

# **THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

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## **Introduction**

For many of us Orthodox Christians the Holy Scriptures are a closed book. In fact, all too often they remain literally closed most of the time. We feel that we should read them more, but when we try, it is so hard to understand what the Lord is telling us. Today I am going to look at some of the broad themes of the Holy Scriptures; if we can keep these themes before us as we read, the Scriptures open up to us and reveal many things which we need to now for our daily lives as Orthodox Christians.

## **True and False Faith**

In the book of Genesis we find a description of how God created the world in which we live. As the crown and ultimate purpose for His creation. He created a man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, in His Own image and likeness. The fathers teach that God's image in us is our mind and our free will, while His likeness is our similarity to Him in virtue. "The 'image' exists in us so that we may achieve 'likeness' to God, that is, become 'divine' — perfect and "immortal by virtue."<sup>1</sup> Men were created to know God, and to worship and obey Him in truth; in doing so, they would grow from glory to glory, always becoming more like God. We read of saints like St. Seraphim of Sarov who were transfigured and shone with glory, but that glory is just a hint of the glory mankind was created to show forth. God provided a way for His creatures to grow in glory and to manifest His image ever more clearly: men and women were to know God, their Creator, and to live in obedience to Him. This is the true faith which mankind was made to follow.

Unfortunately our first parents Adam and Eve were not content to be creatures. They became envious of God and no longer wanted to acknowledge that, since they had been made by Him, they had to obey Him. They were encouraged in this rebellion by Satan, who already had declared that he would not obey anyone but himself. Acting through the serpent, Satan persuaded them to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They believed that when they ate of it, they would have the same knowledge that God has, i.e. that they would become equal to God. In fact, of course, the tree itself did not give them some special knowledge. Up until then they had always obeyed God in all their actions, so they knew only good, which is obedience to Him. They did not even know what evil was. But when they ate from the tree in disobedience to God, they experienced (i.e. knew) evil for the first time. From then on, they knew good and evil through experience, whereas before they had known only good. And when they listened to Satan's tempting words, they unknowingly adopted a new religion, one in which they made themselves into their own gods. They decided to follow their own will, rather than that of their Creator, which meant that they now worshipped themselves. At this moment they introduced the false religion of Satan into God's world.

Thus, from the time of the Fall of Adam and Eve, there have been two faiths in competition in the world: the true faith of worshipping and obeying the Living God, and the false religion of worshipping one's self. The promoters of the false religion are crafty

and have given it many forms, in some of which you do not immediately see that people are worshipping themselves instead of God.

The false religion's most common organized form, often called Pantheism or Monism, teaches that there is no real difference between man and God, but that in fact everything is god and god is everything. There is a continuum between god and man (and even animals, insects, plants, and bacteria), so in a sense man can evolve into "god," or else "god" is evolving out of the world. Hinduism, Buddhism, and various primitive religions in Africa, Asia, and America are religions of this type. Since everyone and everything is "god," anything anyone does is what "god" does. Therefore, the end result of pantheism is that however many "gods" there might be, each person is also "god," so whatever he does is right. The goal of this false religion is for everything eventually to be absorbed into the One, i.e. everything is moving toward a unity in which all individuality will be lost. Only when that finally happens, will "god" have evolved completely. Of course, Satan's goal is to absorb all creation into himself, so we can see where this religion is going.

The other variant of the false religion is not really capable of appearing in an organized system, but it is the practical view of perhaps the majority of mankind. It says that only the individual person exists: he is his own god and his own world. There is no law, truth, or reality beyond or outside him, but rather he is the measure of everything. The only thing he knows is himself, and that is all he worships. This form of faith leads to total anarchy, where each person does anything and everything he wants. In this false religion there can be no concept of "good" or "evil" or any obligation to obey God either.

By way of contrast, the true faith bases its standards of good and evil on God's nature and His commandments to us: what agrees with God's nature and commandments is good; what does not, is evil. God is the ultimate standard, not man.

