Enter By The Narrow Gate

An Introduction to Eastern Orthodox Christianity for ‘New Age’ and Eastern Religion Inquirers

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Introduction

1) This outline is designed as a “module” to be used in conjunction with catechism.

2) Not designed to be an “all-inclusive” or “stand alone” catechism outline.

3) Its purpose is to cover general themes and to facilitate discussion and questions of relevance for inquirers of Eastern Orthodox Christianity from New Age and Eastern Religion backgrounds (Hinduism; Buddhism; Jainism).

   a) Unpack differences between New Age/Eastern and Orthodox Christianity in basic terminology, worldview, metaphysics, cosmologies, theology.

      i) There will be a certain amount of repetition of concepts in the various chapters; such repetition is by design to build on and reinforce key information throughout the module.

4) This module is suggested for use in several ways:

   - As the discussion leader’s guide.
   - As a hand-out to read-review along with inquirers.
   - As assigned reading material that would be followed up with a group discussion led by the catechist.
   - As an introduction for any inquirer from these backgrounds.

5) Not a doctrine-by-doctrine comparison; Hinduism and Buddhism are very complex and have many different traditions (especially Buddhism: Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, etc.).
a) There will be some comparison on a selective basis, to establish common ground and areas of distinction

6) This outline does not attempt to “prove” the existence of God (for non-believers)
   a) Assumes the inquirer wants to believe and/or understand what the early and ancient Christian Church taught and continues to teach today (and that is why they are here)

7) New Age/ Eastern inquirers bring specific baggage with them that comes from the amalgam of traditions to which they have been exposed

   - I.E. Eastern wisdom traditions (Hinduism; Buddhism; Taoism); Metaphysics (New Thought; Alice Bailey; Ascended Masters); Pop-Psychology (Wayne Dyer; Deepak Chopra); Synergistic ideas (Integral Yoga), etc.

8) ‘New Age’ defined: “Behind the term ‘New Age’ is a significant body of religious practice, much of it spun off from classical Oriental wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, along with a much broader collection of practices that would be hard to classify as religious at all: alternative approaches to healing, creative amalgamations of body-work, psychology, and spiritual techniques, and psychic phenomena such as trance channeling.”¹

9) Eastern Orthodox Christianity incorporates doctrinal theology with experiential themes and practices

¹ P. Occhiogrosso; Through The Labyrinth
a) The former can be taught, but the latter - while some of it can be described – can only be experienced

10) Christian teaching is that *God is love* (1 John 4:8)
   a) Orthodox Christianity is experiential and devotional, not primarily doctrinal (although this has unfortunately become the reverse in some Western Christians traditions)
   b) The greatest commandments are to love God with all your heart, mind soul and strength, and to love your neighbor as (much as you love) yourself (Mark 12:30-31)

11) A correct understanding of God is necessary in order to enter into an authentic relationship of love and communion (one cannot love Whom one does not know, or with a transpersonal state of being or Consciousness)
   a) “And love, the noblest of all activities, is the most difficult...”

12) Some people have problems with a healthy concept of “love” due to bad relationships, problems with parenting (Mother or Father), hypocrisy by Christians, sexual abuse, etc.
   a) These can be REAL hindrances (especially sexual abuse) to entering into a loving relationship with God, and should be addressed pastorally (outside the context of this pre-catechism class)

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2 On Prayer; Archimandrite DSophrony; Page 22
b) *Anecdotal* - I wonder whether some Westerners are drawn to Non-Dualistic religions (esp. Advaita Vedanta & Buddhism) in part because they have been abused, hurt or disappointed in human relationships and are thus attracted to the impersonal/ transpersonal/“No-Self” [“Emptiness”] teachings some of these religious traditions posit (escape from relationship and selfhood), versus *the robust personhood and relationship of communion in love in Christianity*; the latter of which requires repentance, confronting the hurt, bitterness, hypocrisy and betrayal and forgiving it, with God’s help.

c) Non-duality (Advaita Vedanta; Theravada Buddhism) is a way of knowledge and tends to appeal to intellectual types who can manage with little or no devotional practice. Certainly, it tends to make those who study it feel that they are above ordinary human relationships, which would be appealing if you have problems in that area.

13) For those who have been involved with Wicca, channeling, ‘spirit guides’, out-of-body work, demonology, psychic healing, magic (not the entertainment type), paranormal experimentation, Tantric Yoga, Advanced yoga (not pure exercise without chants, mantras, gurus), native American Indian spirituality, Angelology, serious astrology study/use, hallucinogenic, or serious drug use, etc., *please let the priest know* (in private), as there may be special work required as one moves through the material.

a) Sometimes involvement in (any of) the above may require an extended catechumen period and/or additional prayers for exorcism and/or counseling; this is at the priest – Bishop’s discretion.
14) Catechumens who have been serious practitioners of the aforementioned can experience depression, emotional melt-downs, internal struggles, temptations, marital discord/strife during the period of catechesis and especially prior to Baptism

a) The spirits [entities] attached to or lurking behind these practices do not let go easily and voluntarily

b) This is not meant to frighten or discourage anyone, but to make the catechumen aware of the reality of unseen warfare and unseen personal enemies and the struggle that occurs when one strives to turn towards God and away from the spirit realms

c) “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12 OSB)

15) Talk to your priest about any doctrines, dogma or personal issues that you have trouble with
Restoring Human Nature

1) The Hindu Upanishads (sacred texts) teach that life is changeable by nature, transitory and ephemeral
   a) Pain and pleasure are two sides of the same coin

2) The Bhagavad Gita (Hindu sacred text) uses the war battlefield as an analogy for this life

3) 500 years before the advent of Jesus Christ, the Buddha was profoundly affected by observing sickness, old age, and death

4) The Buddha concluded that attachments to this life are what produces suffering, and the Buddha sought a way beyond the suffering of the implicit processes of human life
   a) Four Noble Truths; Eightfold Noble Path

5) The 20th-century (post-modern) existential philosopher Martin Heidegger called human life a “being-toward-death”

6) Death, Heidegger wrote, is the primordial existential reality of humans who find themselves “thrown-into-the-world”

7) Christian revelation and Orthodox Holy Tradition:
   a) There is suffering; but not caused by God, the Creator
   b) Root cause: human disobedience by our ancestral parents, the consequences of which we live with (ancestral curse)
   c) We are not randomly "thrown-into-the-world"

3 Holy Tradition is the deposit of faith given by Jesus Christ to the Apostles and passed on in the Church from one generation to the next without addition, alteration or subtraction. Vladimir Lossky has famously described the Tradition as “the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church.”
d) Physical or spiritual death is not our true destiny

e) Awareness of death leads to the search for enduring life

f) There is purpose and a way to enduring life, true life

8) “Man and his destiny were in the Mind of the Triune God (i.e., Holy Trinity) ‘before the world began’ (2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; cf. Rom. 8:29). At a particular moment which man’s limited powers cannot discern, the pre-eternal God decided to create man according to His image and likeness. He made him in a personal and direct way (out of non-being), and endowed him with an incredible mind and a wondrous heart that is capable of embracing not only the whole of creation, both ‘seen and unseen’, ‘visible and invisible’, as the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil says, but even the very eternity of God. Man is the true lord of the kingdom of the world, the crown of the whole creation.”

