it is completely incorrupt. All the flesh is there, it is soft, it is white. There are some amazing cases like that, and also, we have cases of myrrh-gushing relics. Recently, in Greece, on the island of Andros, there is a whole series of relics that were uncovered where there was gushing myrrh. This is an indication from God, or rather a foretaste, or foreshadowing, of the future incorruption. It is not a complete incorruption, obviously, but it is a relative incorruption. So there is something we can speak about, in terms of incorruption, even now, but it is obviously not complete.

I think that the saints, even during this earthly life, can partake, to some degree of that incorruption. We read about some saints who were saying the Jesus Prayer with their head down on their chest, and they were praying in their heart, and then incorrupt fragrance of Heaven will come forth from their chest. These kinds of signs are given in the Church, these rather beautiful little miracles that are given in which God opens up the other world, and gives a sense and foretaste of the incorruption that He has planned for the whole creation, and also the incorruption that was there in the beginning of the creation.

Another account I could give you is the account of Euphrosynos the cook. Many Orthodox Christians have in their kitchen an icon of St. Euphrosynos the cook, patron saint of kitchens and cooking. St. Euphrosenus the cook was a monk, I believe, in Palestine, and he went to Paradise in spirit. His abbot had a dream in which he saw St. Euphrosynos in Paradise. St. Euphrosynos was there and the abbot asked him if he would give him something to take back and St. Euphrosynos gave him two pieces of fruit, I think apples, or something, and they were wrapped in a cloth. When the abbot came out of his reverie, there in his cell where these two pieces of fruit. They were

somehow brought back from Paradise in a mystical manner. Paradise still exists. When Christ died on the cross, before He died He said to the thief, “You will be with me together in Paradise.” So Paradise still exists, although we can’t see it. It is a more spiritual, rarified realm.

Somehow these pieces of fruit were brought back from Paradise and they had this miraculous, heavenly fragrance. The abbot cut them up into little pieces and people came from miles around who were sick and had various diseases, and they partook of these pieces of the fruit, and they were healed. In other words, in this way, that incorrupt realm, which still exists, kind of impinges every once in a while, by God’s allowance, or God’s grace, His providence, by His will, upon this world, and we can somehow partake of that. Again, the same thing with the myrrh-gushing icons, that incorruption is made manifest to us, even in this fallen, corrupted state that we live in.

By the way, about St. Euphrosynos, the cook, after this happened he disappeared, because he knew he was found out that he was going to Paradise, and all these people wanted to go see him, and he became a celebrity, so he left to another monastery. He is considered a great saint of the Church and we have from him that image of the Paradise that still exists and there are others that have been to Paradise, as well—St. Andrew, Fool for Christ, and many others.

Questioner #4: In today’s talk you were talking about the state of man’s body before the fall and last night we were talking about God’s energies. As Orthodox, we believe in theosis and becoming like Christ. Looking at the lives of the saints, I just finished reading Father Arseny’s book, about his life, and about how when he was put into solitude with the other prisoner, Father Alexi. They should have died, they should have frozen to death, and they prayed and they survived. Were they allowed to be in the state before the fall, as though that was what our nature, our physical body was to be outside of the fallen state of the world?

Father Damascene: That is a good point, that is a good way to look at it. You are kind of reading into the text, but I think that is a good way to do that, because when miracles occur, when the order of the fallen creation, or the laws of the fallen nature, of the fallen creation, are changed by the will of God, then we do get a glimpse of that incorruption in which the world existed before the fall, which it will exist in after the fall, and the incorruption that man used to enjoy, and will enjoy after the

resurrection.

Host: Now, Father Damascene is going to be concluding the talk, and he will be speaking, specifically, on the watchfulness of prayer, and the deeper aspects of prayer and unification with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Father Damascene: In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For those of you who have been following the outline that we gave out, we will go right into the subject of watchfulness now.

In order for us to grow in the life of prayer, and on the path of union to God, we must cultivate the virtue of watchfulness, which is a state of inner vigilance, attention, and spiritual sobriety. Due to the corruption of our human nature that began at the fall of man, we are inclined toward sin, and our consciousness is broken up and easily influenced by our imagination, which is often inclined toward sinful thoughts. Therefore, we need to stand guard with our minds against these sinful thoughts, and cut them off when they arise. During time set aside for prayer, we must cut off, not only sinful thoughts, but also all thoughts which distract us from prayer.

Christ spoke much concerning watchfulness. "Take heed to yourselves," he said, "lest at any time your hearts be weighed down with surfeiting or drunkenness, and the cares of this life." To further impress upon the people the need for watchfulness, he told parables about it, such as the story of the five wise virgins, who trimmed and guarded their lamps. "Let your waists be girded about," Christ said, "and your lamp burning, and you, yourselves, like men who wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He comes, shall find watching."

As I mentioned last night, before his trial and crucifixion, when a time of great temptation was about to come upon his apostles, Christ told them, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." He says watch, and then pray while watching.

Prayer cannot be pure if the mind is actively engaged in following thoughts. For prayer to be pure, it must arise from a pure spirit, and this can only occur when one first stands watch and thus rises above thoughts and images. That is why Christ said, "Watch and pray." Prayer and watchfulness are inseparably bound together. Also, as I mentioned last night, St. Ignatius

Brianchaninov said, “An essential and dispensable property of prayer is attention. Without attention, there is no prayer.”

St. Simeon the New Theologian provides one of the best explanations of the relationship between watchfulness and prayer. He writes:

Watchfulness and prayer should be as closely linked together as the body to the soul. For the one cannot stand without the other. Watchfulness first goes on ahead like a scout and engages sin in combat. Prayer then follows afterwards, and instantly destroys and exterminates all the evil thoughts with which watchfulness has already been battling. For attentiveness alone cannot exterminate them. This, then, is the gate of life and death. If by means of watchfulness we keep prayer pure, we make progress. But if we leave prayer unguarded, and permit it to be defiled, our efforts are null and void.

Through attention, or watchfulness, we continually make our eye single, to use Christ’s words. We continually rise above all sensory forms and images, all conditioned thoughts and emotions. We continually allow our nous, or mind, to rise in its journey to receive purification, and thus be united with its creator.

We continually stand guard so as not to let in any thoughts or images that will pull it down to the realm of the senses, and we continually burn away, in the light of understanding, all forms and images of desire, together with all the resentments hiding in the recesses of our souls.

In order to gain attention, we must, as the writers of the Philokalia teach, “go within ourselves.” St. Nicephoros the Monk writes, “We cannot be reconciled with God and assimilated to him, unless we return, or rather, enter into ourselves, insofar as this lies within our power. For the miracle consists in tearing ourselves away from the distraction and vain concerns of the world, and in this way, relentlessly seizing hold of the Kingdom of Heaven within us.”

Closing our eyes and not focusing on outward sensory impressions, we stand or sit at attention before God in prayer.

Almost immediately, we find our fallen, fragmented consciousness filling our head with thoughts, images, fantasies and memories. But as we continue to realign our will toward Christ, yearning to have his mind, and be filled with his life, rather than our own, gradually our awareness will begin to separate itself from our thoughts.

St. Theophan the Recluse writes, “Little by little, you will

separate from your thoughts. You will find that you have strayed far from your first created image.” Of course, we spoke at length in the last talk this morning about what that first created image is.

Above all, our inward attention should be directed at thoughts. This is because, in the words of St. Theophan, “Sinful passions and desires rarely attack by themselves. They are most often born of thoughts.” From this we can make a rule: Cut off thoughts, and you will cut off everything.

When thoughts come, we should not attempt to get involved or argue with them. For such struggle only binds us to them. As St. Silouan of Mt. Athos affirms, “The experience of the holy Fathers shows various ways of combating intrusive thoughts, but it is best of all not to argue with them. The mind that debates with such a thought will be faced with its steady development, and, bemused by the exchange, will be distracted from remembrance of God, which is exactly what the demons are after. Having diverted the mind from God, they confuse it, and it will not emerge clean.” Here he is speaking specifically of intrusive thoughts that come during prayer.

Struggle against thoughts is vain and futile. It is enough simply to observe the thoughts as they arise, and then let them go without reacting to them or following them. “When someone is in the beginning of his spiritual life,” says Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, “he should not study a lot, but instead watch himself and observe his thoughts.”

A thought cannot exist for long under the light of direct objective observation. If we do not align our will with it, it naturally disappears. As the ascetic Abba Poimen teaches in the fifth century, “If we do not do anything about thoughts, in time they are spoiled, that is, they disintegrate.”

Many ancient Christian teachers speak of a struggle with thoughts. It is vital that we understand what they mean by this. Our struggle is not against the thoughts, for as Christ said, “Resist not evil.” Rather, our struggle should be to rise toward our source of knowing, that is, toward God, who is beyond thought.

In other words, we do not engage the thoughts, but instead, struggle to keep our attention lifted above them in stillness of mind. Each time we catch ourselves in a sinful thought, we should just return our attention to what is above it, to God. We do not validate the thought by giving it any more attention. This is already to repulse or to cut off the thought without directly

struggling against it. It is active, not passive, for the action does not involve movement towards the distracting thought.

To raise our attention to our creator is simply to humbly yearn for him, to look up to him with the eye of our soul, and in many cases, to express our yearning with words. “Never allow your mind to be dragged down,” says St. Macarius the Great of Egypt, “but always raise it on high and God will help you.”

Raising our minds to God does not mean trying to imagine God. To deliberately create images in the mind is only to create more distraction, and it can lead to delusion. In watching over our thoughts during times of prayer, we should not focus on them, but rather de-focus from them. We should not try to analyze them, for analysis involves us in the very thing from which we are seeking to separate ourselves. Once again, it means we are trusting in our own powers, rather than in God’s powers.

Therefore, we should be simple. Just watch the thought disappear, as if we were an objective, disinterested spectator, and they will pass, one by one.

Above all, we should not be agitated by the appearance of thoughts, for this also enables them to steal our grapes. As Abba Barsanuphius of the 6th century writes, “If a thought comes, do not be alarmed. The bad thing is not that a thief enters the house, but that he takes what he finds in the house.”

Even in times of prayer, we should not try to force our mind to be empty of thoughts. Instead, as I just mentioned, we are to watch the thoughts arise and disappear as we focus our attention on prayer. We will thereby come to recognize that the thoughts are not who we are.

St. Theophan the Recluse says, “It is a great mistake, and a common one, to honor everything that comes up in us as the property of our own blood, for which we take a stand, as for our own selves.” He is speaking about thoughts. It is a great mistake to honor the thoughts, the ideas, the opinions that come in us as the property of our own blood, for which we take a stand as is for our own selves.

We tend to identify with our thoughts. Descartes had the famous phrase, “I think, therefore I am,” during the Enlightenment, where rationalism took precedence over faith, and in our Orthodox faith, of course, we do not believe that our thoughts are who we are, that we just simply let them go, not attaching ourselves to them.

Although it is wrong to try to determine the source of every thought, we should realize the primordial enemy of man—the

devil—is constantly at work to divert us from our path to union with God, and that he does this by making suggestions to us in the form of thoughts.

St. Theophan the Recluse writes:

The enemy has a law, not to begin suddenly, with a passion, but with a thought, and to repeat the thought often. Continual thoughts are onerous and murderous. To them, more than others, belongs the name, Tempting. Concerning them, it is necessary to know, they are not from nature, although they are similar to it in character, but are always from the enemy. These are temptations such as blasphemy, despair, and unbelief. The main thing is to never incline towards them, never adopt them, and to keep the heart free from them, separating them from yourself.

It is also crucial to remember that the fallen spirits, or the demons, have no power over us unless we give it to them by consenting to their suggestions. St. Theophan expresses it this way:

When the soul is bright, the demons are unable to look at it, like bats who fear the light. They look at it only when it begins to darken. They run in packs everywhere, and as soon as they notice a darkened soul, they immediately fall upon it, and begin to twist it to and fro with thoughts, passionate desires, and disturbance of feelings. They even attempt to creep up to bright souls, but are struck down by rays of light, as if by an arrow.

In watching over our thoughts, we will be able to cut them off before they develop into passions. In the *Philokalia*, the growth from a thought into a passion is described with scientific precision. First comes the provocation of the thought, then the conjunction of the thought with emotion, then the joining or agreement of the will with the thought. If the soul does not pull back at this point, the thought becomes a habit, and the mind is constantly preoccupied with the object of his passionate urge. Finally, the person falls into the captivity of the urge, and rushes gladly and violently to satisfy it. For this reason, it is much better to cut off the sinful thought when it first rises up in us, before it turns into a sinful passion. Just as it is much easier to pull up a tree when it is a seedling than when it is full-grown, so it is much easier to cut off thoughts in the beginning.