The warfare between these two faiths is what we will be considering in detail in the rest of this talk. Basically, though, we can say that the warfare takes two forms: seduction and persecution. In ancient times — the times of the Old Testament — and at the present time, seduction is the most prevalent form of attack. It offers us an easier way of life, social acceptance, and being "normal" and "like other people." No one likes to be thought strange or foolish, so seduction tells us that people will think we are weird if we do not fit into society. The true faith is not openly attacked, but rather sneered at and made to seem childish and ridiculous. Persecution, which was more common throughout much of the Christian period, is at least honest. It frankly acknowledges its enemy and tries to defeat it by force. As history has shown, seduction is usually more effective than persecution. Once the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph, was talking to the last Russian Emperor, Nicholas II. The Emperor Nicholas complained that in Austria, the Jews were given full civil and economic rights and in fact were prominent members of society, while in Russia they were restricted and persecuted. The Emperor Franz Joseph replied, "Nicholas, you get rid of your Jews your way, and I'll get rid of my Jews my way." And, in fact, the Jews in Austria were so assimilated that they had practically lost their Judaism, while Russian Judaism was a stronghold of Jewish Orthodoxy.

## **The Remnant**

When the false religion of self-worship entered the world at the Fall, God did not allow His true faith to fail completely. Self-worship was more congenial to mankind, but there were still individuals who continued to worship the true God. God selected them and nurtured them to create a body of people, a "remnant," which would maintain the true faith throughout history. If the Lord had not created His remnant, the false religion would have triumphed throughout the world. As Isaiah says, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed [survivors], we should have been like Sodom, and we should have been made like Gomorrah" (*Isaiah 1:9*). This remnant of God continues through all the ages of the world. As we see throughout the Scriptures, and especially in the letters to the Churches at the beginning of the book of Revelation, large parts of the remnant itself may fall, but some portion will always survive. Even within the Lord's Chosen People, the Jews of the Old Covenant, and the Christians of the New, there is only a remnant that will actually follow God and come to glorification. Again, the Prophet Isaiah taught, "And though the people of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall be saved. He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness: because the Lord will make a short work of the world" (*Isaiah 10:22-23*). In a similar manner, the Holy Apostle Paul tells us: "Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elias — how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars: I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me'? And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So, too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (*Romans 11:2-5*). "It was not Israel as a whole that found what it was seeking, but only the chosen few. The rest were not allowed to see the truth" (*Romans 11:7*). The task of this remnant is twofold: to keep alive the true worship of God in the world, and to share in the restoration of the image and likeness of God in mankind, made possible through the obedience unto death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole history of the world can be seen spiritually as Satan's struggle to destroy this remnant completely, and God's care for it to bring it to victory. In particular, the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament show us this warfare throughout the ages, and in doing so they also show us how we fit into God's plan in the course of history.

## **The Warfare In The Old Testament**

### *Before the Flood*

After righteous Abel, Adam's second son, was killed by his brother Cain, the Lord gave Adam and Eve another son, named Seth. Seth and his descendents kept the true faith alive in the world, while Cain and his descendents gave themselves completely up to the false religion of self-worship. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, the descendents of Seth came to be attracted to the female descendents of Cain.<sup>2</sup> When they married them, they were quickly enticed away from true worship and fell into the false religion. In fact, this is the first example of mixed marriages, and it serves well to show why the Church, in both the Old and New Covenants, has opposed mixed

marriages. Historically, they have been a major means of seducing men and women away from the true worship of God.