9) The Sacred Scripture and the Holy Fathers of the Church teach that as a consequence of the fall of man (Gen. 3), humans have subsequently lived an essentially “inauthentic” human life that ends in physical death

a) Not truly human as designed for man by God, or as experienced in Paradise before the fall],

i) Cf. “In Buddhist cosmology, the phenomenal world continually repeats a four-stage cycle of formation, continuance, decline, and disintegration—cycles of

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4 Death is defined in Orthodox Christianity as the separation of the soul from the body, which happens because of man’s corruptibility and mortality and is the fruit of the sin of the Forefathers (Adam and Eve) The soul however continues to exist.; Life after Death; Met of Nafpaktos Hierotheos; Page 133

5 The Hidden Man Of The Heart; Archimandrite Zacaharius; page 18
change and rebirth through the four *kalpas* (æons or ages). A parallel to Christian cosmology is found here with this conception of a utopian past: ‘At the beginning of the *kalpa*, there were many beings. Each was garbed in the best of virtues. The light that shone from their bodies was so great that one did not need any more to depend upon the light of the sun and moon. [But] due to the power of the non-eternal, the light waned and the virtues lessened.’

10) The goal of Orthodox Christianity is to restore man (woman) to “true humanness” and human “authenticity” from brokenness, disconnection from its Source, and as a result, to save us from spiritual death (and eventually restore us to eternal life, which includes a “new glorified body”)

a) We are thus freed from the fear of death (Heidegger calls it existential “Angst”)

b) “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself (Jesus Christ) likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, hat is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Heb. 2:15)

11) The underlying premise of Orthodox Christianity (St Gregory Palamas) is that human life, creation, and even the bodiless forms of life [i.e., angels] are imbued with another dimension of reality: the interpenetrating reality of divine grace

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6 Marking Out Common Ground for Eastern Orthodoxy and Mahāyāna Buddhism: Correspondences in the Work of Gregory of Nyssa and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, David K. Goodin, PhD Candidate and Faculty Lecturer, McGill University, Quebec, Canada
12) This comes from the *image of God* which was fully realized, expressed and restored ("recapitulated") in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.7

13) All of mankind – Christian or not – have this Image indwelling them, corrupted, obscured, defiled, or tarnished as it may be; aware or conscious of it or not

a) “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”8

b) “O Christ the true light, enlightening and sanctifying every man who comes into the world”9

i) Note: Buddhists have a similar concept of the *Buddha-nature (Buddha dhatu)*

14) Orthodox Christianity, if undertaken seriously (not nominally), first awakens and then leads to the healing of the soul (often referred to as “the heart”)10, and is the process whereby the soul is re-united with its true [and only immortal and eternal] Source (the *Divine Being*)

a) From Whom is our only hope of “eternal life”

15) Orthodox Christianity as a spiritual path11 (versus a doctrinal or theological system) is not merely a set of doctrines to be memorized or (even only believed), or ascetic

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7 3-4 are direct quotes from Fr Daniel M. Rodich’s “Becoming Uncreated: The Journey To Human Authenticity”; page 25

8 John: 1:4; all biblical quotations are from The Orthodox Study Bible

9 A Manual of the Hours of The Orthodox Church; page 46

10 The “heart” in patristic literature is understood as the spiritual center of man’s being. The heart is comprised of man’s feelings (affect); volition (will); and man’s mind (cognition) in one unbreakable unity. Although not the physical heart (the organ itself) it is thought to reside in the same physical location. The Heart; Archimandrite Spyridon Logothetis; Brotherhood of the Transfiguration; 2001; Page 17, 18

11 I borrowed this from Metropolitan Jonah (OCA)
practices to be followed by “experiences”; nor is it merely a life lived following the example of Jesus Christ

a) Rather, it is a life (ideally) of transfiguration – divinization; through a “union with Christ in His glorified human nature.”

16) Becoming a “Christian” in the context of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, is not a (mere) acceptance by faith alone of a “spiritual legal transaction” in a law court between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ [as some Western Christians traditions teach]

17) In Protestant Evangelical Christianity, initial “conversion” by faith and/or by baptism and “salvation”, are often understood as the same event

a) Are you “saved”?

18) Not so in Orthodox Christianity; the process only begins at Baptism:

a) “Deification in the broad sense begins at baptism, and stretches out all along the whole of man’s spiritual ascent; here his powers are also active, that is, during the purification from the passions, the winning of the virtues, and illumination.”

19) In Orthodox Christian terminology, salvation is understood as a process of transformation/illumination with three inter-related aspects in this life and the next (not linear, or compartmentalized into three distinct stages):

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12 Divine Energy; Jon E. Braun

13 The distinction between forensic justification and progressive sanctification emerged after Luther and is a keynote of later Protestantism; Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences; Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. Mackenzie; Page98 (footnote)

14 Fr. Dumitru Staniloae (Orthodox Spirituality) quoted in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology; M. Pomazansky; footnote; Page 221
a) **Purification** (Metanoia – Gr)

i) “In the first stage man lives and acts outside his heart and entertains proud thoughts and considers vain things. In fact, he is in a state of delusion. His heart is darkened and void of understanding.”

ii) ‘Through suffering we are stopped short in our self worship and pursuit of earthly gratification. We find that our old distractions no longer work as they did before – they no longer stop the pain. Finally we are forced to face what we had been running away from all our lives: we are forced to face ourselves as we really are, and it is a gruesome sight. The ego cries out that, if we truly face our sickness, the end is at hand; and this is true, for it will mean the end of the ego’s tyranny. For our true selves, however, it marks the beginning of a new life.”

b) **Illumination** (Theoria-Gr)

i) “In the second stage, man ‘comes to himself’, and he begins to have humble thoughts that attract grace and make his heart sensitive.”

ii) “One day, as he stood and recited, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner’, uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room...He was wholly in the presence of immaterial Light and seemed to himself to have turned into light.”

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15 The Hidden Man of the Heart; Archimandrite Zacharias; page 6

16 Christ The Eternal Tao; Monk Damascene; Page 285

17 IBID; page 6
(1) “This Light, says Fr. Sophrony, penetrates us with the power of God, and we become ‘without beginning’ – not through our origin but by the gift of Grace; life without beginning is communicated to us. And there is no limit to the outpouring of the Father’s love: man becomes identical with God – the same by content, not by primordial being. God will eternally be GOD…”

c) Theosis (Gr- cf. sanctification; God-likeness; communion with God)

i) “The heart experiences a surge of light-bearing life. The mind suddenly grasps hitherto concealed meanings. Contact with His creative energy recreates us. Cognition that comes that comes in this fashion is not the same as philosophical intellection: together with perception of realities of the spiritual plane man’s whole being takes on another form of life – similar perhaps to the first created. This existential knowledge of God dissolves into a current of prayerful love for Him.”

