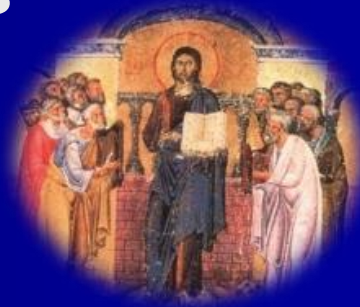


Fall 2022 Adult Study: The Early Christians

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Session 3: A Sweep of History —
Creation, Fall and Salvation
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Reading the Bible

- God Reveals Himself Gradually through History
- A Book of Books of Different Genres
- Read it "literally," like epic literature
- Complimentary stories reveal truth, not process
- Not a constitution
- Understand language, idiom, historical context
- Inspiration, not legalism – take wholistically, typologically
- See how it has been understood



It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him. We must not use the Bible as a sort of encyclopedia out of which texts can be taken for use as weapons.

(C. S. Lewis)

izquotes.com

Illustrative Idiomatic Expressions:

He hit the road

My watch is running slow

He's on Arabic time

She's feeling blue

He's cool

I am the door

Creation: Genesis 1-2



- "In the Beginning, God...."
- Trinity
- Goodness of Creation
- Man
- One with the animals
- In the Image and Likeness of God
- Early Christians held that man was originally created in perfect communion with God, but through his own actions he turned away from God and sinned ("missed the mark"). Because of man's refusal to fulfill the "image and likeness of God" within him, corruption and the sickness of sin, whose consequence is death, entered.

Fall



- The Tree of Life
- The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
- Expulsion from Paradise
 - A single will for creation, but two for deification.
 - A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness.
 - The love of God for man is so great that it cannot constrain; for there is no love without respect.

"God becomes powerless before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Certainly man was created by the will of God alone; but he cannot be deified [made Holy] by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness. The love of God for man is so great that it cannot constrain; for there is no love without respect. Divine will always will submit itself to...detours, even to revolts of human will, to bring it to a free consent." [*Vladimir Lossky*](#)

Fall



■ Disobedience

– Satan

- Evil is chaotic, it is a separation,
- Evil lives only through the Good which it deforms.
- There is an illusory grandeur itself in this baseness of evil.

– Man

- The vocation of primordial man, innate in his very nature, was to love God.
- In the fall man limits himself to himself. Man separated himself from God and broke the spiritual and free contact with God.

Certainly, evil never exists by itself but only inside of Goodness. Evil is a pure negation, a privation or a mutilation. Undoubtedly evil is a lack, a defect, dejectus. But the structure of evil is rather antinomic. Evil is a void of nothingness but a void which exists, which swallows and devours beings. Evil is a powerlessness; it never creates but its destructive energy is enormous. Evil never ascends; it always descends. But the very debasement of being which it produces is frightening. Nevertheless, there is an illusory grandeur itself in this baseness of evil. Occasionally there is something of genius in sin and in evil. Evil is chaotic, it is a separation, a decomposition constantly in progress, a disorganization of the entire structure of being. But evil is also, without doubt, vigorously organized. Everything in this sad domain of deception and illusion is amphibolic and ambiguous. Undoubtedly evil lives only through the Good which it deforms, but which it also adapts to its needs. But this deformed "Universe" is a reality which asserts itself.

Actually, the problem of evil is not at all a purely philosophical problem, and that is why it can never be resolved on the neutral plane of a theory of being. It is no longer a purely ethical problem and on the plane of natural morality one can never surmount the correlativity of good and evil. The problem of evil only takes on its proper character on the religious plane. And the meaning of evil is a radical opposition to God, a revolt, a disobedience, a resistance. And the unique source of evil, in the strict sense of the term, is sin, the opposition to God and the tragic separation from Him.

The vocation of primordial man, innate in his very nature, was to love God with filial devotion and to serve him in the world of which man was designated to be prophet, priest, and king. It was an appeal from the paternal love of God to the filial love of man. Undoubtedly to follow God involved a total surrender to Divine arms. This was not yet a sacrifice. Innocent man had nothing to sacrifice, for everything he possessed came, from the Grace of God. Here there is something more profound than a voluptuous attachment to the world. It was rather a tragedy of a misguided love. According to St. Athanasius, the human fall consists precisely in the fact that man limits himself to himself, that man becomes, as it were, in love with himself. And through this concentration on himself man separated himself from God and broke the spiritual and free contact with God. It was a kind of delirium, a self-erotic obsession, a spiritual narcissism. And through this man isolated himself from God and soon became aware of being involved in the external cosmic flow. One can say it was a de-spiritualization of human existence. All the rest came as a result—the death and decomposition of human structure. In any case, the fall was realized first in the realm of the spirit, just as it already was in the angelic world. The meaning of original sin is the same everywhere— self-eroticism, pride, and vanity. All the rest is only a projection of this spiritual catastrophe into the different areas of human structure. Evil comes from above, not from below; from the created spirit and not from matter. It is more profound than a false choice of direction, more profound even than a choice between an inferior and a superior good. Rather, it was the infidelity of love, the insane separation from the Only One who is worthy of affection and love. This infidelity is the main, source of the negative character of evil. It was a primordial negation and it was fatal.