As I mentioned earlier, it is not only obviously evil thoughts that should be passed over during times of prayer. Even seemingly good thoughts should be left behind. “Impassioned thoughts,” said St. Hesychios, “follow hard upon thoughts that appear to be innocent and dispassionate. The latter open the way to the

former. This we have found through years of experience and observation.”

Continuing to this practice of going within and standing apart from thoughts, we will continue to shed layers of our compulsive thought patterns. At unexpected moments of the day, we may suddenly become aware of aspects of our corrupted condition that had previously been hidden from us. Buried resentments will come to the surface where we can at last repent and be free of them.

Above all, we will begin to realize our secret rebellion against God, which we reveal each time we condemn another person, or feel dissatisfaction. As we become aware of our wretchedness, tears may come to our eyes, cleansing our inward filth. We may not know from where these tears come, for they may not be related to anything in particular, but rather, they are related to who we really are.

As St. Niketas Stethatos in the 11th century writes, Once you come to know yourself, a kind of supra-rational divine humility suddenly descends upon the soul, bringing contrition and tears of fervent compunction of heart. To know yourself means that you must guard yourself diligently from everything external to you. It means rest from worldly concerns and cross-examination of a conscience. This is true humility, the humility that teaches us to be inwardly humble, and makes our heart contrite. If you do not know yourself, you cannot know what humility is. To know oneself is the goal of the practice of the virtues.

When we go within ourselves and truly begin to stand apart from thought, we begin to trust the calculations of our egotistical minds. We begin to grow sick of our stupid judgments.

Throughout the life of our ego, we have become habituated to trusting the opinions and calculations of our minds, which are often the mere servants of our emotions. To practice watchfulness is essentially to practice distrusting them. Once we have begun to become aware of who we really are through entering within ourselves, we will realize what a weak tool is the calculating machine of the human brain, how low its form of knowledge.

For us who have been conditioned by the modern Western mentality, “I think, therefore I am,” it is especially difficult to begin to distrust our thoughts, since our society has been built precisely on reliance on human reason. But this is precisely what we must do if we are to conform our minds to the mind of

Christ.

The aforementioned Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, a beautiful, innocent soul, and a much loved spiritual father of our times, once said, “The devil does not hunt after those who are lost. He hunts after those who are aware, those who are close to God. He takes from them trust in God, and begins to afflict them with self-assurance, logic, thinking, criticism.” A very interesting statement for our times. These are things we are told that we are supposed to have: Self-assurance, logic, thinking, criticism. We all should be critics. He says that the devil takes from people trust in God, and begins to afflict them with these things.

Therefore, we should not trust our logical minds. Never believe your thoughts. Live simply, and without thinking too much, like a child with his father. Faith in God, without too much thinking, works wonders. A logical mind hinders the grace of God and miracles. Practice patience, without judging with a logical mind. A spiritual son of Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos recalls, “The elder always tried to have good thoughts. He said to us, however, that it is not necessary to make this our final aim, namely, having good thoughts, because our souls should be purified, even of them, and be left naked, clothed only in the divine grace which we received for free in holy baptism.” The first stage is to cultivate good thoughts. The final stage is to be purified even of good thoughts, to just be enlightened by the grace of God.

Elder Paisios counseled,

We ought always to be careful, and be in constant hesitation about whether things are really as we think, for when someone is constantly occupied with his thoughts and trusts in them, the devil will manage things in such a way that he will make the man evil, even if by nature he was good.

The ancient fathers did not trust their thoughts at all, but even in the smallest things, when they had to give an answer, they addressed the matter in their prayer, joining it to fasting, in order to some way “force” divine grace to inform them what was the right answer according to God. And when they received the “information” they gave the answer.

Today, I observe that, even with great matters, when someone asks, before he has even had the time to complete his question, we interrupt him and answer him. This shows that not only do we not seek enlightenment from the grace of God, but we do not even judge with the reason that God gave us. On the contrary, whatever our thoughts suggest to us, immediately, without hesitation, we trust it and consent to it, often with disastrous

results.

Almost all of us view thoughts as being something simple and natural, and that is why we naively trust them. However, we should neither trust them, nor accept them. Thoughts are like airplanes flying in the air. If you ignore them, there is no problem. If you pay attention to them, you create an airport inside your head, and permit them to land.

Above all, judgmental thoughts block us from God, since in the very act of harboring them, we are trying to take the place of God, who alone is judge. When we feel an exhilaration by seeming to get on top of someone through judgment, then sooner or later this will lead to inward conflict. If the source of the conflict, which is the soul playing God, is not eradicated, then it can lead to depression and to despair, and even to physical sickness.

The person who is truly following Christ will immediately recognize that the indulgence of a single judgment separates him from God. Therefore, when judgmental thoughts intrude upon his mind, begging to be attended to, and promising the exultation of pride, he immediately cuts them off and lets them pass into oblivion. It does not matter how sagacious, how compelling, how profoundly psychological such judgments appear to him. He wants God above all else, and these thoughts deprive him of God, and so he rejects them.

The 19th century Russian elder, St. Ambrose of Optina, gave this practical advice to his spiritual daughter: “Look at everything simply. Living simply means not judging. Do not judge anyone. For example, ‘Here comes Elikonida. She passed by, and that is all.’ This is what thinking simply means.

Otherwise, at seeing Elikonida passing by, you could think about her bad side—she is such and such, her character is thus and so—that is not simple.”

It is not only people that we can judge. We can pass judgment on our surrounding circumstances, or even on life itself. In doing so, we are at heart judging God, himself, often without even knowing it. This, too, is a way of playing God, and so it separates us from him, the source of our life.

I mentioned earlier that to cut off a sinful thought, it is enough just to turn our attention away from it and toward God. We can do this without words, or we can do it with the help of words, calling upon God from our hearts. Often a short phrase will be enough, such as “Lord, have mercy” or “Lord, forgive me.”

St. Theophan the Recluse explains:

Whenever we appeal directly to the Lord, with fear, reverence, hope and faith in his complete activity, without entering into a verbal battle with a passionate thought, the passionate thought then moves away from the mind's eye, which is fixed on the Lord. When it is cut off from the mind through such attention, the passionate thought departs of its own accord, if it has been naturally stimulated. If the enemy is involved, however, then a discerning ray of light that comes from contemplation of the Lord strikes him. It happens that the mind immediately calms down from passionate violations as soon as it turns to the Lord and calls upon him.

There are times when, such as after a passion or demonic temptation has begun to get a hold on us, an especially fervent appeal is in order. St. John Climacus advises:

For those who have not yet obtained true prayer of the heart, violence in bodily prayer is a great help. I mean, stretching out the hands, beating the breast, sincerely raising the eyes to heaven, deep sighing, frequent prostrations. If possible, go apart for a brief space; hide for a while in some secret place; raise on high the eyes of your soul, if you can, but, if not, your bodily eyes. Hold your arms motionless in the form of a cross in order to shame and conquer the unclean spirit by the sign. Cry to him who is mighty to save, not with cleverly spun phrases, but in humble words, preferably making this your prelude: "Have mercy on me, for I am weak." Then you will know by experience the power of the most high, and, with invisible help, you will invisibly drive away the invisible ones, that is, the demons.

Now having laid more of a foundation by discussing what prayer is and how it is connected with watchfulness, let us look more closely at the Jesus Prayer. "The action of this prayer," says St. Barsanuphius of Optina, "is always hidden in the greatest mysteries. It does not consist merely in speaking the words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' but reaches the heart and mysteriously settles there. Through this prayer, we enter into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We become accustomed to him. We merge with him into one whole. This prayer fills the soul with calm and joy amidst the most difficult trials, in the midst of every oppression and human vanity."

As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches, the essence of the Jesus Prayer was indicated by Christ himself, shortly before his crucifixion. He writes, "The use of the all-holy divine name,

‘Jesus,’ in prayer, and prayer in his name, was appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, when Christ said, ‘And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. So far, you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive it, that your joy may overflow.’ “

What is it that will be given to a person who prays in the name of the Lord Jesus, that can fill him to overflowing with joy? He will be given, we reply, in the words of our Lord, “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name.”

St. Gregory of Sinai affirms that the Jesus Prayer is one of the primary ways by which one can cultivate the seed of grace given at baptism. He writes, “The energy of the Holy Spirit is manifested to those under spiritual guidance, through the continuous invocation of the Lord Jesus, repeated with conscious awareness, that is, through mindfulness of God.”

St. Gregory says that this means can be more effective than others

if one diligently and persistently learns how to dig the ground and locate the gold. Thus, if we want to realize and know the truth, let our aim be to make the energy of prayer alone active in our hearts, for it brings warmth and joy to the soul, and sets the heart alight with an ineffable love for God and man. It is on account of this that humility and contrition flow richly from prayer, for prayer in beginners is the unceasing noetic activity of the Holy Spirit. To start with, it rises like a fire of joy from the heart. In the end, it is like light made fragrant by divine energy. When doing the Jesus Prayer as it should be done, one does not merely say the words, but actually prays them from the depths of one’s being, speaking person-to-person, always returning to the awareness that one is addressing someone. Here is an analogy that might make it a little more clear: I have a telephone, and I turned it off, so it is just a dead piece of metal, so I can talk on this phone, I can be saying something, but I know that nobody is listening on the other line. If I know nobody is listening, I can just talk and I am just talking into nothing. But if the phone is on, and I have called somebody, and I know that the person is on the other line, and when I am talking he or she is listening to what I am saying, then I know, and I am conscious, that I am addressing someone.

This is the way we have to be in prayer. In other words, we should not just repeat the prayer by rote: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” We

should be concentrated on the words of the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ.” We are addressing Christ, we are conscious of him, we are affirming that he is the Lord, that he is the Christ, he is the Messiah, that he is God, and we ask him to have mercy on us, which means to give us all that we need for our salvation and deification, and by extension, not only on us but on everyone around us.

We are conscious of this and we are conscious of the words of the prayer, but more so, on a deeper level, we are conscious of the one that we are addressing in the prayer. We are addressing Jesus Christ. We are not speaking into a dead telephone. We are speaking to someone who is present with us, who is before us, who is closer to us than our own soul, who within, is inside of us, all around us, and so we are addressing a live, living person. This is the consciousness of addressing someone that we need to have.

St. Archimandrite Sophrony says, “The name of Christ must not be detached from the person of God, lest prayer be reduced to a technical exercise, and so go against the commandment, ‘You shall not take the name of your Lord God in vain.’”

Elder Nikodim of Karoulia, a practitioner of the Jesus Prayer, who died in 1984 on Mt. Athos, says,

You have to turn to the Lord with your mind. Don’t just pronounce the words. You have to see the Lord himself in the prayer. It is our designation to be like angels. Angels gaze unceasingly upon the Lord, and we have to strive for this—to see the Lord in the words, with our mind to look upon him, but if with our mind, we only say the words, then we will not look upon the Lord, and this is not enough for prayer. But this seeing is without images. It is with the spirit. God is a spirit.

As he explained to the Samaritan woman, “You will worship in spirit.” We pray in spirit to the Lord, Himself. How is this?

When I turn to the Lord, and right then believe and feel that I am looking upon the Lord, and the Lord is looking upon me, the Lord is ceaselessly looking upon me. You have to look upon the Lord with faith. Look upon the Lord and believe that the Lord is looking upon you, in spirit. Pray in spirit.

God demands worshipers who worship him in spirit. God is a spirit, and one must worship him in spirit. We, with our spirit, pray to God the Spirit. Our spirit is united with God. When we turn to God the Spirit, with faith, then the Lord will look upon us, and the human spirit will be united with the Spirit of the Lord at the time of prayer.

You have to practice this. As always, when you pray, immediately turn to the Lord. You must address the Lord and sense the Lord. Then there will be an echo. You will receive a response. Mercy will come to you. This is all by faith. It is accomplished by faith, by faith and compulsion. That is what it is. “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” This is a very good prayer. From one utterance of the prayer, you already sense and taste God’s mercy, and the further you go, the greater it gets, if it is with attention. At the time of prayer, if you go through the whole prayer rope, then tears will begin to flow, contrition will come, and then warmth of heart will set in.