### *The Flood*

The result of the corruption of the descendents of Seth was that God became so angry with His creation that He decided to kill all those who had dishonored Him and turned to self-worship. Out of all the world, only Noah still maintained the true faith, so the Lord determined that only that one man and his family would be saved. All the rest had fallen into total decadence and would be destroyed in a great flood. Noah and his family were such a tiny remnant, but they and the animals God had made were spared in the flood. They then were able to spread the true worship in the world again after the flood. Unfortunately, though, even among Noah's children the false religion had taken root, so it too survived the flood. It led to the building of the tower of Babel, when men tried to storm Heaven on their own and establish themselves in place of God. This is something that we will see repeatedly in history: righteous parents, members of the remnant, fail to pass on their faith to their children, who fall away from the remnant and are lost. How frightening it is to realize that we may be guilty of the very same failing as Noah; that we may be failing to raise up our children as strong, convinced members of the remnant. It is so easy to take our children for granted and assume that they will inherit by osmosis the religious understandings which we have acquired through hard study and thought; but it rarely happens.

### **Abraham and His Family**

When God saw how the false religion had survived the flood and was growing and spreading throughout the world, He chose one man as a special remnant and began revealing Himself to that man in more detail. The man He selected was Abraham. God called Abraham to leave his idolatrous family and go out to a new land where the Lord could train him in the true faith. Abraham obeyed God immediately, showing himself worthy of this training (*Gen. 12:1-4*). The Lord God appeared to Abraham many times to instruct him, to establish a new covenantal relationship with him, and to make promises to him.<sup>3</sup> Abraham was given a new covenant by God, with circumcision as the sign of membership in it. From then on, all male members of God's remnant would have to have this sign. At the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sign was changed to Baptism and was extended to women, so that now all members of the remnant must be baptized. Abraham showed his total obedience to God by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac to God, even though he had waited until extreme old-age for this child and had put all his hopes for the future of his family in Isaac. When the Lord saw Abraham's obedience, He did not actually require the sacrifice; but we can see that if we are to be faithful members of the remnant, we cannot hold back anything from God (*Gen. 22:1-13*). While Abraham and his descendents were given the special task of being God's remnant in the world — His witnesses to show all mankind the true way of life which man was created to follow — they were less than perfect in their obedience to God; but they were far above those around them in the world. They tried to train their children to follow the true faith, and for a few generations they were successful. Then in the third

generation from Abraham, in the time of Jacob and his son Joseph, the remnant moved to Egypt from the land of Canaan, where the Lord had initially placed them and which He had promised to them as their descendants' homeland. In Egypt they were relatively free from the seduction of the false religion, since they lived in isolation in the land of Goshen, and since in God's providence they were considered "unclean" by the Egyptians because they herded sheep. When the followers of the false religion, and their leader Satan, saw that seduction would not work in this case, they switched to persecution. They decided to destroy all the male children and marry the female children to Egyptians, in that way putting an end to Abraham's line and also to the true faith.

## The Exodus

At this point God acted to rescue His remnant from persecution before it could be destroyed completely, as He always has throughout history. He raised up His special servant Moses to lead His chosen people out of Egypt and bring them to a new homeland, Canaan, the same one He had promised to Abraham centuries earlier. In this way, He would purify His remnant and make them a shining example to the whole world of true faith in Him and life according to His will. The Lord also made a new covenant with His remnant and gave them the fullest revelation yet of His nature and requirements. The crowning element of the Mosaic covenant is the Law which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This Law showed Israel, God's chosen people, what the Lord expected of His people in their personal and social lives. It provided the direct guidelines for the remnant's life for over a thousand years. From this Law, we can still learn much today about God and what He expects from us as we try to live in obedience to Him. We all may know the Ten Commandments, or at least, we have all heard of them. But there is much else in the Law which can serve to amplify the Ten Commandments and show us how they were applied in ancient times and can in many ways still be applied in our lives today.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly enough, though, the Jewish people had already drunk of the seduction of false religion. Even while God was giving Moses the Law, the people were turning to the worship of an idol, a golden calf (*Exodus 32:1-13*). Then they complained that God had rescued them from Egypt: they forgot the slave labor they had been performing and thought only about the food and drink they had enjoyed (*Num. 11:4-6*). Finally, when God ordered them to move into the Promised Land and conquer it, they refused, saying they were afraid of the inhabitants who were there already (*Num. 13-14*). Thus the remnant itself was corrupted by idolatry and disobedience, so the Lord selected a remnant from the remnant — out of all the adults who had left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed by God to enter the Promised Land, because they were the only ones who had been willing to obey Him unconditionally. All the other adults would die in the desert, but their children would be allowed to inherit the promise from them (*Num 14:26-35*). From this we see again the fearful lesson that the remnant of God can itself fall into sin and abandon Him, but we also can draw the hopeful lesson that the remnant cannot completely fall away, no matter how small it may get.