18 IBID; 395

19 Quoting Elder Sophrony; IBID; 168
Post – Modern ‘Spirituality’

1) Various ways the word “spirituality”\(^{20}\) is used and understood in our post-modern, pluralistic culture:

- \textit{Awareness of or connection with impersonal or transpersonal spiritual energies, forces or “cosmic consciousness”}
- \textit{‘Expanded consciousness’: of something greater than self and nature (natural realm)}
- \textit{Unity with the divine}, or Godhead (various understandings of what “God” means)
- \textit{Perfected spiritual awareness; often referred to as enlightenment or realization}
- \textit{Mindfulness} (Buddhist)
- \textit{Compassionate living}; treating people, animals, earth with awareness and decency\(^{21}\)

2) Occult is intrinsic in deity-oriented Eastern religions:

a) “Vedic faith...depended upon external rites, which were magical in effect and intended to control the universe...” \(^{22}\)

i) Belief in depersonalized energies existing in the universe that can be harnessed through natural abilities or mechanical means (occult magic; Roerich; Blavatsky; etc.)\(^{23}\)

\(^{20}\) Fr Meletios Webber distinguishes “religion” from “spirituality” this way: “Religion is concerned with God’s relationship with the universe; spirituality is focused on the way a person sees his own place in the universe.” Steps of Transformation; Page 83

\(^{21}\) Peter Occhiogrosso; Through The Labyrinth

\(^{22}\) IBID; 17
b) “Who are these Vedic gods, known by such names as Prajapati, Indra, Varuna, Yama and Rudra? Generally speaking, gods occupy exalted positions from which they control the rain, sunshine, the wind, water, fire and death, and other natural phenomena.”

i) Holy Scripture: ‘For all the gods of the nations are demons...” (Psalm 95 [96] LXX)

ii) “...all the power that is given to the practitioners of Eastern religions comes from the same phenomenon of medium-ism (I.E., channeling)”

iii) “Many mediums claim that their powers are not at all supernatural, but come from a part of nature about which very little is known. To some extent this is doubtless true; but it’s also true that the realm from which these spirits come is the special realm of the fallen spirits, who do not hesitate to use the opportunity afforded by the people who enter this realm to draw them into their own nets, adding their own demonic powers and manifestations...”

3) In the neo-pagan spiritual culture we live in today these external gods have (often) been supplanted by an elevated (and delusional) teaching of the **Self as Divine Being**

4) The “Self” or “Soul” becomes the god of the New Age

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23 Fr G. Aquaro; Occult Magic: A Brief Synopsis

24 Hinduism; Nikhilananda; Page 23

25 Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future; Fr Seraphim Rose; Page 61; 162

26 IBID; 162
5) Important to understand the Orthodox understanding of the soul [differs from the New Age/Eastern]

6) The soul and body are created simultaneously by God (conception)

7) St Gregory of Nyssa defines the soul as an essence which is created; it is a living and noetic essence, which gives the power of life and the reception of the sense-impressions to the organic and sensory body while the body maintains its physical existence

8) The soul brings vital power into the bodily organism to activate the senses

9) The body moves by the power and energy of the soul

10) Contrary to the understanding of the New Age and East, the interests of the soul are not always seeking the highest good

   a) St Theophan says the soul is in constant motion

11) The soul when in its lower expression is submerged in earthly concerns and the gratification of its temporal needs, which inclines it to sin

12) Seekers of these traditions can be deluded into believing their soul is already “perfect” and is the source of all that is good

   a) “I had revered my soul as my personal God. Why would I need God, if my soul thinks it is perfect? The Freudian definition of the ego is flawed, I learned, for it bypasses the relationship of the soul to our ego; in truth, our soul is as much a part of our lower nature (unpurified – editor) as the ego...St Theophan emphasized that there was a distinction between feeling good (a lower expression of the soul) and truly

27 Life After Life; Met. Hierotheos
experiencing the Holy Spirit...Many New Age practices are ...based on trusting your own feelings and intuitions, without regard for where the trust is being placed.”28

13) “Self-mastery”, “self-divinization” are the goals of New Age (and New Thought) teaching; self-empowerment; being one’s own god (divinization) as a birthright, through one's spiritual efforts and discovery.

a) Very directly connected with the spirit of “narcissism” that pervades modern Western culture.

14) This is the primal temptation: enlightenment man’s way, becoming (thinking one is) a god [Satan tempts Eve]:

15) “For God knows in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.”29

16) “He (man) wanted to become god, not by means of God’s love and in submission to the divine command, but by means of his own independence and rebelliousness. And at that moment, his dreadful fall took place, as the Scriptures relate, and this was a universal misfortune.”30

17) But what does being “enlightened” mean?

a) Is it the (heart) soul that is enlightened or expanded, or in actuality the ego?

28 The Pearl of Great Price; Veronica Hughes; Page 149-150

29 Genesis: 3:5

30 The Hidden Man Of The Heart; Archimandrite Zacharias; page 19
i) In the end, the ego will die with the body; so if our work has only been in the temporal or psychological ego-realm, it is of no eternal avail and actually this work (ego work) is counter-productive to eternal work

b) Elder Sophrony: “In these circumstances...there is no salvation for man.”

c) “The source of real deliverance lies in unquestionable, wholehearted acceptance of the Revelation, ‘I am that I am...Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.’ God is Personal Absolute, Trinity One and Indivisible. Our whole Christian life is based on this Revelation. This God called us from non-being into life...We are created in order to be communicants in the Divine Being of Him Who really is.”

18) Metaphysics in eastern, new age and New Thought spirituality are (generally) based on Pantheism:

a) The view that “God”, the universe, and nature are identical in essential nature; that creation is but an “emanation” of some unmanifested Absolute; and, that the so-called “soul of man” is in its true essence, this (very) unmanifested Absolute

i) Common form of pantheism is Dualistic Pantheism; two major types of substance: [lower] physical and [higher] mental/spiritual. Dualistic pantheism may include beliefs in reincarnation, cosmic consciousness, and paranormal; it

31 On Prayer; Archimandrite Sophrony; Page 169

32 IBID; Pages 169-170

33 I.E. Christian Science; Religious Science; Science of Mind; Unity

34 Paramahamsa Yogananda; The Second Coming of Christ; Vol. 1; page 310
often involves an asceticism where the material-physical is rejected as being
unworthy of spiritual endeavor

19) Contrast with Orthodox Christian Theism:

a) The belief in one God as the creator, sustainer and ruler of the universe, who created
everything else out of nothing (ex nihilo); not out of Divine substance or preexistent
matter or substance

b) Orthodox Christian Theism holds that creation is distinct from God (whose nature is
ultimately unknowable and unapproachable in essence); but (creation is)
interpenetrated by God’s energies (energeia - Gr) by His grace (which can be
experienced)

i) Orthodox view of the re: between the Creator and Creation: **Immanence**

    **without pantheistic identification, transcendence without deistic isolation**

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c) Christian belief in a personal, enduring “self” or “soul”, created by God

i) VS false self of Hinduism; No Self or “Emptiness” of all forms of Buddhism

d) Christianity: The soul is distinct by nature and essence from God; it (soul) is created;
it exists by God’s grace

i) “The Nature of God and the nature of man are not identical; or, to speak more
generally, the Nature of the Divine and the nature of the earthly are not identical.
In the Divine Nature, both existence itself and everything in It which has

35 Becoming Uncreated: The Journey To Human Authenticity; Daniel M. Rogich
existence are unchangeable and immortal; for, in that which is constant, everything is constant. But what is true of our nature? It flows, is corrupted, and undergoes change after change.” (St Gregory The Theologian; Homily 19, “On Julian”)³⁶

ii) Cf Buddhist view of impermanence

20) When Our Lord says “The Kingdom of heaven is within”; or, “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” He does not mean that the human soul is God

21) The purified human heart is where we encounter God

³⁶ Orthodox Dogmatic Theology; Pomazansky; Page 127
Common Ground With Eastern Religions?