Elder Porphyrios, another holy elder of recent times who lived on Mt. Athos, speaks of the love and longing with which one should say the Jesus Prayer. He says,

Pray to God with love and yearning and tranquility, with meekness, gently, and without forcing yourself. And when you repeat the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” say it slowly, humbly, gently and with divine love. Pronounce the name of Christ with sweetness.

Say the words one at a time: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” smoothly, tenderly, affectionately, silently, secretly, mystically, but with exultation; with longing; with passion; without tension, force, or unbecoming emphasis; without compulsion and pressure, in the way a mother speaks to the child she loves: “My little boy, my darling girl, my little Johnny, my wee Mary,” with longing. Yes, with longing. That is the whole secret. Here is the heart speaking, “My little child, my joy—my Lord, my Jesus, my Jesus, my Jesus.”

Here he is relating this to parents speaking to the child.

Obviously, he is not saying that we should pray to God, “My little child, my joy.” He is saying that, as a parent says this to a child, we should say, “My Lord, my Jesus, my Jesus, my Jesus.” What you have in your heart and in your mind, that is what you express with “all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.”

That is from the gospel according to St. Luke [[Luke 10:27](#)].

While doing the Jesus Prayer, as all other kinds of prayer, we are to practice watchfulness—to stand guard against a mental takeover by thoughts. The Jesus Prayer is especially conducive to watchfulness, since it is such a short, one-pointed prayer, which one can more easily focus one’s attention on.

As Father Sophrony writes,

While saying the Jesus Prayer, a Christian is to face thoughts,

and then exterminate them by shutting the door of his mind, and stationing his mind on guard like a sentinel, unfettered by imagination and cogitation, but armed with prayer and the name of Jesus Christ. By keeping one's mind enclosed in the words of the Jesus Prayer, and by directing the yearning of one's heart toward Jesus Christ, one can cut off the thoughts that lead to sinful passions. One can learn to stand apart from thoughts, while keeping one's attention fixed firmly on Christ, and can cut off thoughts with the aid of the words of the Jesus Prayer, itself. As Elder Nikodim stated in the passage I read earlier, the Jesus Prayer, and all other kinds of prayer, for that matter, should be entirely without the deliberate formation of mental images, pictures of Jesus coming, and so on. The creation of mental images pulls one down to the level of the fallen imagination, and as I have mentioned, it can lead to delusion.

Such images become idols. Elder Porphyrios teaches, "With an image, the focus of prayer is easily lost, because one image can easily be displaced by another, and the evil one may intrude images, and we will lose grace. Also, when saying the Jesus Prayer, one should be careful not to idolize the prayer itself, as if one can be saved by words, rather than by Jesus Christ himself."

St. Theophan the Recluse writes,

Hold no intermediate image between the mind and the Lord when practicing the Jesus Prayer. The words pronounced are merely a help, and are not essential. The principle thing is to stand before the Lord with the mind and the heart, that is, this, and not the words, is inner spiritual prayer.

The words here, are as much, or as little, the essential part of the prayer as the words of any other prayer. The essential part is to dwell in God, and this walking before God means that you live with the conviction, ever before your consciousness, that God is in you, as he is in everything. You live in the firm assurance that he sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself.

This awareness of the eye of God looking at your inner being, must not be accompanied by any visual concept, but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling. A man in a warm room feels how the warmth envelops and penetrates him. The same must be the effect on our spiritual nature, of the all-encompassing presence of God, who is the fire in the room of our being.

The words, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," are only the instrument, and not the essence of the work, but

they are an instrument which is very strong and effective, for the name of the Lord Jesus, is fearful to the enemies of our salvation, and a blessing to all who seek him. Do not forget that this practice is simple, and must not have anything fanciful about it.

Archimandrite Sophrony indicates a certain sequence in the development of the Jesus Prayer. He says:

First, it is a verbal matter. We say the prayer with our lips while trying to concentrate our attention on the name and the words.

Next, we no longer move our lips, but pronounce the name of Jesus Christ, and what follows after, in our minds, mentally.

The third stage, mind and heart combined to act together, the attention of the mind is centered in the heart. The prayer is said there. Fourthly, the prayer becomes self-propelling. This happens when the prayer is confirmed in the heart, and with no especial effort on our part, continues there, where the mind is concentrated.

Finally, the prayer, so full of blessing, starts to act like a gentle flame within us, as inspiration from on high, rejoicing the heart with a sensation of divine love, and delighting the mind in spiritual contemplation. This last state is sometimes accompanied by a vision of light.

Now we will speak more about praying in the heart, what Archimandrite Sophrony talks about when he talks about prayer being “stationed in the heart.” As prayer grows and deepens in us, it descends into the heart. This leads to what is called, in the Philokalia and other Orthodox spiritual writings, “prayer of the heart.”

The heart, say the writers of the Philokalia, is the secret place, or inner chamber, of our mind, or nous. This is, in fact, the traditional understanding of the heart, which we find in ancient cultures, such as the Hebrew, the Chinese, and the Greek. As the Chinese painter and author, Mai-mai Sze, points out, in Chinese, “mind” is denoted by the character “xīn,” which is “heart,” and, in Chinese thought, the heart was regarded as the seat of spiritual and moral intelligence and perception, its function being to control the emotions.

The form of the Chinese character “sī,” which means “to think” or also “thought” which is composed of a pictograph of a head, in the form of a skull, placed above that of heart, suggests that thinking is guided by the heart and originates from it, and is more important intuitively, than intellectually. This is an understanding of the heart found in many ancient cultures.

In many places of the gospels, Christ spoke of the heart as a center of spiritual awareness. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks,” he said, and that people should “understand with their heart,” he said in another place. And again he said, “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart.”

This ancient understanding of the heart was passed on to the Greek fathers of the Philokalia, who would at times use the word, kardia, or heart, and nous, or mind, interchangeably. They taught that the nous resides in the head, and at the same time, is active in the heart. The nous is united to the body, but it is not entirely within or without the body, for it is bodiless. [In] the Philokalia, the heart refers to the physical organ, but it also refers to the spiritual center of man’s being. In watchfulness and prayer, one’s mind first descends to the physical heart, and then one’s metaphysical or spiritual heart.

Father Sophrony writes:

The ascetic learns the great mysteries of the spirit through pure prayer. He descends into his inmost heart, into his natural heart first, and thence to those depths that are no longer of the flesh. He finds his deep heart, reaches the profound spiritual, metaphysical core of his being, and, looking into it, sees that the existence of mankind is not something alien and extraneous to him, but is inextricably bound up with his own being.

From his long experience of praying in the heart, Elder Nikodim speaks on the heart as a center of spiritual awareness. He says:

We pray with the heart. We are aware through the heart. But with the mind we can only know that we are praying. If I am praying, then I realize I sense that I am praying. I bring myself to an awareness. Then the feelings become manifest, and when the feelings appear, then tears flow. Without consciousness, without feeling, not one little tear will roll out.

If you only know in the mind that you are praying to the Lord, that is one thing, but when it is with the heart, then you sense that it is the Lord himself whom you are addressing. When a person prays with his heart, he is praying and has prayer of the heart. But if he does not have the awareness that he is addressing the Lord, then he is only praying with his head. He knows that there is a God and remembers that he is addressing God, but he does not realize it.

But awareness leads a man to feeling, and when feeling comes, then he begins to weep. True repentance is then revealed. He becomes aware of his sins, and begins to repent sincerely.

“Forgive me, forgive me, have mercy on me.” Everything concludes in the heart. That is how the Lord created us. He gave us a heart, our life. That which you pronounce in prayer, be aware of it with your heart.

It is not only with the mind, but I hear and understand when I am pronouncing the words. No, with the awareness. Our awareness is located in the heart. This is the feeling of the heart. When you pronounce the words, be aware, as if you felt them. You have to practice this.

What we have called the descent into the heart, is at the same time, a unifying of mind and heart. The separation of the mind from the heart, and their opposition to one another, have resulted from the fall of man. This separation is overcome when our nous, distributed throughout our being, unites its power in drawing closer to its creator. Then we can truly love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, as with a single, unified force. In the Philokalia, one will also find instruction on how, while mentally saying the Jesus Prayer, one can lead the mind into the heart with the aid of one’s breathing. Father Sophrony writes of this method:

The monk, having suitably settled his body, pronounces the prayer, with his head inclined on his chest, breathing in at the words, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” and breathing out at the words, “have mercy on me, a sinner.” During inhalation, the attention, at first, follows the movement of the air breathed in, as far as the upper part of the heart. In this manner, concentration can soon be preserved without wandering, and the mind stand side-by-side with the heart, or even enters within it.

This method eventually enables the mind to see, not the physical heart, but that which is happening within it—the feelings that creep in, and the mental images that approach from without.

With this experience, the monk acquires the ability to feel his heart, and to continue with his attention centered in the heart, without further recourse to any psychosomatic technique.

Because the misapplication of this method, without proper guidance from a spiritual father in the Orthodox Church, can also lead to bad consequences, ascetic elders of recent centuries have generally steered people, especially lay people, away from the technique, and toward a safer, and simpler, practice. Thus, Father Sophrony writes:

This procedure of following one’s breath to the upper region of the heart can assist the beginner to understand where his inner attention should be stayed during time of prayer, and as a rule, at

all other times, too. Nevertheless, true prayer is not to be achieved thus. True prayer comes exclusively through faith and repentance accepted as the only foundation. The danger of psychotechnics is that not a few people attribute too great a significance to method qua method.

In order to avoid such deformation, the beginner should follow another practice, which, though considerably slower, is incomparably better, and more wholesome—to fix the attention on the name of Christ, and on the words of the Jesus Prayer. When contrition for sin reaches a certain level, the mind naturally heeds the heart.

In the same manner, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches, “The essence of the matter consists in the union of the mind with the heart during prayer, and this is achieved, by the grace of God, in its own time, determined by God. The above mechanism is fully replaced by the unhurried enunciation of the prayer, by a short rest or pause after each prayer, by gentle and unhurried breathing, and by the enclosure of the mind in the words of the prayer.”

As St. Ignatius goes on to explain, “As we continue to say the Jesus Prayer in this way, our heart will enter into closer sympathy with our praying mind. At first, this is felt as contrition. Tears come to our eyes. In our heart, we feel a certain soreness, a pain which is not unpleasant, and which helps to draw the mind’s attention to the heart.”

About this pain, St. Theophan the Recluse writes, “Constant effort will achieve this quickly. There is nothing peculiar in this. The appearance of this pain is a natural effect. It will help you to collect yourself better, but the chief thing is that the Lord, who sees your effort, will give you help and grace in prayer. A different order will then be established in the heart.”

Ultimately, the union of the mind and the heart comes about through divine grace, when God wills to grant it. “It is natural for divine grace,” writes St. Ignatius, “when it stretches out its finger to heal a man, crushed and broken to pieces by his fall, to join together his severed parts, and to unite the mind, not only with the heart and soul, but even with the body, and to give it a single true ardor for God.

With the union of the mind and heart, the ascetic receives the power to resist all passionate thoughts and passionate feelings. Can this be the result of any technique? No. It is the result of grace. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who overshadows the unseen labor of the Christian ascetic, and it is incomprehensible

to carnal and natural people.”

Elder Porphyrios, likewise states, “Prayer of the heart is prayed only by a person who has attracted the grace of God. It must not be done with the thought, ‘I’ll learn it, I’ll do it, I’ll acquire it,’ because in this way we may be led to egotism and pride. Not only experience and genuine desire, but also wisdom, care, and prudence are required if our prayer is to be pure and pleasing to God. A single seductive thought, ‘I have really made progress,’ for example, brings everything to nought. Why should we be proud? We have nothing that is our own. These are very delicate matters.”

Many holy fathers, St. Theophan, and others, say that we are not to try to measure our progress in the spiritual life, because the minute we start to think that we are achieving something, then we have lost it, so, as Elder Porphyrios just said, “When through divine grace, the mind is united with the heart in prayer to Jesus Christ, one’s heart is filled with irrepressible love for God, for man, and for all creatures.”

Elder Porphyrios described this experience:

Only through grace can you pray. No prayer can occur without divine grace. (This, again, goes back to what I was saying before about the synergy between our free will and God’s grace, that obviously we turn to God in prayer through our free will, but God’s grace assists us.) When grace comes, then when love comes, you say the name “Christ,” and your mind and heart are flooded.