## The Promised Land

When the Israelites finally were allowed by God to enter the Promised Land, they were given what seems to us a very harsh commandment: they were to exterminate totally all the Canaanites who were already living there. This would serve two purposes: 1) it was a punishment for the Canaanites' evil way of life, their disobedience to God (*Lev. 19:24-30; Deut. 9:4*); and 2) it would keep the Israelites, the remnant, from being seduced into worshipping the false gods of Canaan (*Deut. 7:4*). Unfortunately, as the book of Judges records, Israel did not carry out this commandment, but allowed many of the Canaanites to survive.

The story of the first woman judge is told in Judges 4-5. Israel had turned away from God, and as a result was being oppressed mercilessly by King Jabin and his general Sisara, who are mentioned in Psalm 82. God raised up Deborah and Barak to defeat these wicked men, and He gave the victory over them to an army of simple Israelites. It was not a case of Israel's being stronger, but rather, the Lord was on their side. As the Scriptures explain it: Then the remnant went down against the mighty" (*Judges 5:13*).

Because Israel had again fallen into idolatry after Deborah's death, the Midianites were allowed to oppress them for seven years. Then an angel, who was actually the Lord Jesus Christ (*Judges 6:14*), appeared to Gideon. This Angel told Gideon to destroy the Midianites, and He promised that Gideon would have the strength to do it (*Judges 6:11-18*). Gideon's very first act was to destroy his family's idolatrous altar and use the wooden idol to built a fire on which he sacrificed his father's best ox to the Lord. When Gideon finally led his army into battle, he initially had 32,000 soldiers. The Lord wanted to show that He was giving the victory, not man, so He told Gideon to send home everyone who was timid or afraid and then also everyone who knelt to drink from a stream, rather than picking the water up in his hands. In this way the army was reduced to only 300 men; but God gave them the victory over Oreb and Zeb, Zebbee and Salmana, who also appear in Psalm 82. Israel then enjoyed 40 years of peace. In this instance. God reminds us that our small size does not matter when we have Him on our side — He Who gave 300 men victory over 135,000 can do the same for His remnant at any time.

The examples of Deborah and Gideon, and others also in the book of Judges, reveal a pattern in the life of the remnant which recurs throughout the history of the world and also in the lives of the faithful. This pattern contains the following elements:

- 1) Creation of a new world. This might be the whole universe, as in the initial creation, or it might be a sanctuary for the remnant, for example the Promised Land. In the life of the believer, this is conversion to God and a new spiritual life.
- 2) Fall. Some act or sin occurs which leads to man's fall from obedience to God. This is usually some form of idolatry, including self-worship. Time after time, Israel fell into the false religion, usually by being seduced into following the gods

of the Canaanites who had survived. In the life of the believer, this is giving way again to sin.

3) Decline. After this fall, the world created in step 1 enters a period of decline. The decline might last for thousands of years, or for only a short time. In the life of the believer, this is the increasing coldness and distance from God that follows re-admitting sin into one's life after Baptism.