Fall

■ Death

- Death is not a release; it is a catastrophe.
- An abnormal estrangement from God, who is man's Maker and Master
- The separation of soul and body
- Man's mortality is the stigma or "the wages" of sin (Rom. 6:23)
- Providence of God

■ Effect on the Cosmos

Death is an ultimate ending, a complete frustration of human hopes and prospects. Death comes from sin, from the original Fall. It was not divinely instituted. Human death did not belong to the Divine order of creation. It was not normal or natural for man to die. It was an abnormal estrangement from God, who is man's Maker and Master—even physical death; i.e. the separation of soul and body. Man's mortality is the stigma or "the wages" of sin (Rom. 6:23). Many Christians today have lost this Biblical conception of death and mortality and regard death rather as a release, a release of an immortal soul out of the bondage of the body. As widely spread as this conception of death may actually be, it is utterly alien to the Scriptures. In fact, it is a Greek, a gentile conception.

Death is not a release; it is a catastrophe.

A dead man is no man any more. For man is not a bodiless spirit. Body and soul belong together, and their separation is a decomposition of the human being. A discarnate soul is but a ghost. A soulless body is but a corpse. "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee, in the grave who shall give Thee thanks" (Ps. 6:5). Or again: "Wilt Thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise Thee? shall Thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or Thy faithfulness in destruction? shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness" (Ps. 88:10-12). And the Psalmist was perfectly sure: "and they are cut off from Thy hand" (v. 5). Death is hopeless.

Fall

- Effect on Subsequent Generations
 - Inherited guilt?
 - Rom. 5.12

Would a baby born to a crack-addicted mother, and is thus born a crack addict, be considered guilty for its addiction? No one in his right mind would say the child is guilty. We would rather say that it is a tragedy that the innocent child has inherited the consequences of its mother's actions.

Fall

- In this passage there is a major issue of translation. The last four Greek words were translated in Latin as *in quo omnes peccaverunt* ("in whom [i.e., in Adam] all men have sinned")
- "As sin came into the world through one man and through sin, death, so death spread to all men because all men have sinned [*eph ho pantes hemarton*]."
- "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men; and because of death, all men have sinned..."

The scriptural text, which played a decisive role in the polemics between Augustine and the Pelagians, is found in Romans 5:12 where Paul speaking of Adam writes, "As sin came into the world through one man and through sin, death, so death spread to all men because all men have sinned [*eph ho pantes hemarton*]." In this passage there is a major issue of translation. The last four Greek words were translated in Latin as *in quo omnes peccaverunt* ("in whom [i.e., in Adam] all men have sinned"), and this translation was used in the West to justify the doctrine of guilt inherited from Adam and spread to his descendants. But such a meaning cannot be drawn from the original Greek — the text read, of course, by the Byzantines. The form *eph ho* — a contraction of *epi* with the relative

pronoun *ho* — can be translated as "because," a meaning accepted by most modern scholars of all confessional backgrounds. Such a translation renders Paul's thought to mean that death, which is "the wages of sin" (Romans 6:23) for Adam, is also the punishment applied to those who like him sin. It presupposed a cosmic significance of the sin of Adam, but did not say that his descendants are "guilty" as he was unless they also sinned as he did.