This love, this craving, also has degrees. When you experience this love, you desire to acquire spiritual things. You desire to do everything within the embrace of love, to move within this love. You wish to engage in every effort out of love for God. You feel love and gratitude towards God, without having in mind to achieve anything specific. The sense of love floods through you, and unites you with Christ. You are filled with joy and exultation, which shows that you have the divine perfect love within you. Divine love is selfless, simple, and true.

I repeated the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” and new horizons would open up. Tears of joy and gladness would flow from my eyes on account of Christ’s love and his sacrifice on the cross: insuperable longing. In this, the whole greatness is concealed—Paradise itself. Because you love Christ, you repeat this prayer, these seven words (in Greek it is five words), with craving, and with your heart. And gradually, the words are lost.

The heart is so replete that it suffices to say two words—My Jesus—and ultimately, no words at all. Love is better expressed without words, but when a soul truly falls in love with the Lord, it prefers silence and spiritual prayer. The flood of divine love fills the soul with joy and exultation.

Here again, it can be seen that the highest pinnacle in the practice of the Jesus Prayer occurs not through human effort alone, but it is given by divine grace. As Elder Porphyrios, and others who have experienced this, testify, “Man’s soul becomes flooded with the light of divine grace.”

This leads us to the final section of this talk, which is on the end of our Christian life—union with God. As we have seen in the Orthodox Christian tradition, grace is known to be not merely a created energy, or merely created effects on the soul, but rather the uncreated energy of God, in which God himself is fully present. In being filled with God’s grace, we are filled with God himself. We are filled with his life. We become one with God, not by essence and sonship, as only Jesus Christ was and is, but rather by grace and by adoption.

This union with God by grace is what we have called theosis, or deification. One might say that when one is baptized and chrismated into the Orthodox Church and receives Holy Communion, one is already deified, since through these mysteries, one receives the grace of the Holy Spirit united with one’s soul, as Adam had it before the Fall. However, as we discussed earlier, this is only in potential. A seed of grace has been implanted in the soul, which must be nurtured and cultivated by the baptized Orthodox Christian.

The Romanian Orthodox theologian, Fr. Dimitru Staniloae, calls this “deification in the broad sense.” That is, every person who is baptized, chrismated, receives Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church, is deified in the broad sense of the word.

There is even a prayer of St. Simeon the New Theologian, which we read before Holy Communion, in which we talk about Christ’s deifying Body and Blood.

But as Fr. Dimitru Staniloae goes on to say, “Deification, in the strict sense, is given by God to a soul that has been purified of simple passions and has drawn closer and closer to God through watchfulness and prayer. In deification, in the strict sense, one’s human powers are taken over, as it were, by God’s divine power, and one is wholly interpenetrated by God’s life, energy, or grace.”

Orthodox saints and elders who have experienced the grace of

deification, in the strict sense, often speak of it as an experience of light—not a physical, created light, but the uncreated light of God. Such an experience of grace is not limited to those who are practicing the Jesus Prayer at the time of the experience.

Nevertheless, in the Orthodox Church, the experience of the grace of deification is seen most commonly in the hesychast tradition, and, as we have seen, this tradition is strongly associated with the practice of the Jesus Prayer.

I would now like to read to you an account of this experience of grace, written by a modern holy elder, Archimandrite Sophrony, whom I have quoted at length above. Five years before his repose in England at the age of 97, he recorded his experiences of uncreated light. These experiences had begun many years earlier, when he had been living as a monk on Mt. Athos in Greece, and, like all Orthodox monks, had been practicing, daily, the Jesus Prayer:

Now at the close of my life, (he writes,) I have decided to talk to my brethren of things I would not have ventured to utter earlier, counting it unseemly. At the beginning of my monastic life on Mt. Athos, the Lord granted me unceasing prayer. I will relate what I remember well enough, since we are talking of the prayers which marked me indelibly. This is how it often used to be:

Towards evening at sunset I would shut the window and draw three curtains over it, to make my cell as quiet and dark as possible. With my forehead bent to the floor, I would slowly repeat words of prayer, one after the other. I had no feeling of being cooped up, and my mind, oblivious to the body, lived in the light of the gospel word. Concentrated on the fathomless wisdom of Christ's word, my spirit, freed from all material concerns, would feel flooded, as it were, with light, from the celestial sun.

At the same time, a gentle peace would fill my soul, unconscious of all the needs and cares of this earth. The Lord gave me to live in this state, and my spirit yearned to cling to his feet in gratitude for this gift. This same experience was repeated at intervals for months, perhaps years. Early in the 1930s—I was a deacon then—for two weeks, God's tender mercy rested upon me. At dusk, when the sun was sinking behind the mountains of Olympia, I would sit on the balcony near my cell, face turned to the dying light.

In those days, I contemplated the evening light of the sun, and at the same time, another light, which softly enveloped me, and

gently invaded my heart, in some curious fashion making me feel compassionate and loving towards people who treated me harshly. I would also feel a quiet sympathy for all creatures in general. When the sun had set, I would retire to my cell, as usual, to perform the devotions preparatory to celebrating the Liturgy, and the light did not leave me while I prayed.

Under the influence of this light, prayer for mankind and travail possessed my whole being. It was clear that the inescapable, countless sufferings of the entire universe, are the consequence of man's falling away from God, our creator, who revealed himself to us. If the world loved Christ and his commandments, everything would be radically transformed, and the earth would become a wonderful paradise.

Elsewhere, Father Sophrony attempts to describe the indescribable:

The soul feels apprehensive at approaching the subject of the light which visits the man who craves to behold the face of the eternal. Its nature is mysterious. In what terms can it be described? Incomprehensible, invisible, yet it may sometimes be seen by the physical eye. Quiet and gentle, it draws heart and mind to itself, until the earth is forgotten, one's spirit caught up into another sphere. It can happen in broad daylight as in the blackness of night. It is a soft light, yet more powerful than all around.

In strange fashion, it embraces from without. You see it, but your attention is drawn deep within the inner man, into the heart, burning with a love, now compassionate, now grateful. It may happen that one is not aware of the material world of external circumstances, and one sees oneself as light. Aches and pains disappear. Earthly cares fade away. Anxieties are absorbed into a sweet peace. The light used, at first, to appear like a thin flame, healing and cleansing, consuming both within and without, everything not in harmony with it, but calmly, hardly making itself felt.

This holy light, coming in strength, brings humble love, banishes all doubt and fear, obliterates every earthly consideration, the whole pyramid of secular grades and hierarchies. The repentant man becomes a nobody, as it were. He no longer stands in the way of his brother, seeks no place for himself in the world.

This light is, in itself, life imperishable, suffused by the peace of love. It brings to our spirit knowledge of another indescribable being. The mind is stayed, above reflection, by the very fact of

its entry into a new form of life. Weightless, more finely attuned than anything the earth knows, the light conveys to the soul invulnerability, making her safe from everything that hitherto weighed her down. Death flees from this light. Our spirit exults. This light is God—God almighty, and at the same time, indescribably gentle. Oh, how discreet is its approach. It will heal the heart broken by despair, the soul bruised by sin. It will inspire with a hope of victory.

A millennium earlier, in the 9th century AD, the same kind of experience was described by St. Simeon the New Theologian, in his Hymns of Divine Love. St. Simeon writes:

I am sitting on my couch, all the while beyond the world. Being in the middle of my cell, I see him present, the one who is beyond the world. I see him, and I speak with him. I—dare I say it? I love him, and he, in turn, loves me. I nourish myself with this contemplation alone, forming one with him, I transcend the heavens. That is true, I know, and yet, where my body is, I do not know.

I know that the one who remains unmoved, descends. I know that the one who remains invisible, appears to me. I know that the one who is separated from all creatures, takes me inside himself and hides me in his arms, and then I find myself outside the whole world. Yet, in turn, I who am so insignificant in this world, I contemplate in myself, completely, the creator of the world. I know that I will not die, since I am inside of life. All of life surges within me. He is in my heart, yet he remains in heaven. Here and there, equally dazzling, he reveals himself to me.

How can all of this come about? How can I accurately understand it? How would I be able to express all that I understand and see? In truth, these are indescribable things, utterly ineffable.

In similar manner, but with even stronger expression, St. Simeon speaks of this in another hymn. He writes:

He himself is discovered within me, resplendent inside my wretched heart, enlightening me from all sides with his immortal splendor, shining on all of my members with his rays. Entirely intertwined with me, he embraces me entirely. He gives himself totally to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with his love and beauty. I am sated with pleasure and divine tenderness. I share in the light. I participate also in the glory. My face shines like that of my beloved, and all my members become bearers of the light.

This illumination, this deification, that Christ offers, does not end with this life, nor is it static in the life to come. It is only the beginning of a progress that will never end. “Indeed,” says St. Simeon, in the passage that I read last night, “over the ages, the progress will be endless, for a cessation of this growing toward the end-without-ending, would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable. The one on whom no one can be sated, would then become an object of satiety. On the contrary, to be filled with him, and to be glorified in his light, will cause unfathomable progress.”

This eternal progress was originally intended for man, who was ever to rise in a vision of God, but man lost that possibility when he departed from the way. Through Christ, who was called the New Adam, this possibility is once more open to mankind in his Church.

But it is not only man’s soul which can experience everlasting deification, everlasting progress towards God. As we discussed earlier, through his redemptive work, Christ destroyed, not only spiritual death, but also physical death.

These two types of death are overcome, in turn, by Christ, the New Adam, just as they were introduced into the world through the first Adam. Because of Adam’s fall, first, spiritual death entered the world, then physical death. Likewise, spiritual death is first overcome by Christ, then physical death.

We can experience the overcoming of spiritual death, in other words, a spiritual resurrection, even now, in Christ’s Church, by experiencing the life of God within us, vivifying us, transforming us into his likeness. And finally, in the general resurrection, which has been made possible by Christ’s resurrection, we will experience the overcoming of physical death, as well—our physical resurrection.

It is in the general resurrection that all the fruits of Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, are to be fully revealed. At that time, because Christ rose from the dead, becoming the first-fruits of those who slept (or who had fallen asleep, according to the words of St. Paul), the unnatural separation of the soul from the body at death, which began at the Fall, will be overcome for all mankind, and man will experience everlasting physical life in bodies that have been made, once again, incorruptible. “The dead shall be raised incorruptible,” writes the apostle Paul, “and we shall be changed.” Moreover, the entire visible creation will be recreated and become incorruptible, along with man, since it exists for man’s sake.

But again, it was not only to restore what the first Adam had ruined, that the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, came upon this earth. Christ also came to accomplish what the first Adam had failed to accomplish. Man had been created for deification. As St. Simeon the New Theologian, writes:

If Adam and Eve had not fallen, the soul of each would have become brighter, and the perceptible and material body of each, altered and changed into an immaterial and spiritual one, into something beyond sense perception. And man would have been led up, in due time, to a more perfect glory and transformation, drawing nearer to God, and to the rays which spring from his divinity.

As we have seen, through his redemptive work, Christ has already granted to man the possibility to experience such a deification of soul, in and through his Church—a deification that is to grow and become more perfect in the life to come. In the general resurrection, however, he will do more than this. In reuniting man's soul with his body, he will raise man in a body that is not only incorruptible, but also spiritual, and will grant an everlasting deification to man's body, together with his soul.

Furthermore, he will make the entire cosmos to be a spiritual dwelling-place for man, and will grant unending deification to the entire cosmos, together with man. God will be all in all. All this, and the immutable glory of the future age, has been made possible by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Through the totality of Christ's redemptive work, man is spiritually united with God and deified, man can attain to paradise and heaven after death, and at the general resurrection, man's body and the entire creation are to be renewed as an incorruptible, spiritual, and divine, deified dwelling-place.

Our Orthodox Christian faith is eschatological. That means we look forward to faith and hope to the future age that will come into being through Jesus Christ. But as we have seen, the union with God that Christ has made possible for man does not begin at the general resurrection. It is possible for us begin the way to this union, even now, and to experience foretastes of it, even in this life. We have abundant counsels and testimonies of those who have endured to the end on the narrow path toward union with God, and who are enjoying it eternally in the heavens, even now.

Images of them are depicted all over church. These holy ones beckon us to follow them, and they pray for us to reach the blessed realms in which they now live. What hinders us? Only

our laziness, our stubborn attachment to our sinful passions. Let us, therefore, cut off these passions at the root, by cutting off the thoughts which engender them. Above all, let us continually turn our minds and hearts to him who has the power to save us from our sins, and to grant everlasting deification to our souls and bodies.