4) Judgment. After the limit of the decline has been reached, God judges the fallen world, not only to condemn it, but to open a way to repentance for the remnant. When God's judgment on a fallen part of the remnant is delayed for a long time, it means that the remnant is not yet ready to repent and so there is no basis for restoration. This act of judgment destroys the world created in the beginning of this sequence. God sent Israel disasters, foreign invasions, and evil rulers which often reduced it to almost nothing; but then the few who were left would cry out to God for help, repent of their idolatry, and return to true worship. In the individual's life, this is often sickness or some other trouble sent by God to wake the person up from the sin resulting from his fall and bring him to repentance.

5) Re-creation or restoration. God does not abandon His world, but after **His** act of judgment. He restores or re-creates His world. In Israel's history. God raised up saviours who defeated the enemies and restored the true faith. In the individual's life, this is confession and God's grace allowing him to start over again. At this point the pattern usually starts over again.^

The first great occurrence of the pattern includes the Creation of the World, the Fall of Adam, the Decline of the world throughout all its history, the Judgment at the Second coming of the Lord, and the Re-Creation when a New Heaven and a New Earth are created (*Figure 1*). We are in the Decline phase of this occurrence of the pattern, but within this great pattern, there have been many more instances of the pattern, some of which we have seen already. We will also see that some of the occurrences of the pattern are still unfinished. When this is the case, we do not know if the given sequence will be completed at its own level, or be followed by another instance of the pattern at that level; or if the instance will be completed by the completion of a pattern sequence at a higher level. Only time will show us how each open instance will be completed, but we do know the general contour which the pattern sequence will take even now.

## The Kingdom

Although we could look at many examples of this pattern in the history of the kings, beginning with Saul, we do not have time to consider them all. One of the saddest examples, though, of seduction leading the remnant astray is to be found in the life of King Solomon. He was granted great wisdom by God, and he left us many books in the Scriptures, filled with the most profound insight and further revelations of God and His ways with men. But he disobeyed all of God's commandments for the king (*Deut. 17:16-17*) especially by taking many wives for himself. To make it worse, many of these

wives were from nations which followed the false religion of self-worship. Through the influence of his wives, Solomon himself was led away from God and into false worship. This was, in fact, the major fall of the remnant after the Flood. Although Solomon repented, the kingdom he passed on was fatally damaged by his excesses and his fall into false worship.

After Solomon's death, the northern part of the kingdom separated and became a state called Israel. Israel's kings quickly established idolatry as a matter of state policy, since they did not want their people going to Jerusalem, in the rival kingdom of Judah, to worship the true God. At this time the Lord began sending His prophets to reveal more about Himself and His relationship with us. Through the prophets we are taught that God wants inner obedience and worship, not just outward conformity to His laws. We are also taught that we must avoid any sort of idolatry, since idolatry is like adultery in our relationship with God. Over a period of centuries the prophets tried to recall Israel to true worship and obedient living, but with no success. For example, about 160 years after Solomon's death, the Prophet Elias appeared in Israel. He challenged the priests of Baal, the false god being worshipped by the king and most of the people, to a contest to show which god was real. The priests of Baal called on their god all day to send down fire to consume their offering on his altar, but with no results; then Elias called on the Lord to accept the offering he had prepared on his true altar. And even though that offering had been drenched repeatedly with water, the Lord sent fire down from Heaven and consumed it. When the people saw this, they killed the priests of Baal (*III Kings 18:16-40*). This action angered the king, so Elias fled for his life. While he was in hiding, he became very discouraged and spoke to the Lord in his fear and despair: "I only am left alone, and they seek my life to take it" (*III Kings 19:10*). The Lord appeared to him as the voice of a gentle breeze to console him and told him that there were still 7,000 men in Israel who had not worshipped Baal, so he was not alone at all (*III Kings 19:18*). How often do we, the remnant today, feel that we are all alone in the world. And yet, the Lord reminds us here that there may be many more of us than we imagine, many who have kept the true faith alive in their hearts. We must not become discouraged or give up because we are so few. He is saying, but we must leave the numbers to Him, since only He knows what they really are.