1) While each religious system and tradition offers a distinct diagnosis and cure, there are areas where there is common ground:

2) Orthodox Christianity shares an *existential emphasis* with eastern traditions (although based on very different theological/cosmological premises)
   a) Eastern Orthodoxy – especially the *hesychasm* (contemplative) tradition – teaches that true “spiritual knowledge” presupposes a “purified” and “awakened” *nous* (Greek), which is the “Inner ‘I’” (so to speak) of the soul
   b) For Eastern Orthodox the true theologian isn’t one who simply knows doctrine intellectually or academically; but one “*who knows God, or the inner essences or principles of created things by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception.*”
   c) Most eastern spiritual seekers are not aware that the opportunity for profound spiritual illumination-transformation - which our tradition calls “*theoria*” - exists within a Christian context

3) These traditions (including Orthodox Christianity) share a *similar (negative) diagnosis of humanity and human consciousness* in the phenomenal world:
   a) Suffering as an existential and intrinsic factor of life
   b) Christianity teaches the fall of man (Gen. 3) moving towards death
   c) Hinduism teaches Maya, or the ultimate unreality of conditioned existence

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37 Makarian Homilies; Glossary of The Philokalia
d) Buddhism teaches the phenomenal world as the milieu of the non-Self, as impermanent and non-eternal and attachment to it fosters suffering.

e) While Christians share a similar negative diagnosis of the fallen human condition with Buddhists, Jains or Hindus, they do not share a common “cure”

i) Anecdotal: Buddhism (especially Theravada) in my opinion comes close to a correct analysis of human nature and of the need for an end to craving/desire as a cure to suffering (apatheia); however the fact is that the Buddha was 500 before the advent of God on the earth and so he could not bring an end to suffering and death. In fact, the Buddha died at 80 after eating bad pork, for which he suffered and then expired.

4) For Orthodox Christians, the “cure” is being transformed by the grace-energies of God, through Jesus Christ, which (paradoxically) begins when we see our spiritual poverty and desolation and need of saving.

a) The “therapy” of the Orthodox Christian life, according to the Eastern Church Fathers, is to progress from the “sub-natural” or “fallen state”, in which we find ourselves subject to death; to the truly “natural” or “according to nature state”, after the Image (of God); and ultimately to the “supra-natural” or “beyond nature” state, after the Likeness (of God).

b) For Hindus the goal is to achieve an esoteric-type, self-realization through spiritual disciplines.

38 Hidden Man of the Heart; Zacharias; page 7
c) For Buddhists the power of salvation is in the individual through correct knowledge and practice in the Noble Eightfold Path

5) Classic Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are all [practically-speaking] *exclusivist* in their understanding of salvation (I.E., each tradition believes it is the one, true path)
   a) Christianity tends to get a “bad rap” for being “exclusivist” in its understanding of salvation (soteriology)
   b) A Hindu text (Rig Veda) makes reference to all paths leading to the same truth and therefore Hinduism is often touted as being ecumenical; however, in Advaita Vedanta for example, the Upanishads as interpreted by Shankara are seen as the only path to liberation; Buddhists teach that Buddhist dharma is the only real path to liberation (and Christians understand the work of Christ, through His atonement and resurrection as the only way to salvation)

6) Buddhist and Hindu *dharma* (practice) emphasize cessation of craving-desire (dispassion), which is necessary to quench the passions
   a) Holy Tradition teaches *apatheia*, or detachment as a means of combating the fallen passions

7) Hindu and Buddhist meditation methods teach “stillness”
   a) The word *hesychia* in Holy Tradition – the root of the word for *hesychasm* – means “stillness”

8) Buddhism, especially, teaches “mindfulness”

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39 Some of these comparative elements were suggested by John Simmons
a) Holy Tradition teaches “watchfulness” (nepsis - Greek) so we do not fall into
distorted thinking-living!

9) Hindus and Buddhists understand it is not wise to live for the present life, but to
struggle for the future one
   a) Orthodox agree

10) Westerners who become Buddhist or Hindu are often fervent spiritual seekers used to
struggling with foreign languages and cultures (Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Japanese) and
pushing themselves outside their “comfort zones”
   a) Converts to the Eastern Orthodox Church can relate

11) Buddhist and Hindu sects have complex forms of “liturgy” including chant, prostration
and veneration of icons
   a) Obviously Orthodox Christianity does as well

12) All traditions have a robust monastic lineage

13) Tibetan Buddhism, especially, places high value on the lives of (their) ascetics, relics
and “saints”
   a) Cf Christian hagiography and relics

14) All traditions share a belief in angelic (positive) and demonic (negative) beings or
entities

15) These traditions all believe there is an afterlife
   a) They differ as to what this afterlife will be
Orthodox Spirituality

1) Contrasted with New Age/ Eastern ideas of “transcendence” and the essential divinity and immortality of the human soul, “spirituality” in the Orthodox Church is a restored life in communion with the spirit of the Holy Trinity\(^{40}\), mediated specifically by the Divine Person of Jesus Christ

   i) “…Orthodox spirituality is the experience of life in Christ, the sphere of the new man, regenerated by the grace of God. It is not an abstract, emotional and psychological state of being. It is man’s union with God.” \(^{41}\)

2) Strictly speaking, spirituality is only authentic when it is of the Holy Spirit of the living God

   a) “The Holy Spirit partakes of the fullness of the divinity”\(^{42}\)

3) “Our specifically Christian undertaking is decidedly not one of transcending. It is, rather, the intentional reinspiriting of the body and its lowly matter – as manifested in the incarnation of Christ.”\(^{43}\)

4) Other “spiritualities” and major world religions may provide glimpses or glimmers of the Holy Spirit, but only glimpses

   a) If the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not known, one cannot really know God

\(^{40}\) We will get to the Holy Trinity later

\(^{41}\) Met. Hierotheos Vlachos; Orthodox Spirituality

\(^{42}\) St Basil; On The Holy Spirit; 46

\(^{43}\) The End of suffering; Scott Cairns; Page28
5) Spirituality is \textit{not} primarily about how one treats others, the earth, animals, meditation, altered states, etc.

a) although these are impacted by one’s conversion, and part of following God’s commandments

6) Goal of the Orthodox Christian life is to become by grace, what God is by nature

a) “\textit{...we are to become like God, as far as this is possible for human nature.}”\textsuperscript{44}

b) Distinguish this from Pantheism or self-divinization

c) Essence - energies distinction (St Gregory Palamas)\textsuperscript{45}

i) \textbf{Immanence without pantheistic identification, transcendence without deistic isolation}

7) Only God is holy by nature, and according to the Scripture, it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies men (Romans 14)

a) “\textit{...fill me wholly with holiness, as Thou art holy by nature.}”\textsuperscript{46}

b) C.S. Lewis: we catch this holiness from God

8) According to St Basil, the gifts of the spirit cause “\textit{knowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, heavenly citizenship, endless joy in the presence of God, becoming like God...}”

9) \textbf{The relationship between God and humans is not impersonal, or trans-personal}

a) “\textit{At the center of the universe is a relationship.}”\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} (St Basil; On The Holy Spirit; paragraph 23

\textsuperscript{45} St. Gregory Palamas taught that both God’s Essence and His Energies, being inseparable from each other, are present everywhere in creation; Footnote; Orthodox Dogmatic Theology; Page 71

\textsuperscript{46} From “Prayers Before Holy Communion”, St Basil the Great
i) It is personal, intimate; the most personal and intimate of all relationships

b) Personhood is key in Orthodox Christian human anthropology

i) We never lose our personhood (hypostasis) through communion with God (just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not melded into an in differentiable Divinity)

ii) Other traditions (especially Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism) do not have a true human anthropology, because the self$^{48}$ is ultimately absorbed into an Impersonal Absolute, a Buddha nature (Buddha dhatu), or is considered a “false” self (in an ultimate sense), of relative existence, or simply a “mode” of the divine (no real ontological existence)

10) (Contrarily) Christian Scripture tells us God knows us intimately; each hair of our head$^{49}$

a) “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”$^{50}$

b) “You took hold of me in my mother’s womb”$^{51}$

c) We (as “persons”) are promised eternal life with God, knowing and known

11) Theosis – deification [What is it?]