May we place our whole life and hope in his hands, which were outstretched to us and to the whole world on the Cross. May we gratefully accept his loving invitation, “Abide in me, and I in you,” forever drawing closer to him who is the Resurrection and the Life, our only true life. Amen.

Questioner 1: When you’re talking about images, how do icons work in that—because if we pray in front of icons we’re not supposed to have the image in our minds?

Fr. Damascene: We have icons in the Church that are visual reminders to us of the saints, although we don’t worship the icons. We know God can impart grace through icons. We have miracle-working icons. Of course, it’s not the icons that work the miracle, it’s God’s grace that works the miracles through the icons. So in the Orthodox Church, we don’t deny matter as imparting grace. Grace is imparted through matter, and we are living in a material world. We’re physical beings. When God was incarnate in Jesus Christ, he was in body, and he imparted his grace through his body. The saints were followers of Christ, as Saint Justin Popović said, the saints continued to live Christ’s life on earth by embodying Christ, having Christ living within them. And so the saints also through their bodies—the physical world—impart the grace of God to mankind, and even after they die, God can impart his grace through the relics of the saints, and we also have the images of Christ and the mother of God and the angels and the saints which remind us of God. We call them “windows into heaven.” They depict a reality not of this world. That’s why in icons, the sky is often golden, which represents a light not of this world. There are no shadows in icons. You won’t see a shadow under the mother of God’s feet, for example, because they’re only in heaven where there is no shadow at all.

So we’re depicting an other-worldly reality. That’s why their faces and their clothes are rather stylized. And so we’re, in a sense, looking into heaven, and they’re reminding us of the reality of heaven, the reality that the saints are still alive and are present, and that the Church Triumphant in heaven is united

together with the Church on earth and that we're all one in the body of Christ. And so we have these icons in worship, in the Church, we also have icons at home, but when we're in private prayer, we're not supposed to, as I said, form mental images in our minds. Also, we really don't have the practice of staring at an icon as we're praying. We have these icons—we have them there to remind us. We look up to the iconostasis, and it shows that image of heaven, the mother of God, and heaven with Christ, depicted within her, but these reminders are not there for us to stare at. You can kind of fall into delusion. You know, you have some people who are not Orthodox, they take icons, and they have these teachings about praying with icons, and they have these ideas about looking at the icon and staring at it. This is really not an Orthodox practice. I know, for example, a person can start staring at the icon and then praying and then imagining the mother of God smiling at them or winking or something like that. They're falling into a kind of a delusion out of that. So yeah, we do not stare and look at icons like this. We look up at them. It reminds ourselves, but when the prayer itself occurs, it's not with images, either mental images or staring at icon images.

Q 2: Thank you for taking the time to share the fruit of your lifetime of labor and reading with us because it's a tremendous blessing for us. For those of especially who, you know, won't have an opportunity to read those things and so forth or who, without naming any names, are way too lazy to read them for ourselves.

You mentioned that it was Descartes who said "I think therefore I am," and I was wondering, what would be the Orthodox equivalent of that? Would it be "I pray therefore I am," "I commune therefore I am," "I am, therefore I am"? I know that one sounds a little bit moving towards blasphemy.

Fr. Damascene: Yeah, the last one is a little bit presumptuous. There's a book by the nephew of Archimandrite Sophrony, living in Essex. It's basically a distillation of Archimandrite Sophrony's teachings. The name of the book is I Love Therefore I Am. In other words, if we're in isolation, if we're living in isolation, thinking we're sufficient until ourselves, then we're not really fully persons. We haven't fully expressed our personhood, that our personhood, that uniqueness of our being is really fully realized only through love, by reaching out beyond ourselves and loving. Of course, we are first of all to love God, and, in loving God, we love all people.

And so, it's really by love that we learn to, we come to really

know ourselves and experience who God created us as, in its full sense. As Archimandrite Sophrony said, you know, God revealed himself as “I Am,” and we believe that he created us, beings outside of himself, in order to come to him and share in his goodness and his love and to become one with him. So, in order to know the “I Am,” the true I Am, we have to come to him with love. So, I think you could answer it in various ways, but maybe the best one would say “I love, therefore I am.”

Q 3: Father, during the prayer, when you’re looking at the icon and praying, or listening and praying, when a blasphemous thought occurs, how would you battle with those? Would you ignore and call upon the name of the Lord or the saint to help us, or would you just ignore and keep on praying what you’re praying?

Fr. Damascene: Either one. It depends on what’s more effective for you at that particular time. The holy Fathers say, and this is written, and universal in what I’ve read, that when a blasphemous thought comes, we know it’s from the devil. Because if we’re standing in prayer and we’re standing in church and an evil thought against a holy thing comes, we know that it’s not from us. We wouldn’t form such a thought. The devil’s putting such a thought in our mind to defile our prayer. And he wants to get us upset. Like, (gasp) “How could I think such a thought?” you know? You get all scandalized with yourself, and you think that it came from you, but it didn’t. It came from the devil.

So therefore, you just don’t pay attention. The devil is proud. He wants people to pay attention to him, so if we don’t pay attention to him, he can’t do anything. So you return your mind to your prayer and also you could say, “Lord, have mercy.” St. John Climacus talks about calling upon God in times of temptation like that, and St. Theophan the Recluse in the passage that I read says we know that these thoughts come from the devil, and they’re called “tempting thoughts.” So yeah, ignore it, just let it go, and you can call upon the name of the Lord. Do not get scandalized or upset with yourself. It’s not coming from you. It’s coming from the evil one.

Q 4: A lot of some of the Desert Fathers did things like made baskets and so forth to make a living. In my life and I think a lot of people’s lives, what we do is that we manipulate symbols, a kind of rational thought. How do you reconcile that? You know, what we have to do every day to make a living, keep the wolf from the door, from what you’ve said, which makes a lot of

sense, that prayer or contemplation of God is beyond—it's not rationalization, it's not logical. How does one reconcile—well, you write books and I'm sure you have to copy-edit your books, take notes, and all that kind of thing. How do you rationalize, how do you deal with that seeming contradiction? How does one achieve prayer that's experiential rather than logical when you're kind of keeping the wolf from the door with manipulating symbols?

Fr. Damascene: That's a good question. Well, we're given various tasks to do in our lives. We have to earn a living and even in the monastery, we have to support ourselves, and in our monastery we do it through publishing books, and other brothers have other obediences, and we just go about our work and do it as an obedience before God, accountable before God. And we do it with prayer. We always pray before we work. We should be turning our minds to prayer during the work as often as possible, and we just go about the work, and we can use our minds.

There's no injunction that we can't use our minds to do the work that needs to be done in our lives—we need to. But what Elder Paisios was saying when he said, “Never believe your thoughts” is we just shouldn't put final trust in the calculations of our minds or our opinions.

We had to form some kind of ideas, and St. Theophan the Recluse says we kind of take a stand for it as if we're all in blood. I had this thought, therefore it's my thought, therefore, I've got to fight for it. You don't know. Your thought might be a deluded thought, it might be a wrong thought, it could come from the devil, we don't know, but you can't put absolute trust in that thought. That's why we have accountability in the Church so that we're not just trusting ourselves and doing our own will all of the time. You know, I have this thought, I want to do something, then in the monastery you'd go before the spiritual father and say, “Will you bless me to do this, what do you think of this idea?” In our lives, if you're not in a monastery, you're in a parish, you go to your spiritual father, your parish priest. In a marriage, you go to your spouse. You make sure that if you have this idea, if I want to move to another city, you can't just go, buy the plane tickets and buy a house without checking with your spouse, you have to be accountable.

So, God's will is manifest in our lives through a life of accountability in whatever place that God has placed us. Elder Paisios gave a few examples of a people that believe their thoughts—and these are kind of radical examples, some are kind

of extreme examples, but it's just going to give us an idea of what we also do, maybe not to such an extreme degree. There was a monk who believed that there was a bird that was making a noise inside of his ear. He had this idea, so all the brothers would try to talk to him, and he wouldn't listen—he was convinced there was a little bird. So then Elder Paisios went to him one day, and he said, "Oh, let me put my hand here," and he pretended to catch the bird. He says "I got him!" and then the guy was free from the thought. (laughter) And then there was another monk who fell into delusion. This happens sometimes. He fell into delusion, and he locked himself in his cell, and he decided he was going to become a martyr by killing himself. And so he started to cut himself, just a little bit. Not too much because he had the idea, but actually to pull it off was too much for him. So the abbot came in and saw him doing it, and the abbot started beating him. And he says, "Don't hurt me, don't hurt me!" And he says, "You want to be a martyr, but you can't even stand a little beating!" (laughter) And so the monk said "Ah!" and the monk came to his senses. After that, he gave up this idea of being a martyr.

And that's kind of an example of we get these thoughts in our head, like I said—maybe we don't have such extreme thoughts—but we get these thoughts in our head, we get attached to these thoughts, and we're convinced we've got to do them, and maybe they're not from God. We have to be more humble and not put absolute trust in our own thinking. So, we still use our minds, we use our reason to do the jobs that we're blessed to do, or given to do, that we need to do in our lives to support our families, to use the talents that God has given us.

Q 5: Forgive my ignorance, but when praying the Jesus Prayer, what is actually the proper use and purpose of the prayer rope?

Fr. Damascene: If we're given a prayer rule, then we'll count the beads, the knots on the prayer rope. If you're given a prayer rule of 100 Jesus Prayers, you have 100 and you can do it that way. Some holy Fathers say that you do it so you don't have this illusion that you're doing it more than you think you are. That's one reason. I've got a practical reason. It really depends on your prayer rule, the prayer rule that you've been blessed to do by your spiritual father. St. Theophan the Recluse says that in some cases, a person can be given, instead of a set number of prayers, a person can have a certain time of prayer set aside, like 20 minutes, half an hour in the morning, something similar in the evening, and then can do whatever prayers they can during that

time. In which case, you can do some number of Jesus Prayers—you don't necessarily have to use a prayer rope—and say some prayers from a prayer book and then pray in your own words.

But more often, people pray with a prayer rope so that they have this specific number of prayers that they can do. So, it really depends on the person and what the person's particular prayer rule is, and that person's prayer rule can change as the person kind of finds what is best suited to him. Yeah, we normally keep the prayer rope in the left pocket, because when we use the prayer rope, we use the left hand so we can cross ourselves with the right hand. So it's good to have that prayer rope in that pocket so that we can pull it out when we need it, and we can remember God. And we can do the Jesus Prayer anytime as I said. You can do it while you're riding on the bus, commuting somewhere, and for example, if you're driving and you don't necessarily need to use a prayer rope, you can just say it, just repeat the Jesus Prayer without the prayer rope. It's not absolutely necessary, but it's helpful in many cases.

Q 6: The things that we've heard today are so far from where many of us might find ourselves that I think if we don't—if we're not careful, we could fall into despair, because we are so far from the mark. And I'm wondering if you could address that matter.

Fr. Damascene: Yes, thank you for bringing that up. At the end of the talk, I spoke about the very heights of union with God, deification, just to show what's been made possible by Jesus Christ and what's possible in his Church. A lot of people don't know that, and I think it's helpful to know what Jesus Christ has done, what he's made available for us, to inspire us. But at the same time, we have to realize, as Fr. Seraphim Rose used to say all the time, that we are on a very low spiritual level and that we're just beginning spiritual life at the lowest step. We can look to these saints and read about Archimandrite Sophrony or St. Simeon the Theologian, and we can admire them and they can inspire us, but we know that they are far above us: to lead us to humility, but not to despair. Because the same way to salvation and deification that was open to St. Simeon the Theologian has been opened to us, and as Fr. Seraphim would say, "Yes, we're beginning spiritual life at the lowest step, but if we just continue going, step by step, a day at a time, and are just humbly aware of our own infirmity, then there's nothing that can take us off the path." And we can walk, step by step in that way to the kingdom

of heaven.