Unfortunately, though, Israel did not repent and return to true worship, so in 722 B.C. the kingdom of Israel was destroyed and the leading people were taken into exile in Assyria. Because they had failed as the remnant, they were lost, and almost none of their descendents ever returned to the Promised Land, although some did still maintain the true faith in exile.

The descendents of Kings David and Solomon continued to rule in the southern kingdom, Judah. But many of them also followed false gods, being seduced by the remaining Canaanites and by their own self-will.<sup>6</sup> The prophets were also active in Judah, but their message was largely unheeded there too. In 586 B.C. Judah was conquered, and most of its leaders were taken into exile in Babylon. But in this case the remnant was preserved, including such well-known figures as Daniel and the Three Children. Because of its faithfulness, the remnant was allowed to return to the Promised



Land in 537 B.C. and to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The restored nation again experienced periods of faithlessness, brought on in large part by inter-marriage with pagans,<sup>7</sup> and by the time of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ, most of the nation had fallen into false worship again. In fact, for the remnant's faithlessness, the Temple itself was turned into a center of idolatry for a time under Greek conquerors. Before the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ there was a restoration of the Temple to the worship of God, but even so, most of the Jewish nation adopted pagan ways of thought or else followed the Pharisees, a new variant of the false religion. The Pharisees appeared to be zealous for God's laws, but instead they created a whole fabric of man-made laws which took precedence over the Law given on Sinai. Furthermore, they changed the focus of the Law: as the prophets taught, man was to obey the Law as a loving response to God's mercy; but the Pharisees turned the Law into away by which men could save themselves by their own efforts. They made the Law a source of human pride and self-confidence, rather than a teacher of our need to obey God and our need for His help to do so.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ**

During this time of corruption in Israel, there was still a small, obscure remnant that studied the prophets carefully and learned from them a true understanding of God's Law and His true faith. This remnant included such people as Sts. Zacharias and Elizabeth, Joachim and Anna, the prophet Symeon, the prophetess Anna, Joseph the Betrothed, the Theotokos, and St. John the Baptist and his disciples. They were waiting and praying for the coming of the promised Messiah, and at last He was born to them. When God took flesh and was born of the Virgin, we were given the final and complete revelation of God's character and of His requirements for us. The life and obedience unto death of our Lord Jesus Christ show us God Himself and give us the pattern for our own lives.

The Lord gathered His disciples and followers into a new remnant. This remnant, like all others, contained both weak members and traitors. Judas betrayed the Lord, St. Peter denied the Lord; Judas repented, St. Peter repented; Judas refused forgiveness and hanged himself, St. Peter accepted forgiveness and was restored. St. Peter's example is a comfort to us, since it at least holds out the possibility of coming back to the remnant if we have fallen away. On the other hand, by his rejection of forgiveness and his suicide, Judas reminds us: if someone so close to the Lord, so much a part of the remnant, could fall away for all eternity, how careful must we be! The Lord's new remnant at times was reduced to a tiny handful — at the Cross there were only a few women and one disciple who remained faithful to Him, but it ultimately grew to include representatives of all mankind. When the Jewish nation rejected its Messiah and put Him to death, the Lord in turn rejected them and called the Gentiles to become members of the remnant.^ From this time on, membership in the remnant is open to all mankind through Holy Baptism. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., God spoke His final judgment on the Old Covenant and put an end to an instance of His pattern for the remnant which had begun with the creation of the world. At Pentecost, the Lord created His Church and began the second great instance of God's pattern in the history or when Orthodoxy in the East was reduced to St Athanasius or St. Maximus the

Confessor and hardly anyone else at different times. But God was always with the remnant, and it always prevailed over the heresies in the end.