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$^{47}$ Experiencing The Trinity; Darrell W. Johnson; 37

$^{48}$ In forms of Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, there is ultimately “no self” or enduring personal identity to be absorbed


$^{50}$ Jeremiah 1:5

$^{51}$ Psalm 139 (140); 13
a) Participation in the uncreated grace or energies (energeia) of God, which we receive (by grace) from the Holy Spirit (Who is also God)

12) Our “deification” is only possible through our “communion” with the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ [important nuance of distinction]

a) Not based on our own innate divinity or inherent worth

b) The term “deification” does not mean that the one who is “deified” is placed on the path to personal God-Manhood

52

c) Cf. The sword (Christ’s human nature) and the fire (His divine nature) analogy:

i) Christ’s human nature participates in the uncreated energies or qualities of the divine nature (in Himself); “I and My Father are one…” (John 10:30)

ii) People joined to Christ therefore have access to those energies because of and to the extent of their union with Him in His now glorified humanity

d) Our “union” with God, through Christ, is not a union with Christ’s divinity (which is unapproachable, being God); our union with God is made possible through our union (or potential union) with the divinized humanity of Christ, through His Body and Blood (the Eucharist)

i) Since the Lord Jesus Christ received flesh from the Ever-Virgin Mary, she is called the fount of our deification

52

e) Identified and connected with theoria (vision) of the uncreated Light

52 Orthodox Dogmatic Theology
i) “Called theosis in grace because it is attained through the energy of divine grace. It is a cooperation of God with man, since God is He Who operates and man is he who cooperates.”

f) All effective praxis, all effective asceticism in the Church (self purification) aims at man's theosis-divinization, his communion with God, the Holy Trinity

13) What is the purpose of self-denial and ascetic struggle?

a) Purification of the heart (often referred to as “nous”\(^5^4\)), so we can experience God (The Kingdom of God within)

14) Principle means of inner purification and one we are commanded to by Jesus Christ: repentance

a) Change of attitude, thoughts, desires, decisions and change of faith and hope

b) Change of action and life

c) St Clement of Alexandria: “True repentance is capable of purifying man.”\(^5^5\)

15) Another key Orthodox principle is the freedom of the human will, which although battered and tarnished (and tends to choose wrongly), is always free to choose good over evil; in fact we have the responsibility to choose good over evil and will be judged for our choices in this life

\(^{53}\) IBID

\(^{54}\) “Higher mind”; Christ The Eternal Tao; Page 277

\(^{55}\) Above from The Heart; Archimandrite Spyridon Logothetis; Page 70
16) Cf. “Synergy” be: Divine grace and human will

   a) Divine grace prompts human response and action
      i) Not Divine grace alone; not human works or efforts alone

   b) “A house roof is held up by the foundations and the rest of the building, and the
      foundation and the rest of the building are laid to hold the roof – since both are
      necessary and useful – and neither is the roof built without the foundations and the
      rest of the house, nor can foundations and walls without roof make a building fit to
      live in....So it is with the soul: the grace of the Holy Spirit is preserved by keeping the
      commandments, and the keeping of the commandments is the foundation laid for
      receiving the gifts of God’s grace....Neither does the grace of the Holy Spirit remain
      in us without our obeying the commandments, nor can obeying the commandments
      be useful and salutary without Divine grace.”

17) Orthodoxy: a “material or incarnational theology”

   i) Sacramental theology where matter participates in divinization
      (1) IE the Eucharist
   ii) VS Gnosticism(s); an anti-material spirituality; we view matter as “real”; matter
      is intrinsically good and matter has been sanctified by Christ and will be –
      including humans – transformed

56 Cf. Versus depravity of the will Augustine; Total depravity, John Calvin, etc.

57 St. Simeon the New Theologian (Practical and Theological Precepts no. 95, Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart;
   Faber and Faber pg. 119)
b) Gregory of Nyssa: phenomenal reality only exists because of God’s direct and continuing intervention...“the Divine Will became [the world of] nature...”

i) Contrast with eastern and Gnostic metaphysics where “created being” is eternal (because it is part and parcel of the Absolute; i.e., pantheism); it goes in and out of “cycles”

ii) Christian creation is linear

c) Although Eastern Orthodoxy has been called a “mystical” expression of Christianity, it is not a “mystical” theology if by “mystical” we mean something immaterial, or “somewhere else”, “transcendent”, opposed to /rejection of the material, etc.58

i) Our Lord tells us: The Kingdom of heaven is at hand (here and now, intersecting time and space)...it is we who do not have eyes to see it...not referring to the physical eyes, but the “I” (nous” behind the physical eyes)

18) Sensible reality is a different substance from God, but since all sensible reality is undergirded by the divine will and the principle of existence (i.e. the logoi), it is imbued with an intelligible reality reflecting the essence of God to varying degrees – the height of which is humanity’s Image of God59

19) Contrast with Hindu/Buddhist idea of Maya (illusion); or the relativist ‘reality’ of the created world

59 Becoming Uncreated
20) Contrast with Hindu/Buddhist – Gnostic idea of the dualism/opposition of soul (good) and body (bad)

a) Cf. Soul imprisoned in body
The ‘New Age’ Christ

1) Important to distinguish Orthodox Christianity from New Age – Eastern religions, in their understanding of Christ

2) Hinduism sees Christ as one of many Divine Incarnations
   a) “...the periodic recurrence of divine incarnations is part of God’s creative enterprise...”
   b) "God incarnates Himself to fulfill a cosmic need whenever such a need arises."

3) Buddhism does not acknowledge a Creator God, but does acknowledge “Vedic gods” who occupy spiritual realms
   a) These gods however are lower than the state of Nirvana

4) However, a divine incarnation in the Hindu sense is not really human by nature (contrast with the natures of Christ)
   i) “He is seen as though born, as though endowed with a body, and as though showing compassion for men; for He is in reality unborn, unchanging, the Lord of all created beings, and by nature eternal, pure, illumined, and free.” (My emphasis)

5) (Therefore) Christ is understood in New Age/Eastern as an all-spirit being (i.e., not human)

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60 Paramahamsa Yogananda; The Second Coming of Christ; Discourse One; page 4
61 Hinduism; Swami Nikhilananda; Page 45
62 IBID; paraphrasing Sankaracharya
a) Tendency in New Age / Eastern religion to “spiritualize” all references to Christ

   i) “…Christ is from heaven; he is from above, he is the Son of God. This man of heaven has a heavenly body; his flesh and blood are not the same gross kind as those of ordinary humanity.”

6) New Age/ Eastern view of Christ contradicts the biblical and Orthodox Christian view:

   a) “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered (real blood, real suffering) and was buried…”

   i) If Christ was only Spirit, He could not redeem our humanity (except through some form of spiritual “magic” or “alchemy”; we (“self”) are spirit and flesh together); this He could only do by assuming our nature (while still being God!), purging it of death (and sin), and raising our nature with Himself

   ii) We become “partakers of the divine nature” through our participation with His glorified human nature

7) Christ is often depicted in New Age teachings as “self-realized” or “deified” soul (New Age)

   a) A human who simply discovered Brahman (Trans-personal divinity) within himself

63 Ravi Ravindra; The Gospel of John in light of Indian Mysticism

64 Nicene Creed

65 2 Peter 1:4
b) “Jesus was a powerful guru who taught ‘inner alchemy’ through awakening the latent artist is us... Jesus is a great teacher of ‘ordinary magic’...”

i) Cf. Patristic writers also title Jesus a Supreme Mystic and Deified Saint (in His Glorified Humanity); however He is also known by the Patristic writers as Savior and Bodily Redeemer

8) Or as a Yogi, an adept, who studied in India or Tibet

9) Messenger who restored lost knowledge to humanity (Gnostics)

10) Metaphysical traditions teach Christ is one of the ‘Ascended Masters’ - i.e. (Blavatsky; Alice Bailey)

a) Individuals who were formerly embodied on the Earth and learned the lessons of life during their incarnations. They gained mastery over the limitations of the matter planes, balanced at least 51% of negative karma, and fulfilled their Dharma (Divine Plan). An Ascended Master, in such an understanding, has become God-like and a source of unconditional "Divine Love" to all life, and through the Ascension has united with his or her own "God Self," the "I AM Presence."