So, again, these accounts of deification and also when you read lives of saints about the great feats of the martyrs and how they had such a profound faith, these should lead us to humility and spur us on to take up this path and follow it, the narrow path to salvation and deification, step by step. I did say in the talk that we—there's deification in the broad sense and deification in the strict sense and all those who have been baptized into the Church and received Holy Communion have been deified in the broad sense of the word. So we all have that potential, we all have that seed of grace implanted in us at baptism, and we are to cultivate the seed. And this is the full meaning of salvation in the Orthodox Church. We're saved from sin as I mentioned earlier. We are forgiven of sin by Christ, we are cleansed of sin. The way of heaven is open to us, but it's a progress, it's a path, it's a journey of growing more and more in the likeness of God, having God's life fill us more and more, becoming more close to God and more in communion and in union with God. And this journey, this path towards deification is never to end. It continues forever. Even the angels in heaven who are beholding God, they are forever progressing towards God, because God is fathomless. Yes?

Q 7: From your presentation, the Orthodox seem to really like Greek thought, especially if it's from 0-1000 CE and distress current or even modern philosophy or scientific discovery. You, being Orthodox, seem to reject current psychology, astronomy, biology, or any empirical method. You even seem to gleefully reject reason and logic, though many Church Fathers like Justin Martyr, Athanasius, etc., sought to explain their faith reasonably and with good logic. But it says if Orthodoxy is defined by its archaicism and characterized by irrelevance. I'm not a Christian, but I'm a fan of Orthodox Christianity in general, and so this is disconcerting to me. I was wondering why is it compromising to your faith to set it in the context of current scientific knowledge? Why is better to lock your faith in time, as it were, within the first millennium?

You might say that scientific understanding is always subject to new discovery and therefore change. But from this—I'm sorry, from this, you may go on to say that's counterproductive or pointless at best to constantly try and make one's faith work within a scientific paradigm, but Church Fathers used their scientific understanding to explain their faith. Granted, science and philosophy were in bed together at the time, so it looked

different, but the Fathers' discussions of the body, the mind, the will, cosmos, etc., those are all spoken through primitive scientific views. Even the dual nature of Christ is sometimes explained by analogy to the elements of sea and fire being both present simultaneously. So, by keeping your scientific paradigm situated in the first millennium in order to keep your faith from undergoing certain paradigm shifts, are you not putting yourself in the same position as the dogmatic Jews, scribes, or secular philosophers who refuse to accept the gospel or even the staunch Protestants who believe in Sola Scriptura?

Fr. Damascene: Well, we don't reject scientific knowledge. I know I talked about not trusting our logical minds to come to absolute truth, but we still use our minds, we still use our reason, and we can still employ science and scientific method. There are many Orthodox Christians who are scientists. I've attended on three occasions a conference in Moscow [at] which we talk about the Orthodox understanding of the creation of the world, and there are scientists, Ph.D.s teaching in the universities and working in various scientific establishments in Russia, and also they come from other countries, who come and give lectures. There are some theological lectures, but most of them, the majority of them are scientific lectures. So, we do.

We don't deny scientific knowledge. It's also important to understand that scientific projects of today often can't be separated from certain presuppositions, and so Orthodox Christians, having faith in God and faith in the revelation of Christ and his Church through the holy Fathers who understood things through divine vision or contemplation—in Greek it's *theoria*—they have given us an outlook on the world and a whole world view which I tried to bring out in my talk. You might call it a cosmology. And so, when we approach scientific knowledge, we do it from that worldview. We don't necessarily use all this science of the first century or the first ten centuries. Obviously, scientists that have come to these conferences and write papers—I have a few that have written some papers for my new version of Fr. Seraphim's book on Genesis. These people are using scientific knowledge that has been recently discovered, some of it cutting edge [including] geological research and biological research into genetics. The articles are published in the proceedings of these Orthodox conferences which bring out the very latest information about mutations, for example. So we're not stuck in the first ten centuries. We are dealing with scientific knowledge as it is today, but we're looking at it with

the presuppositions, or what you might call metaphysical presuppositions, of our Orthodox faith, because much of modern science is based on the presupposition of naturalism, and that is: “Nature is all there is, matter is all there is,” materialism, they call it methodological naturalism, and we, of course, don’t come at it with that presupposition. There are different presuppositions. So, we are looking at the same evidence, doing the same kind of scientific work, but looking at the evidence from a different worldview, and there’s no way to empirically prove the worldview. There’s no way to prove the presuppositions. These presuppositions are a matter of faith, and so we have faith in God as God has revealed himself in the Christian Church through the Holy Scriptures and holy Fathers. And those who believe in naturalism also have a faith: that nature is all there is, that we came to be through impersonal, natural forces. So we recognize that our faith can’t be empirically proved, but we also realize that the faith in naturalism can’t be empirically proved.

Q 8: I think that your Chinese analysis is interesting because with methodological naturalism, you would have the head below the heart, and this must be providential because I am one of these Ph.D.s who believes in the apostolic faith, albeit I’m Eastern Catholic. But at any rate, I agree with what you said about the priority of logic is simply not first.

Fr. Damascene: Right, faith above logic. There was a philosopher in Russia named Ivan Kireyevsky who was a disciple of Elder Macarius of Moscow, and he said that the reason must be submitted to faith. St. Theophan the Recluse also talked at length about that. These are both in the 19th century.

Q 8: You mentioned Justin Martyr’s interaction with the Logos and St. John the Theologian. Would you care to comment to comment about another with Thomas Merton’s analysis of eastern religion and eastern philosophy, to compare and contrast that with your work and Fr. Seraphim’s work?

Fr. Damascene: Yes, that’s not something I’d really like to talk about, but... Sorry if I offend anybody here, but I really regard Thomas Merton as a tragedy, a tragic figure, a man who lost his faith. I don’t know, maybe he wasn’t getting it from the tradition he was in for whatever reason, but his gradual loss of faith until, at the end they said he about to go into Zen Buddhist initiation, and I think that showed that he really wasn’t fulfilled in what he had in his own tradition. And so I don’t think we should look to him as a model to emulate and as a person who is leading the

way in the Roman Catholic Church or anywhere else. I think he should be looked at as a person that should be pitied such as a tragic, tragic person.

So my approach is obviously very different than his. As I tried to say at the beginning of my talk last night, my book is not a work of religious syncretism. It's not saying that all religions are one and everything is equal, but it's using the Tao Te Ching as a springboard to show to people that whatever is true in eastern religions is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and, specifically, in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Church of Jesus Christ. So, I showed Lao Tzu as a foreshadowing of what would be revealed by Christ. It's really not necessary for Christians to study the Tao Te Ching, but that's not why I'm bringing this up. But it's more of a bridge book for people outside the faith to help them appreciate the mystical depths of the Orthodox Faith by looking at this ancient Chinese philosopher whose insights, intuitive insights, foreshadowed and confirmed by what was revealed and fulfilled in its fullness through Jesus Christ. So there is a big difference, as I see it, in my approach and that of Thomas Merton.

Q 9: Earlier, you answered the question on the icons, and you were saying we're not to stare at the icons when praying. And in my former Protestant faith, "we bow our heads and close our eyes," what then are we to do with our eyes when we're praying?

Fr. Damascene: Well, we can look up at the icons, but when I said don't stare, I meant don't be like, "Look at Jesus, is he looking at me? What's the expression on his face?" (laughter) Not like that. You can stand in church looking up at the icons and pray. You don't have to keep your eyes closed the whole time in Divine Liturgy. You can read from the Divine Liturgy book. You shouldn't be reading a separate prayer book during the Divine Liturgy (for example, just because you missed your morning prayers before going to church). You can pray looking up at the icons, look down, look up at the priest serving. As I said, we don't believe that matter is evil and we use the icons and the music and the incense in order to—so that our senses, through our senses, we are reminded of the presence of God and of heaven, and the icons are just one facet, they're a visual facet. We have the hearing facet which is the music. We have the smell, the incense, and so on.

Q 10: I had a question basically related to the Jesus Prayer. You kind of explained that it's somewhat later on the scene, between

the 4th and 14th century?

Fr. Damascene: Well, the Philokalia was written between the 4th and 14th century... There was a saint—I think in Egypt they found an ancient inscription from the fourth century—of the Jesus Prayer. So it was practiced very early about that time, about the fourth century.

Q 10: But nevertheless, at least three or four hundred years after Christ and the New Testament. I guess my struggle is that I don't know how important it should be in the life of a Christian if it came on the scene so late. Obviously there's some fruit in people seeing the divine light, but is it producing the quality of people that the Early Church saw, people that are doing the things Jesus did, fulfilling the Great Commission and discipling nations... But the earlier disciples, they clearly had a vibrant prayer life themselves, but they also saw it as their role to go and take the Gospel to the nations. So, could the Jesus Prayer be a form for some, but maybe a distraction to some of the more simple things that the Gospels make known? That's what I'm struggling with because I'm just not seeing anyone like St. Patrick around practicing the Jesus Prayer and doing the things that the Apostles did.

Fr. Damascene: Yes, the Jesus Prayer is obviously not necessary for salvation. I mean, I quoted from St. Theophan the Recluse. There could be other prayers that you could be saying besides the Jesus Prayer. It's not like Christ came to give us the Jesus Prayer. (laughter) But the Jesus Prayer has been taken up in the Church because it is so effective. In the experience of the Church, it has been found to be so effective in bringing us into communion with God. So just because it started as a practice 300 years after Christ doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. And there are people who are in the Church who lived as apostles of Christ in more recent times who practiced the Jesus Prayer. I mean we have, in America, our first canonized saint, St. Herman of Alaska, was a practitioner of the Jesus Prayer. His spiritual father, Abbot Nazarius of Valaam was one of the ones who was responsible for compiling the Philokalia in Russian or having it printed in Slavonic.

So St. Herman of Alaska, even before it was printed, had certain texts of the Philokalia with him in Slavonic, and he was practicing. He was America's first apostle, really. He came here as a missionary, as an apostle, to preach the gospel to the Native Americans in Alaska, and also, to some degree, to the Russian fur trappers up in Alaska who were kind of falling away from

the faith. Primarily to the natives, he came as an apostle. So, he had both, he did both. He was practicing this unceasing prayer, the prayer of the heart, the Jesus Prayer. He reached great, great heights of sanctity, and he was serving an apostle of Christ. And not only an apostle of Christ, preaching the gospel to the people, but he also cared for them in sickness, especially when they had plagues in the villages when the diseases came over from Europe, and many, many thousands of Native Americans were killed or died because of these diseases. St. Herman was nursing these people and caring for them as a father. So he showed this abundant love and this apostolic zeal and was always preaching the Gospel, and at the same time had the Jesus Prayer enshrined in his heart.

Then we also have even closer, we have St. John of Shanghai in San Francisco, who was, of course, practicing the Jesus Prayer and also was a great apostle who also had this idea of bringing the gospel, the Orthodox gospel of Christ to all nations, so he went many places. He was in China, and he was in Europe, and finally in America, and each place he went, he knew we have to find and venerate the local saints. He was one of the first people to venerate St. Herman of Alaska even before he was canonized, and to bring the Gospel to all nations in their own languages.

So, the Jesus Prayer is not absolutely necessary, but it's very effective, so everybody's encouraged to do it. And you can be an apostle of Christ and at the same time, do the Jesus Prayer.

People are called to different things. Some people are called to be monks living in their cells and praying for the world, and others are called to do more apostolic work, but even those who are in their cells and doing the Jesus Prayer, their prayer is not just for themselves, but it's for the whole world. Archimandrite Sophrony, by the way, really emphasized this with his spiritual children, especially the monks and nuns in his monastery, this practice of praying for the whole world, not just for yourself, and really feeling pain for all the suffering in the world.

If you remember, in this account that I read, Archimandrite Sophrony was saying that when he was flooded with this divine light, he really felt the pain of the world, and he felt that all of creation was suffering because of man's sin. And so, he prayed in travail for man and all of creation, and so these—although this may not be apostolic work in the sense of exactly what the Apostles did, but this is also very important and essential for upholding the world, and those who—some are given to do apostolic work like St. Herman, St. John, and others are not, but

each Christian, if he's really coming closer to God, and coming closer to Christ, his concern is not just for himself and not just for the immediate people in his immediate vicinity, but for everyone and ultimately for all creation.

Q 11: Please take with you our love and regard to our fathers and brothers at St. Herman's for their being on the frontlines, so to speak, of the struggle. My question has to do with you touched briefly on the concept of judging, and, in our present society, there seems to be a lot of people who have taken our Lord's admonition of "judging lest we be judged"—or "not judging"—to such an extreme that we've lost the ability to discern things that are right or wrong or indifferent. So, I guess, I don't know if it's an issue of terminology between "condemning" and "judging" and "discerning." So, if you could flesh that out for us, that would be really appreciated. I hope I've been somewhat clear.