### **Worldliness**

After Christianity was accepted as the state religion under St. Constantine the Great, the character of the Church changed greatly. Up until that time, the members of the Church had for the most part been dedicated and obedient followers of the Lord, good members of the remnant. But when the Church became legally and then socially acceptable, large numbers of people entered it without real conviction. This led to a situation where the remnant was often only a small group within the physical body of the Church, while many so-called Christians were actually self-worshippers. As a reaction, many Christians fled to the wilderness and lived as monastics, since there they could escape the worldliness which had intruded into the Church. The seduction of using membership in the Church as a means to earthly success was far more potent than the open persecution which had been used against the remnant in the first centuries after Christ.

In some cases worldliness took the form of nationalism, using the Church as a vehicle for national identity, rather than as a means to salvation. Whole national Churches, for example Egypt, Armenia, Ethiopia, and Syria, separated from Orthodoxy for largely political reasons. Because of this faithlessness and their formal adherence to major heresies, some of these Churches were unable to resist the advancing Moslems a few centuries later and lost most of their members. This form of seduction is still quite active today and was behind the recent fall of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.

Initially the Church was strong in the West, and many times in the early centuries it preserved the true faith when the Church in the East was floundering in heresy. But the absence of an emperor in the West led the Bishops of Rome into ever-increasing political activity. They became virtual secular rulers of the Western Empire, and as a result the false religion of self-worship took root in the heart of the Western Church. This process began at least by the sixth century, when the Bishops of Rome began to claim dominion over the whole Church. Their claims grew more inflated, and eventually came to include the right to alter the Creed of the first two Ecumenical Councils on their own initiative (the *Filioque*). From this time on, a process of decline began in the Western Church. It is characterized by an increasing emphasis on the Pope, even including a declaration of his personal infallibility, making him like God; a distorted and corrupt emphasis on the Theotokos, making a creature almost a fourth member of the Trinity; and a perverted concept of "satisfaction" for sins, claiming that man can save himself and others by his own efforts. It appears at least possible that the judgment on Rome occurred at the Second Vatican Council, since the Roman Catholic Church has been in a state of rapid dissolution since that council.

At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century it appeared for a short time that a remnant of the Western Church might return to the true faith, but unfortunately the principles of self-worship were by then so deeply rooted in the West that this did not

happen. Instead, the Protestant reformers ended by making themselves Popes who could teach unerringly about the faith without reference to the teachings of the early Church. Following their example, most Protestants at the present time have become their own Popes, considering themselves able to define the true faith by themselves. Unfortunately, the power of the Western heresies has been so great that we would have to say that there is no real remnant in the West today, although there are isolated individuals who attempt to maintain some sort of real faith in God.

The Church in Byzantium maintained Orthodoxy for most of its history, but became more and more infected with worldliness. This corruption culminated in its adopting the Papal heresy for purely secular, political reasons. Since God no more allowed His remnant to commit adultery with false gods in this instance than He did in Old Testament times. He handed Constantinople over to the Turks in 1453 and put an end to the Christian Empire. He allowed a partial restoration in the liberation of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania, but Greece proved unfaithful again and soon fell by adopting the Papal calendar and entering into the heresy of Ecumenism. Today the remnant of Byzantium survives in our Old Calendar Church, which is often torn through human weakness, as Israel was in ancient times, but which preserves the true faith in the midst of a wasteland of false religion.

Russia preserved the true faith for a time after the fall of Constantinople, but it finally was seduced by a desire for worldly success in the 17th and 18th centuries. Tsar Peter I in particular despised Orthodoxy and openly put himself in the place of God in Russia. He and his successors imposed Western principles of self-worship and emperor-worship on the Russian Church, but the remnant did survive in isolated spots; e.g. St. Paissius Velichkovsky, St. Seraphim of Sarov, the Optina elders, and Bishop Theophan the Recluse. Finally this path to destruction culminated in the Revolution of 1917. Today the remnant survives in Russia in the Catacomb Church and, to a limited extent, in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, although that body has itself fallen with its adoption of a new ecclesiology after the repose of Metropolitan Philaret.