11) New Thought (Christian Science; Religious Science; Unity) teaches Christ is a human individual who discovered the mental - spiritual laws (the world of conscious intelligence) of the universe

66 Becoming Uncreated: The Journey To Authenticity; Daniel M. Rogich; xvi

67 The Science of Mind; Ernest Holmes; page 31
Christ in the Bible and Holy Tradition

1) Divinity is revealed in the Sacred Scriptures (Hebrew and New Testament) as the Holy Trinity

   a) “The Three Hypostases (“Persons”) of the Holy Trinity [Father, Son, Holy Spirit] have one and the same Essence (nature); each of the Hypostases (“Persons”) has the fullness of Divinity...the Three Hypostases (“Persons”) are equal in honor and worship.”

   b) “Because God in His very Essence is wholly consciousness and thought and self-awareness, each of these three eternal manifestations of Himself by the one God has self-awareness, and therefore each one is a Person. And these Persons are not simply forms or isolated manifestations...

   c) The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union is also a Person...What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the third of the three Persons who are God.”

2) Orthodox Christian teaching is that Christ took up our human nature through His incarnation and joined our human nature in His divine nature (without confusing or co-mingling the two) in order to transform/ restore/ recapitulate our nature to its original condition (Archetype)

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68 M. Pomazansky; Orthodox Dogmatic Theology; 93

69 C.S. Lewis, quoted in Understanding The Trinity; 50-51
i) St Gregory of Nazianzus (St Gregory The Theologian): “For that which He has not assumed (speaking of assuming human nature through His Incarnation), He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.”

Jesus Christ: Humanity and Divinity in One “Person”

   a) Mark 15:39; John 19:5

4) The Son of Man
   a) John 9: 35-37

5) Tempted (as a man)
   a) Matthew 4:1

6) Possesses a body of flesh, bones and blood
   a) Luke 24: 39

7) Died (as a man)
   a) Romans 5:8

8) Called God in New Testament
   a) Cf. Col 2:9; John 1:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 9:5; John 20:28; Acts 20:28;
      Titus 2: 12-13

9) The “only-begotten”
   a) Cf. John 1:14;18; John 3:16

70 Epistle 51; 1st Epistle Against Apollinarius
10) Equal in honor to the Father
   a) Cf. John 5:17; John 5:21; John 5:26; John 5:23

11) He is prayed to
   a) Cf. Acts 7:59

12) He is one in essence the Father
   a) Cf. John 10:30; John 14:11; 10:38; John 17:10

13) He is worshipped as God
   a) Cf. Matthew 2:2,11; 14:33

14) He is sinless
   a) I Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15

15) Knows all things
   a) John 21:17

16) He is eternal
   a) Cf. Rev. 1:8; John 17:5

17) He is omnipresent
   a) Cf. John 3:13; Matt. 18:20;

18) He is the Creator of the world
   a) Cf. John1:3; Col. 1:16

19) Has all the fullness of deity
   a) Cf. Col. 2:9

20) Gives eternal life
   a) Cf. John 10:28
Christian ‘Salvation’ and Eastern ‘Enlightenment’

1) Are they the same?

2) No! Different “cures” to ultimately different diagnoses

3) Christian salvation/ redemption is hard to grasp for (many) New Age/ Eastern seekers, for whom *there is no correlative idea about God literally becoming human* in order to save/ redeem man (cf. atonement)

   a) C.S. Lewis articulates this well: “My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption; in what sense the life and death of Christ ‘saved’ or ‘opened salvation to’ the World...What I couldn’t see was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us right here and now – except so far as his example helped us.”

4) Eastern deities or Avatars are “emanations”, “manifestations” or “modes” of the unmanifest, unconditioned Absolute [of which humans are thought to be of the same essence and nature]

   a) They do not liberate men from Maya; they merely show the way, encourage, or [cf. Boddhisatvas] help seekers along the way of Dharma (as Christians believe “Saints” can)

   b) Boddhisatvas are merely liberated beings; not “gods” or “deities”

5) In *Eastern – Gnostic metaphysics* there is no need for an “atonement” (as Christians understand it)

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71 The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis; 976
a) Because human nature itself is ALREADY understood to be one in essence and nature with the divine (no atonement or redemption is needed)

b) The focus is on meditation and right thinking ["Apavada"], whereby the individual soul [apparent soul] becomes aware of its divine nature [real soul], often through a “Gnostic” sort of experience (Samadhi; Nirvana); it is illumination which is sought and by which the imprisoned soul is freed; and, it is ignorance which fuels maya and perpetuates samsara, the cycle of births, deaths and suffering (reincarnation)

c) “…the central difference between Gnosticism and conventional Christianity...is not sin, repentance and redemption, but an enigmatic mystical illumination...”72

6) Hindus-Buddhists do not believe an Avatar-Deity (Isvara) can take on or obliterate universal karma and therefore free individuals from future (re)incarnations:

a) Karma; cause and effect consequences from previous action and lives (Cf. reincarnation)

b) Each individual must struggle to liberate oneself from karma (over many lifetimes on a roller coaster-like scenario of lives)

7) Reincarnation was rejected by the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the Church73

i) “Souls (do not) transmigrate into other bodies. For if they did, they would know why they were punished, and they would be afraid to commit even the most trivial sin afterwards.”74

72 Forbidden Faith: The Gnostic Legacy; Richard Smoley; 15

73 I will speak more on reincarnation in chapter
ii) “Now our position is this: that the human soul cannot by any means at all be transferred to beasts.” 75

iii) “At one time he (Plato) says that the soul is of the substance of God; at another, after having exalted it...he exceeds again in a different way, and treats it with insult, making it pass into swine and asses, and of other animals of yet less esteem than these.” 76

8) In addition to an esoteric “illumination”, liberation or “Moksha” in eastern traditions often understood as an “absorption” of self in an unmanifested Absolute

a) A drop of rain in the ocean – Sri Ramakrishna (19th century Hindu “saint”)

b) “Being Brahman, he merges with Brahman”.

   i) Some dualistic (Bhakti – devotional) Hindu sects (Vaishnaivites – Krishna followers) would disagree with this “absorption” view

   ii) Some Buddhist traditions (Mahayana) would say there is some form of enduring self

9) Distinctive Christian view: the human soul is enduring and uniquely created in God’s Image and Likeness (not in nature or essence), but needs restoration (like a tarnished painting) because after the Fall it lost divine grace and became (and exists) alien to God

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74 Justin Martyr quoted in A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs; David W. Bercot, Editor; page 553

75 Tertullian; IBID; 553

76 Speaking of Plato; St John Chrysostom; Hom II; St John’s Gospel; page 4-5
10) God’s Image in us has been tarnished by breaking God’s commandments; however it (Image) is never eradicated