A number of authors understood the *eph ho* to mean "because" and saw nothing in the Pauline text beyond a moral similarity between Adam and other sinners in death being the normal retribution for sin. But there is also the consensus of the majority of Eastern Fathers, who interpret Romans 5:12 in close connection with 1 Corinthians 15:22 — between Adam and his descendants there is a solidarity in death just as there is a solidarity in life between the risen Lord and the baptized. This interpretation comes, obviously, from the literal, grammatical meaning of Romans 5:12. *Eph ho*, if it means "because," is a neuter pronoun; but it can also be masculine referring to the immediately preceding substantive *thanatos* ("death"). The sentence then may have a meaning, which seems improbable to a reader trained in Augustine, but which is indeed the meaning which most Greek Fathers accepted: **"As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men; and because of death, all men have sinned..."**

Mortality, or "corruption," or simply death (understood in a personalized sense), has indeed been viewed since Christian antiquity as a cosmic disease, which holds humanity under its sway, both spiritually and physically, and is controlled by the one who is "the murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). It is this death, which makes sin inevitable and in this sense "corrupts" nature. For Cyril of Alexandria, humanity after the sin of Adam "fell sick of corruption."

For Theodore of Mopsuestia, "by becoming mortal, we acquired greater urge to sin." The necessity of satisfying the needs of the body — food, drink, and other bodily needs — are absent in immortal beings; but among mortals, they lead to "passions," for they present unavoidable means of temporary survival. Theodoret of Cyrus repeats almost literally the arguments of Theodore in his own commentary on Romans; elsewhere, he argues against the sinfulness of marriage by affirming that transmission of mortal life is not sinful in itself, in spite of Psalm 51:7 ("my mother conceived me in sin"). This verse, according to Theodoret, refers not to the sexual act but to the general sinful condition of mortal humanity: "Having become mortal, [Adam and Eve] conceived mortal children, and mortal beings are a necessarily subject to passions and fears, to pleasures and sorrows, to anger and hatred." There is indeed a consensus in Greek patristic and Byzantine

traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an inheritance essentially of mortality rather than of sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality. The idea appears in Chrysostom, who specifically denies the imputation of sin to the descendants of Adam.

Fall

■ "Original Sin"

- Unity of Mankind
- Genesis 1:27 — "God created man in His own image" — refers to the creation of mankind as a whole
- The sin of Adam must also be related to all men
- The Pauline doctrine of the two Adams ("As in Adam all men die, so also in Christ all are brought to life" [1 Co 15:22])

The Greek patristic understanding of man never denies the unity of mankind or replaces it with a radical individualism. The Pauline doctrine of the two Adams ("As in Adam all men die, so also in Christ all are brought to life" [1 Co 15:22]) as well as the Platonic concept of the ideal man leads Gregory of Nyssa to understand Genesis 1:27 — "God created man in His own image" — to refer to the creation of mankind as a whole. It is obvious therefore that the sin of Adam must also be related to all men, just as salvation brought by Christ is salvation for all mankind; but neither original sin nor salvation can be realized in an individual's life without involving his personal and free responsibility.

The contrast with Western tradition on this point is brought into sharp focus when Eastern authors discuss the meaning of baptism. Augustine's arguments in favor of infant baptism were taken from the text of the creeds (baptism for "the remission of sins") and from his understanding of Romans 5:12. Children are born sinful, not because they have sinned personally, but because they have sinned "in Adam"; their baptism is therefore also a baptism "for the remission of sins." At the same time, an Eastern contemporary of Augustine's, Theodoret of Cyrus, flatly denies that the creedal formula "for the remission of sins" is applicable to infant baptism. For Theodoret, in fact, the "remission of sins" is only a side effect of baptism, fully real in cases of adult baptism, which is the norm, of course, in the early Church and which indeed "remits sins." But the principal meaning of baptism is wider and more positive: "If the only meaning of baptism is the remission of sins," writes Theodoret, "why would we baptize the newborn children who have not yet tasted of sin? But the mystery [of baptism] is not limited to this; it is a promise of greater and more perfect gifts. In it, there are the promises of future delights; it is a type of the future resurrection, a communion with the master's passion, a participation in His resurrection, a mantle of salvation, a tunic of gladness, a garment of light, or rather it is light itself."

Salvation

- Noah
- Abraham - *and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.*" (Gen. 12:1)
- Moses
- Judges
- Kings
- Prophets
- Exile

In the person and life of Abraham, the central events of the salvation of the world by Christ in the New Testament have been prefigured.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3, See also 17:1-8, 22:1-18)

Salvation

■ Jesus Christ

- For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3.16)
- When Jesus came into the world He Himself was Perfect Man and Perfect God united. Through his participation in humanity, human nature was re-created, allowing human beings to participate in the divine nature.

Salvation



- Every creature made by Thee offers Thee thanks. The angels offer Thee a hymn; the heavens a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, the manger:

References

- Georges S. Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*
- Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*
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Recommended Reading

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- Cronk, George F. *The Message of the Bible: An Orthodox Christian Perspective*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982.
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