Fr. Damascene: I know what you mean. Sometimes, when somebody does something wrong, we have to do something about it. You can't just let everything go, right? That's clear. But we don't make any absolute conclusions about that person. That person has done something wrong, and in some cases, we need to do something about it, and in some cases we don't necessarily. I can't make an absolute rule for everything, you know, for every situation. That's why you have to use discernment. But not to make an absolute conclusion about that person.

And also, not about ourselves either. We are to accuse ourselves of our sins and what we've done, but we shouldn't judge ourselves. There's a difference between what we call self-accusation and what we might call self-condemnation or self-judgment. Often people get confused with the two, between the two of them, and they will start condemning themselves, judging themselves, and then that leads to despair, or at least to depression. In other words, I could say—I could look at myself and say, well, "I did this wrong, God forgive me," and "I have this tendency"—and that's good. We should be looking at ourselves to see that: I have this particular attraction to this sin and I did this sin. It's good to acknowledge that and see that, so we can repent and change. But if I'd say to myself, "Oh, I am totally no good, I am going to hell, there's no hope for me, I'm a reject, God made a mistake when he created me," you know, then that leads to despair.

It's actually ultimately a judgment against God, because, as I

said, you're actually telling that God made a mistake. So we should be careful with that, and the same thing about other people. We can acknowledge a person did a wrong thing, but not to stew about it and think about and work ourselves up about it, and build up resentment about it. In some cases, something needs to be done, and if we can do it without passion, without anger, without malice, and without condemning the person, making a final judgment on that person's soul, and having some emotional reaction, or even resentment which is not such an obvious emotion; it's kind of a response, a sinful response of harboring a condemnation of others based on whatever they may have done or we may have perceived they may have done. Yes?

Q 12: As you're thinking about Lao Tzu, that his writings were just a foreshadowing of what was to come in, as you say, the fulfillment of the Tao, or do you feel that practices that came about through Taoism that led to things like traditional oriental medicine and feng shui and qigong, and that type of thing would be beneficial to Christians or people of all faiths? And, to that end, do you think the idea of cultivating immortality through harmony with nature is a departing point for Christians and Taoists, or do you think that that's a point of agreement?

Fr. Damascene: Cultivating immortality with harmony with nature?

Q 12: Well, the idea of using Taoist practices to pull your body and mind and spirit more in harmony with the creation around us? Do you think that that concept would be a departing point where the Taoists and the Christians would depart, or do you think that it's an idea where we would be in agreement? I'm thinking of things like, for example, the relationship of man and animals can be seen through maybe the traditions of the saints that we have, where you have certain saints that were able to commune with nature in a way that was very harmonious and more like the pre-Fall state? And you also see that in the teachings about the Taoist masters. So I'm just wondering that's a point where you think that Taoism and Christianity is in agreement, or if you feel that the whole concept of trying to achieve harmony with nature in an effort to cultivate immortality would be more a teaching that's not, I don't know, Orthodox?

Fr. Damascene: I know what you're saying. Well, if you're trying to cultivate harmony with nature, that's a good thing, but in Taoism as it later developed, we have a different basis than in the Christian faith. And the whole idea of cultivating

immortality: would it be different in what developed later in Taoism than it is in Christianity? So that would definitely be a point of departure. And as I said earlier, in Christianity when Christ came and bestowed his grace upon mankind, and people could be filled with his grace through the holy mysteries, then the acquisition of uncreated energy, which is union with God, became the overriding concern so that cultivation of energy, chi, turning into ching, turning into shen, and these things, it's not part of Christian practice. It's not something that a Christian would pursue, because we have another pursuit, which we've been given the fullness of the revelation of God. We've been given the fullness of the means. Whether or not we take the means, and use them or utilize them, we've still been given the fullness of means towards union with God. So this becomes our overriding concern.

We also believe in a personal God, and so what later developed in Taoism, they don't have that same understanding of a personal god. I think it was even somewhat lost after Lao Tzu because of the later Chuang Tzu—you can read his writings; he doesn't even have that sense of the benevolence of the Tao and the Tao caring for things. This is not just my opinion. There is a Shambhala book of Taoism; they say the same thing, that that idea was kind of lost even after Lao Tzu.

So, what, in later forms of Taoism, developed was a worldview without a personal god, and so feng shui and these things, they're based on a worldview without a personal god. And we believe that there is God's providence and God is overshadowing everyone, that he is a person like we are, and so that changes the whole worldview. And so, that's a fundamental difference. That's why in my talk I stuck to Lao Tzu who even though he didn't have a full understanding of the personal God, at least he had some intuitive awareness of the Tao as a benevolent being who cares for and shelters and nurtures creation. So we can't go too far with that, making those comparisons.

You mentioned Chinese medicine. The Chinese have been doing this medicine for thousands of years, and they found certain herbs that can do—that can help people. I think that's okay, that's fine. But we have to realize that there is a different worldview there, and we have to be conscious of that. And, above all, we have to understand that this cultivation of energy outside the Christian Church—outside the Orthodox Church because only the Orthodox Church only really has a full

understanding of the uncreated energy of God—it's different outside of the Church. And so I wouldn't recommend mixing and matching and trying to practice both at the same time, because we're given, in the Orthodox Church, the fullness of the revelation of God, the full means of coming into contact with God and acquiring his energy.

It's not like it's a getting of energy, you know what I mean?

When I talk about acquiring energy, it's not something impersonal either. You just kind of use that term. St. Seraphim uses the term "acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit." And he talks about buying and selling. He says you're like a merchant who buys and sells. He finds the things that can make the most profit, and he buys those things. St. Seraphim says in the Christian life, you do the things that acquire the most grace. But it's not like acquiring a thing, you know? It's just a way of expressing the communion with God where God's life—what we call his energy—his life fills us more and more. So this is what we're after as Christians. And this is what I'm trying to speak about and try to open up some of the ways that are given to us in the Church of bringing, making this union with God or communion with God more complete.

Q 13: Last night, Father, when we were talking about the Tao, we talked a little about the concept of nothingness and the Tao Te Ching and how that's sort of understood as an attribute that the Tao has that sort of allows it to kind of forget itself, and it allows God to not have to worry about himself so much but sort of him being able to move beyond yourself and looking at the rest of the world and other people. And so I'm wondering if you could maybe talk a little bit more about how average Christians can use the Jesus Prayer as a tool to get to that point? Especially when maybe we have a lot of things about ourselves that we have to kind of be aware about or be watchful about and we can't totally forget necessarily, so how do we sort of mesh those two together?

Fr. Damascene: Okay, to reach what point use the Jesus Prayer?

Q 13: To kind of reach that point of, I guess, nothingness, that I understood in the sense that you were talking about last night where it's a sort of being able to forget one's self and move to the other? So how do we use the Jesus Prayer to get to that point?

Fr. Damascene: Well if you notice in that quote from Archimandrite Sophrony, he talks about being infused with the uncreated light of God, which means this full participation in the

divinity, and he describes this feeling of nothingness. The person becomes nothing before the whole world. It's really an experience of grace, you know. As we go beyond ourselves, as I mentioned earlier in the talk about yearning and longing. It's very important. It's a yearning of love, you know, towards God, and we express this longing to become him, to have his life fill us, to have him abide in us, so we can abide in him. We don't want to just live our own life. Our own life is temporary. Without God's grace, our life is nothing. As I said in the beginning, we couldn't exist for a moment without God, without God's grace, so we're nothing without him.

And so, as we come closer to him, as we long for him, we yearn for him, long to make his life our own, like Archimandrite Sophrony's book that influenced me so much *His Life is Mine*, then we become like a nothing, but at the same time, we're given strength, but our strength is not our own. It comes from God, and so that's why humility in the Orthodox Church doesn't mean just being like a doormat, having no sense of anything, no sense of self at all. It's more of a realizing that we of ourselves are nothing, but that our power is given from God. So if a person, if he's truly humble, he is actually stronger. A person can be stronger, but the ultimate strength is in humility. Because if we have pride, then someone can say something to us that goes against our grain, we get upset. Someone can put us down, ridicule us, we get upset. We want somebody to do something, if they don't do it, we get upset. Well, actually, that's a sign of weakness, because we are trying to take a stand for our own ego, but when we are truly humble, when we realize that we're nothing and that God is everything and God is caring for us and his providence overshadows everything, and his love is everywhere, and his wish is for our salvation and the salvation of the whole world, and we're filled more and more with his life, then people can say something to us, put us down, not do what we want them to do, and we won't be upset. Our feathers won't be ruffled because we have our strength in him, not in ourselves. And that's a kind of nothingness of knowing that without God we're nothing, but that God is all-in-all, and his mercy is overshadowing everything in our lives.

And through the Jesus Prayer, we strive to come to that state, we're expressing "Lord Jesus Christ," he's the Lord of our life, he's the Christ, he's the Savior, well, "Jesus" means "Savior." He's the Christ, he's the Anointed One of God; he's God, and he became man, and we ask "have mercy." We ask, "have mercy on

me,” it means I’m nothing before you, I’m a sinner. We even say in the longer form of the Jesus Prayer, “have mercy on me, a sinner.” I’m a sinner, I’m nothing, and I need you. So when we ask have mercy, it means everything. Everything is contained in that one phrase. It’s not just some things that God can do for us, it’s everything. It means “have mercy on me” because I’m nothing, I need to be filled with your life. I need to become one with you. So we’re actually praying that God will forgive us for our sins, cleanse us of sin, fill us with himself, do everything that we need for our lives, and, by extension, we’re praying for everybody around us, because in having mercy on—we’re all connected. So, we’re not only praying for ourselves.

Archimandrite Sophrony did sometimes have his spiritual children say, “have mercy on me and on my world,” so we’re praying for the whole world. But regardless of whether we say it that way or say it the simple way, we are putting ourselves under God, realizing with each prayer, each time we say the Jesus Prayer, we’re expressing that we’re not God. The Fall occurred through man wanting to be like God, wanting to become God, wanting to—of course we have this natural desire to be God that’s given to us, to become one with God, but man tried to take that, tried to grasp that, illegitimately, when he took the fruit. You know, “Eat of this fruit and you will be as God, knowing good and evil.” So each one of us has in ourselves this ego, you might say, this pride, self-esteem, in which we want to be God. It’s kind of what we call our “fallen nature,” but at the same time, we have the yearning for the real God, so in saying the Jesus Prayer, we are expressing that yearning for the real God, placing ourselves under the real God, and acknowledging that we are not God. And so, this way, we become more and more like nothing.

Q 14: I’ve got a question about, just for me personally, the meaning and symbolism about crossing yourself, and if that has anything to do with possibly breaking down meridian lines in your body with subtle energies that certain ancient eastern philosophies have?

Fr. Damascene: No, we don’t do that. No, as I said, in the Christian faith, we don’t get into any of that stuff because [there is] something better. The aim of Christian life is the acquisition—as I tried to explain what that means, according to St. Seraphim, “acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit,” which is uncreated, which is God himself, and so we’re not into the meridian lines or energies or human energies or that kind of

thing. What we do—but there is a symbolism in the Sign of the Cross. There's quite a bit of it actually.

The Orthodox Sign of the Cross, we put these three fingers together for the Holy Trinity, and we put these two down for confessing that Christ, that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, having a divine human nature, and a divine will and a human will, divine energy, human energy in one person. And we cross ourselves, that God would enlighten our mind, that he will establish himself in our heart, enlighten our hearts, and that he will bless our work, with the arms. And the Sign of the Cross over our heart because it's through the Cross that sin and death, devil, Hades, are overcome, and man is given new life and we are restored to God, to paradise, to heaven through the Cross. And so, of course, the demons fear the cross, because by the Cross, the power has been destroyed. So that's why we sign ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. So there is quite a bit of symbolism in that Sign of the Cross.

Q 15: I just had a simple question. It's not wrong to have a komboskini on your right hand, right?

Fr. Damascene: Well, if there's a specific reason why you need it in your right hand, that's fine, that's not a problem. It's not a sin. (laughter) If you go to confession about it, your priest is not going to stop you from doing it, but it's just practical. It's just normally you have a komboskini in your left pocket, you have it in your left hand, so that you can make the Sign of the Cross with your right hand. Russian prayer ropes usually have a bead every 10 knots, so that if you're standing while you're praying the Jesus Prayer, you can cross yourself and make a bow every 10, so yeah.

Q 15: It's just a habit.