11) In the Christian view, “salvation” (saving – redemption) first requires an objective intervention outside the psychological human realm; liberation from death and entrance to the divine realm cannot thus occur through one’s own spiritual quest or exploration (fundamental difference, this cannot be overstated)
   a) All such exploration and work [as occurs in Eastern, non-Christian asceticism] necessarily takes place in the fallen, human realm, the psychological realm, or the realm of the fallen spirits
   b) These are the only avenues open to man without the Holy Spirit

12) The door to the divine realm has been shut and locked from the inside; it must be opened from the inside
   a) The connection between God, the source of Life, was severed (between creation and God) after the Fall

13) Saving from what, one might ask?
   a) From death; separation from God, our Source of Life

14) Christians believe salvation is only possible through and by the grace of God

15) Through a mediator (Christ), who bridges the heavenly and material realms [without Whom there is no possibility of a union, since the two natures-realms are of entirely different existence]
   a) “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus…” (1 Tim. 2:5)
b) “Christ has saved our nature: through His Incarnation, death and Resurrection, physical death will not hold us, and all mankind has been made subject to future resurrection. Further, Christ has opened to human nature the possibility of being deified and united to God eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven.”\(^\text{77}\)

16) Perception of an exclusive claim of Christ as Savior is often hard for eastern seekers to understand and accept

a) However (as previously pointed out) each religious tradition teaches that its “cure” is the only real cure

i) This is often not clearly understood, and Christianity takes a bad rap for being *exclusively* exclusivist (not true)

17) The best way I can speak to this (IE. religious pluralism) is to say that the Orthodox view is that Christ is *not* simply one tribe’s god (the Christians); He is in fact revealed as that very light-life of existence, by which every man was brought into the world; other traditions may *ascribe* divinity to gods (or states, or not states as in some forms of absolutist traditions) of their making (culturally conditioned, etc.); however the Holy Trinity and Christ as its expression, has been revealed as the One, True God, of whom all other gods are (at best) cultural representations

a) A question could arise: if one worships (say) Krishna is one (not) actually worshipping the “true God”, the Holy Trinity, *behind Krishna*...without really knowing whom one is worshipping?

\(^{77}\) Orthodox Dogmatic Theology; Pomazansky; Footnote; page 202
18) I would say to the extent that purity, goodness, love, life, compassion, truth, and mercy are reflected in Krishna, Christ is being worshipped as the Source of all good (without ascribing it to Christ, obviously); however, that is NOT to say (as some ecumenists say) that worshipping Krishna etc. is therefore efficacious...or equivalent to coming into a direct saving relationship with the True Godhead

a) And...some of the gods that are worshipped in the East (Kali, etc.) appear to be more a reflection of demonic nature than divine nature

19) In either or any event, worship of Krishna, etc. is not “saving” in a Christian understanding of soteriology (salvation)

a) “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...” (John 1: 12)

20) Spiritual practice and ascesis outside Christian Tradition [esp. Eastern non-Christian] are understood either as (a) self-contemplation, I.E., not contemplation of God78, or (b) interaction with the psychic, magical, occult

21) What is the power behind the psychic, magical, and the occult?

a) Fallen bodiless spirits who dwell in and operate from the “aerial realm” (St Ignatius Brianchaninov)

b) Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), who was experienced in yoga (‘union’) before becoming a hesychast – monk, and disciple of St. Silouan of the holy mountain, wrote this from personal experience: “All contemplation arrived at by this means (Yoga, etc.) is

78 Elder Sophrony; On Prayer
self-contemplation, not contemplation of God. In these circumstances we open up for ourselves created beauty, not First Being. And in all this there is no salvation for man.”

22) We acknowledge that the eastern seeker, through his ascesis or contemplative disciplines (yoga, Tantra, etc.) may have experiences at deep levels of created beauty, created being (through self-contemplation), paranormal dimensions, or channeling of spirits but these are not of the divine dimension

79 On Prayer; Sophrony; pages 168-170
Christian Salvation\textsuperscript{80}

1) Why does man need salvation, intervention, and redemption? What does it mean?

2) First, Christianity teaches that man is alien to God by reason of Creation itself, inasmuch as man has a nature different from God’s

3) This initial alienation has been redeemed by God’s taking on our human nature in the Incarnation
   a) "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14; cf. Colossians 2:9)
   b) Christ’s taking on and sharing of our human nature, becomes the medium of our participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).
   c) This truth was boldly expressed by Irenaeus of Lyons and many other Church Fathers, but most notably by Athanasius himself, "God became man so that man might become god."
   d) This transformation by divine grace is the goal of human existence and man’s sole reason for being in this world at all

4) Secondly, Man is alien to God by reason of sin, a legacy to which all human beings are heirs (and prone), because "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19).
   a) To overcome this alienation from God by sin, Jesus died on the cross, thereby reconciling us to our Creator

\textsuperscript{80} This entire section is based on the work of Father Patrick Henry Reardon
b) The Church does not teach that we are “guilty” of Original Sin; however, she teaches that we are prone to sin; it has become a “second nature” to us; we propagate our own sin in our lives and in the world and as a result, suffer its consequences, the ultimate of which is mortality, death.

c) Integral to the reconciling death of Christ were His voluntary sufferings and the sacrificial outpouring of His blood; whereby God washed away the sins of the world. Indeed, *the Bible’s chief image of the reconciliati

on the cross is the blood of Jesus, poured out in libation for the sins of the world.*

d) The New Covenant is established by this redemptive shedding of His blood (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24). Only in the blood of Christ do we have access to God. The necessity that Christ shed His blood for our redemption is established by a general principle governing the biblical sacrifice for sins -- namely, "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). In Christ, therefore, "we have redemption through His blood, the remission of our sins" (Ephesians 1:7). Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..., by whose stripes you are healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

5) Third, Man is alien to God by reason of death, because death is inseparable from sin. By reason of Adam's offense, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12). Indeed, "sin reigned in death" (5:21). Paul goes to Genesis 3 to explain what he calls "the reign of death" (Romans 5:14,17)

a) In the Bible, death is not natural, nor is it merely biological, and certainly it is not neutral. Apart from Christ, death represents man’s final separation from God.
(Romans 6:21,23; 8:2,6,38). The corruption of death is sin incarnate and rendered visible. When death, this "last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:56), has finally been vanquished, then may we most correctly speak of "salvation." (This is why the vocabulary of salvation normally appears in the future tense in the Epistle to the Romans.) Thus, the resurrection of Jesus is soteriological (salvific). Indeed, it is absolutely essential to our redemption, because Christ "was delivered up for our offenses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

b) Ultimately it is from the reign of death that Christ delivers us. Just as the sufferings and bloodshed of Jesus were integral to the redemptive value of His death, so His passing into glory and His seating at the right hand of God pertain to the fullness of His resurrection. This theme is especially developed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which describes Jesus' ascension as an entry into the heavenly sanctuary as the eternal High Priest, the Mediator of the New Covenant
How Does Salvation Become Ours?

1) Eastern Orthodox Christianity teaches that we are “saved” by becoming “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (II Peter: 1: 3,4

a) “Jesus made possible for us the end of our frustration…being unable to be what we were intended to be in the purpose of God. This He did by incorporating us into Himself, thereby making God’s energies available to our human nature….Because you are made in God’s image, you are capable of containing and exercising God’s uncreated energies.”