### **The Battle Today**

This brings us down to the present time. Today the false religion of self-worship has permeated even formerly Christian societies, adopting many new forms and disguises. Evolutionary theory, for example, has led to a combination of ancient pagan, Hindu, and Buddhist ideas with modern scientific methods for controlling the world. This false religion denies that God sustains the world at every moment, preferring to believe that man can dominate the world by using so-called "scientific laws" to exalt himself into the "god" of this world. Some amazing books on the latest concepts of quantum physics attempt to use physical science to prove the scientific truth of pantheism.<sup>9</sup> This drive for unity at all costs represented by Ecumenism and various world-government movements are also expressions of this false faith. Open revivals of paganism, witchcraft, and Satanism have appeared in the supposedly rationalistic West. So-called New Age concepts of man as god have infiltrated almost all the world around us, being assumed in most modern literature, art, drama, and television. These ideas are also dominant in modern medicine and psychology, which claim to be able to heal mankind's ills without

reference to God at all. Most of what is taught in the schools and universities ignores God at best, preferring to teach that man can learn to control his world and his destiny. The Feminist movement denies the God-created role of women and of late has openly started worshipping gods of its own creation, either the so-called "Goddess" — actually a self-conscious revival of ancient paganism — or a perversion of the true God which claims to introduce a feminine principle into the Godhead. Even the modern democratic movement must be recognized as fundamentally hostile to the true faith, since its principles teach that man, not God, is the source of power in the state and that even moral decisions rest on majority vote, rather than God's revealed Will.

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1. Fr. M. Azkoul, *The Teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church* Vol. 1, 1986m p. 94

2. This is the best interpretation of the episode described in Genesis 6:2. Although many of the early fathers took the phrase "sons of God" to mean angels, it is clear from the teachings of the later fathers that the angels do not have a corporal nature and cannot assume flesh, so they could not have been meant here (cf. Fr. M. Azkoul, *op. cil.*, p. 214, note 1). St. John Chrysostom, in his *Homilies on Hebrews* 29:5, states that the "sons of God" were men. St. Isaac the Syrian also affirms that they were men (cf. *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Boston, 1984, p. 74). The teaching that they were specifically the descendents of Seth is affirmed by N. Popov, *Rukovodstvo k izucheniyu svyashchennoy istorii Vetkhago i Novago Zaveta [Handbook for the Study of the Sacred History of the Old and New Testament* Jordanville, 1964. p. 15 and Archpriest S. Slobodskoy, *Zakon Bozhiy (The Law of God)* Jordanville, 1967, p. 139.

3. See Gen. 15:1-21; 17:1-22; 18:1-33. In this last case, the Lord even permitted Abraham to debate with him about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

4. The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deut. 5:6-21. There is extensive commentary on and application of the Ten Commandments in other parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

5. James Jordan (*Judge's, God's War Against Humanism*, Tyler, Texas, 1985, pp. xiv-xvi) discusses the elements of this pattern in more detail.

6. For example, Ahaz (III Kings 16:3) and Manasseh (III Kings 21:2).

7. See Ezra 9-10.

8. Thus saith the Lord unto the Jews: O My people, what have I done unto thee, or how have I vexed thee? To thy blind have I given sight; thy lepers have I cleansed; and the man upon a bed did I restore. O My people, what have I done unto thee, and how hast thou recompensed Me? In the stead of manna, gall; in the stead of water, vinegar; in the stead of loving Me, ye nailed Me to the Cross. No longer will I endure. I will call to Me the nations (Gentiles), and they shall glorify Me, with the Father and the Spirit, and I will grant them life everlasting! [12th antiphon of the Matins of Great Thursday.

9. For example, F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, E. Lansing, Mich., 1975; F. Wolf, *Star Wave: Mind, Consciousness, and Quantum Physics*, New York, 1984.

## PATTERNS IN HISTORY