Fr. Damascene: Some people, when they pray, make the Sign of the Cross every Jesus Prayer. There are different ways of doing it. So, there's not an absolute law about having it in your left hand.

Q 16: Thank you for your time you've spent here with us. I have a question largely about the Holy Spirit, and you've been talking about the acquisition of grace, or maybe even the day, as an energy. And I was just wondering about your thoughts on the acquisition of the grace, and to the communion of the Holy Spirit as a person, and the personal connection, and even the voice of the Holy Spirit, how the impressions that he gives versus—you can clear your mind of the thoughts that might be coming from any number of different places, but then, the

attentiveness to the voice of the Spirit and things like that. The impressions even the apostles had in going one place or another, or doing one thing, like Philip on the road down to meet the eunuch and, you know, just that connection that, even when you get to the point with the communion with the Spirit, the attentiveness to the voice and the personhood.

Fr. Damascene: I'm sorry, what is the question though? I didn't quite get that.

Q 16: Oh, just your thoughts on that, like I don't know—kind of when you were talking about like the difference between our own thoughts and then just the difference between divine thoughts and then our own thoughts, and just thoughts about that. How to—when you get to the place of communion with the Spirit?

Fr. Damascene: God can communicate himself with words in our heart which is kind of rare, and we shouldn't try to cultivate that, and we shouldn't try to seek for that because we can fall into delusion that way, thinking that any thought or words that comes into our heart are from God. But yeah, God can communicate himself—communicate with us in that way. But more often, it's wordless, it's a wordless communion. We feel God's presence within us. We feel God when we're praying; we feel that God is present. We're speaking to him, and he's alive and he's right there with us, he's hearing us. He's filling us with himself, and that's wordless, we're not hearing any voices. And if you even notice, when I read the accounts of deification from Archimandrite Sophrony and St. Simeon the New Theologian, there's no mention of any words. They didn't have to hear any words. They felt; they experienced God's light, and they were filled with love for all of creation. And St. Simeon the New Theologian said "I feel like I'm inside of life." That's why he felt himself and nothing also. He's inside of life and who's he? Nothing. And so, the deepest experience of God is usually beyond words. But sometimes, for a particular reason, God can communicate and say some words. It's possible that that happens, but it's not the main thing, and it's certainly not the thing we should be seeking.

And also, I should say this. We shouldn't be trying to seek the experience as St. Simeon the Theologian. Okay, if I say the Jesus Prayer enough, I'm going to get to this state. I read that passage from Elder Porphyrios we shouldn't think like "Oh, this is it!" you know? "What am I going to get out of this?" The Jesus Prayer should simply be done out of love for Jesus Christ,

and this is also what I read in some of these councils. We do it because we love him, and we want to come closer to him. He's the source of our life and union with him, as I've said many times, is the purpose of our life. Out of our longing for him, we just pray out of love. We're not doing it because we're trying to get an experience or get something out of him. And that's what true love is. You're not something you're doing in order to get something. It's just the natural longing and yearning that arises from the human soul made to come into contact with God.

Q 17: Father, I was a little curious about the idea, the possible relationship between revelation and the imagination. You had said that we are not to trust our dreams or our imagination. I understand that, in the case of prayer, not to let our imagination distract us, but I was a little curious when it comes to cases of like precognition or prophecy, like the Revelation of St. John, for instance, all these concepts being veiled by images, or God using our dreams to speak to us, revelation through dreams and whatnot. Obviously, I'm not talking about the street-corner psychic, but you know, genuine cases we see with the saints and the prophets and things like that.

Fr. Damascene: Of course, St. John the Theologian's vision and his account of it in the Book of Revelation is something very exceptional. It's certainly not something that we should cultivate. In the Protestant world, I know there's these "prophets" out there—I read one book, it's this guy who was driving to work in his car, and he's seeing this whole vision of armies fighting each other, and it kind of goes on and on all day long. And this is something that we don't practice or cultivate in the Orthodox Church at all. And in terms of dreams, as I said earlier, the holy Fathers say that the best practice is not to trust dreams.

Sometimes God can reveal himself in a dream, but, overall, those are rare cases, and if we're in the practice of trusting our dreams, then, as St. John Climacus says, we can really get off track. It's better just to be simple, and if we have—like I said, sometimes a dream kind of sticks with us, and we kind of know it, and we kind of discern, we think about it, if we have some kind of a dream if we think is from God, we should talk to our spiritual father or spiritual mother about it just to get it out so we're not just kind of imagining, ourselves, what it really is. And there could be a time where we have a dream where it's kind of special to us, but even then, I would think that we shouldn't place absolute trust in that and base our whole life on

that. And especially, we should bring it before our spiritual guide or spiritual mentor in the Church, just so we won't trust ourselves. Because through—if we're trusting our dreams, then we're trusting in ourselves. That's why I can't make an absolute law because sometimes God does reveal himself, but I'm trying to give you a general understanding of the picture. Yes?

Q 18: Father, you spoke about union with God as the fruit of the practice, and deification occurring, but by adoption and that once in heaven and the afterlife, there's still progress. I'm wondering is there any point that one is said to have reached spiritual perfection. I know in some traditions they refer to that—in other words, your work is done, you've done it. You've cast off Satan to the point where that influence is gone. You're not going to be falling into sin anymore. Within this life or in the next life, is this something that's a part of the Orthodox view? That one does reach some type of spiritual perfection? Or is one always still studying? Is one waiting for a graduation that will never come?

Fr. Damascene: I think I know what you're saying there. Yeah, the word “perfection” in Greek comes from the word “end” (telos); it's connected with that. But when we're speaking of creation—God's creatures, which includes us—we speak of perfection in a relative sense because only God is totally perfect. And so Adam and Eve, for example, by some holy Fathers they're described as perfect. Well when they're talking about “perfect” there, they're talking about flawless. You know I talked about the state of Adam's soul, but also his body before the fall, was flawless. He didn't have any genetic mutations, for example, but he hadn't reached his end. He had the grace of the Holy Spirit residing within him, but he was called towards deification, he was called to perfection. But even the perfection he was called to might be considered relative because only God is totally perfect and man is always—and the creation is always on a journey of progress towards God.

So in this life, a person is still subject to sin, an inclination towards sin, up until death. The only person who ever lived who had no inclination towards sin is Jesus Christ, and I explained that before: because he has a divine nature and a human nature united inseparably and unconfusedly in one person. So, he couldn't sin, right? We say that the most holy Mother of God, we call her “immaculate” or “pure,” not because she was born without the tendency towards sin, but because she kept herself from outward sin. She certainly had a tendency towards sin like

everybody, but she kept herself from outward sin. So, no person is perfect in that sense.

Even up until death, we're still in the battle against sin, and there's even an account of St. Macarius the Great who was seen after his death, and he was ascending to heaven, and the demons were trying to kind of trip him up and make him fall into pride. And they said, "O Macarius, you beat us, you're so holy, you've reached such perfection, we're put to shame by you, Macarius." And Macarius says, "No, I'm not. I haven't made it yet. I'm a sinner," and finally he was going higher and higher, and the demons kept telling him, "Oh, you've reached perfection," and it wasn't until he was actually in heaven that they accepted that he was in heaven. (laughter)

So, we haven't made it until we've made it. St. Maximus the Confessor talks about the state beyond the resurrection as a rest, that creation reaches rest, because Origen, whose teaching St. Maximus was correcting, taught the opposite. He taught that in the beginning there was rest, and then man—in the beginning the souls were in heaven and that the souls cooled down in their love towards God, and then, because of their cooling down, they took bodies and movement began. St. Maximus says that, no, when the creation begins, movement begins, and man should be moving towards God—of course the Fall interrupted it, but now through Christ, man is moving towards God, and the movement reaches its consummation and its conclusion in the general resurrection. We call it the eschaton, the parousia, the future age. And even heaven will be transformed after the resurrection. Not only this earth will be transformed into a spiritual and divine dwelling place, even heaven, where the angels dwell, and I believe that St. Simeon that says even the angels can't even conceive of this glory that will be revealed, even in the angelic realm. So, in a sense, yes, there is, after the resurrection in the future age, there is a rest, everything is complete, the creation has reached its final state, but at the same time within that rest, there is still this endless growing closer to God. We can't imagine it. We talk about the future age, even when we talk about the age, time after death, between now and the general resurrection, we can't imagine it. So we're using analogies to try to describe it.

So, the holy Fathers affirm that, yes, it'll be a rest, but at the same time, this movement. And the reason we can't understand it is that we can't get our heads around the idea or the reality that God is limitless. He's unfathomable. We think of God as great

and holy and huge, but we can't imagine limitlessness. So, but that's what God is. He's limitless and unfathomable. He's glorious beyond our comprehension, experience, and even the angels, they're ever growing closer and closer to God and having more and more full vision of God. And so it's a rest and at the same time, it's a movement, and so again, that's apophatic. In other words, we can't understand it. We just accept it and it's a mystery.

Q 19: Forgive me if this lacks clarity. When talking about the attribute of Tao, of the Tao, and speaking about the emptiness, you talked about the spontaneity that occurs. And when—I don't know much about Taoism so forgive my ignorance, but this brought to mind—the spontaneity got me thinking about human instinct and how when humans act spontaneously that they're acting usually in a way away from God's wisdom that brings them into sin and brings them—kind of like the evils of this world creeping up, and so my thought, or question, is: I see the concept laid before me that was previously explained. Does this other one work its way into it in the sense of “the mind of God comprehends evil”? And without the Fall of Adam, they wouldn't have been able or humans wouldn't have been able to comprehend evil, and so is that an element of this emptiness or could it be? Does that make any sense?

Fr. Damascene: I don't quite understand the connection between the understanding of evil and the emptiness.

Q 19: So talking about when the Tao's spontaneity, talking about working in conjunction with the emptiness on that?

Fr. Damascene: I'll try to answer it, and you can tell me whether I'm hitting on what you're asking. First of all, the holy Fathers teach that evil has no existence of itself. It has no positive existence. God did not create evil. So evil is only the turning away from good. Evil did not exist until the devil turned away from God and became evil, and then he got man snared in the same evil. So once man turns towards God, evil ceases to exist in that instance.

There's a teaching especially brought out by St. Maximus between the natural will and the choosing will. The natural will is the will in us that always tends towards God, because that's how we were created; we were always created to do God's will. But we're also created with this choosing will that we can either choose God or turn away from God. And the more one aligns oneself with God and becomes, as I said before, more filled with God's light, the more the choosing will, the less that we have to

use the choosing will. You know, we just return to the natural will which is always to do the will of God or, as Lao Tzu said, the way of heaven.

So, when man was in the beginning before he fell, he kind of naturally did what he was supposed to do. And then when he turned against God, turned away from God became disobedient to God, then after that, he was caught between different choices. He had to keep choosing the choosing will because he was separated from God. What's right? What's wrong? And Christ, St. Maximus says, didn't use his choosing will. He always did naturally what was the Divine Will. Did that answer your question at all by bringing that out? The emptiness would be, in this case, spontaneity, would be doing spontaneously what our natural will indicates, which is God's will. This would be the emptiness spontaneity.

Q 19: I guess that did answer it in contriving it to be of an evil nature of the spontaneity and the emptiness as an evil nature was originally not what was intended.

Fr. Damascene: What we can do, we can do evil things spontaneously if we're inclined towards evil, if we become a habit of evil, and we let ourselves be a tool of evil forces, if we just do it habitually. That's why I talked about passions. I talked about the stages in a passion, first provocation, conjunction joining habit and then captivity. When a person's captive in a passion, the passion controls the person. So the person is madly as they say in the fathers, they just madly rush to satisfy that particular passion. It could be a passion of desire towards something, or it can be a passion of hatred towards something, but the person kind of automatically does it without thinking because it's kind of taking control of the person.

So, in that case, you might could call it spontaneous acting out of evil, if the person is captive in a passion. That's why we're supposed to cut off the passions at the root at the beginning so they don't develop into these passions. Of course, if a person's captive in a passion, they still get out by the grace of God and their own free will, but it's much more difficult.

Well, I want to thank you for all your attention and your excellent questions which made it much more interesting and enjoyable for me, and it's a real blessing to be able to speak with you and to meet with you and discuss these matters which are really about the ultimate meaning of our life. May God bless us to follow the—and help us to follow the teachings that are laid out by our Lord Jesus Christ and his saints and to follow this

path of union with God to the end. Amen.