2) The beginning of our experience of salvation begins with (is achieved by) holy Baptism

3) The Sacred Scriptures and Holy Tradition affirm clearly that to be “saved” (in the full sense of the meaning) we must abide (remain) in communion with Christ throughout our lives, moment-by-moment

a) “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” (John 15: 4)

4) The first and most important communion with Christ takes place through communion with His Body and His Blood

5) A Christian who does not believe that the physical bread and wine is truly the Body and Blood of our Lord, is a stranger to the true biblical and historic faith of Christ

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81 Divine Energy; Jon E. Braun; Page 118

82 Hieromonk Kleopa Elie; Regarding the Four Types of Communion with God in the Orthodox Church; Translated from the Greek
a) Gospel of John (6:55): “For My flesh is food indeed and My blood is drink indeed”

b) “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?” (I Cor. 10:16)

6) Whoever then communes unworthily, becomes guilty

   a) “Therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (I Cor. 11:27).

7) The Christian, however, who communes with fear, devoutness and preparation, becomes worthy of countless gifts

8) He is joined with Christ through grace

   a) “He who eats My flesh and drinks My body abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56).

9) He shares in eternal life

   a) “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life…” (John 6:54).

10) He will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment

   a) “…and I will raise him at the last day.” (John 6:54).

11) Christ Himself creates an abode inside our hearts

   a) “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith…” (Eph. 3:17), and “At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” (John 14:20).

12) He who communes Christ has Him living inside of him

   a) “…It is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me…” (Gal. 2:20), and “My little children, for whom I labor in birth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

13) He advances and is built up in spiritual works
a) “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph. 4:15)

14) It cleanses from sin, sanctifies, illumines and bestows eternal life
   a) From the prayer of Holy Communion of Saint John Damascene

15) Brings about holiness of body and soul, expels fantasies and cleanses from the passions, gives boldness toward God, illumination and help for the increase of the virtues and the perfection
   a) 6th prayer, Holy Communion of St. Basil

16) Brings about spiritual joy, health of body and soul
   a) According to St. Cyril of Alexandria

17) These and many more are the spiritual fruits that the Christian receives, who is a believer and comes often with good preparation to the Holy Eucharist

18) He, who does not come forth to this Mystery, will never be able to advance in the work of the virtues, because he does not dwell in Christ and Christ in him
   a) “Without Me you can do nothing” (John15:5).

19) The second manner of communion with Christ takes place through the “Jesus Prayer”
   a) In which the nous (the “Inner ‘I’) sinks (eventually) into the heart and there it says continuously: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner”
   b) The Prayer begins with verbal (out loud, prayerful) recitation, with faith and love

20) The prayer that is done with the nous in the heart has great significance, because it unites the soul with Jesus Christ and through Him to the Father, because the only way that leads to union with the Father is Christ
a) “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)

b) The prayer of the heart empowers the Holy Spirit to dwell and to work in our heart and to unite us with the Holy Spirit

c) This union through the unceasing prayer resembles the bride who loves the bridegroom Christ and does not want to ever be separated from Him.

21) The third way of being united with our Creator God takes place with the fulfillment of His commandments and the acquisition of the virtues

22) This cohabitation with Jesus is revealed in Scripture by Him

a) “If anyone loves Me, He will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23), while in another chapter he says; “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, and just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10)

23) St. Dionysios the Aeropagite says that our likeness and union with God is accomplished only with the fulfillment of the divine commandments

24) Saint Maximus the Confessor says, regarding our union with God: “The word of God and Father is found mystically in each one of His commandments, so that he who accepts the word of God accepts God”.

25) Saint Gregory Palamas speaking on the sanctification of man with the execution of the commandments of God says: “The commandments of God contain not only the knowledge, but also the sanctification (theosis)”

26) The fourth method of being united with Christ takes place through the hearing of the words of God
a) “However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

b) “So then faith comes by hearing; and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

27) If the Body and the Blood of the Lord is true food and drink, then the word of the Lord being received by the faithful becomes for them “...a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14) and “the bread of life which came down from heaven” (John 6:58) while according to St. Damascene it is called manna of immortality and mystical manna.

28) The Apostle Paul, through hearing, accepted the word of God, when he was called with the divine light on the road to Damascus and heard a voice from heaven.

29) It is through hearing that the Samaritan woman receives the word of God, while the Samaritans believe and are baptized through the preaching of the Apostle Philip (Acts 8:5, 6, 12) and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14, 18).

a) The special and holiest place, where this manifold union with Christ takes place is the Orthodox Church. It is there that all our faithful, coming with piety and faith in the priestly services, find themselves in a mystical atmosphere and commune with the nous, the heart, and the prayer and share in the Holy Communion in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Before all else the liturgical sacrifice is the perfect expression of the union with our Lord.”
The Bible in the Orthodox Church

1) Orthodox Christianity holds a high view of Scripture
   a) Seen as the record of the experience of God and salvation of the prophets and apostles, the experience to which we are also called

2) Christ Himself, the Apostles and the Church from the beginning recognized the authoritative nature of the Hebrew scriptures

3) Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God through men, and understood in the context of the Revelation of Christ, through the experience of the Holy Spirit working through the Church
   a) St Irenaeus: “…the conduct, and all the doctrine, and all the sufferings of Our Lord, were predicted throughout them.”
   b) John Chrysostom called the reading of Scripture conversation with God

4) Scripture seen as “property” of the Church, not to be torn away from the overall life of the Church
   a) Cf. Contrast however with “bibliolatry” of the Protestants who reject the Church and its Holy Tradition & try to replace it with the Scripture through personal interpretations, often out of context with the greater Christian Tradition

5) Orthodox are not, however, biblical fundamentalists

6) Nor are Orthodox liberal when it comes to the Bible

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83 Above from: New Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky), Archbishop of Verey; Holy Scripture and the Church
a) Orthodox biblical interpretation is based on the long-term, universal understanding (catholicity) of the Church, and not on personal interpretation

7) Three schools of interpretation used by Church fathers:
   a) *Allegorical method* (Origin)
   b) *A more literal interpretation* of the Bible (St John Chrysostom)
   c) "*Verse homily,*" a form poetic biblical interpretation

8) Orthodox believe the Scriptures are *reliable;* although not every text is always to be taken literally, literally as history, or as earth science

9) Holy Scripture points to and conveys the presence of Christ in the Spirit

10) The Scriptures are a sacramental reality
    a) Cf. Read the account of Metropolitan Anthony Bloom’s first experience of reading the Gospel of Mark. It’s online

11) People were saved before the canon of the N.T., after the advent of Christ

12) Bible *not* the only way the Holy Spirit works out our regeneration in the Church
    a) Mysteries
    b) Rites of the Church
    c) Common prayer and love
    d) Church services
Orthodox Christianity Contrasted with Western Christianity

1) Western Christianity presents the Gospel narrative largely in terms of a law court:
   God is the Judge who presides over guilty and sinful man (guilty of punishment); the price for our guilt is paid by His Son and imputed (applied) to us

2) The Orthodox Church by contrast sees the Gospel narrative in therapeutic terms
   a) to cure the entire human person - and lead man to theosis, to communion and union with God
   b) The words "salvation" and "salve" have the same root and have to do with healing.

3) Very different ethos

4) The Church is seen as a hospital which cures the broken soul of man
   a) The Eucharist is understood as “the medicine of immortality...”

5) “Sin” is seen by the Orthodox Church as an illness, needing to be cured

6) Latins (Roman Catholic Church) shared this early therapeutic tradition, but abandoned (early) vestiges of a “therapeutic” tradition, as it moved further away (Great Schism in 1054) from the Eastern Church, esp. in development of medieval Scholastic theology (Thomas Aquinas)
   a) “The scholastic theologists, in their effort to maintain the simplicity of God (I.E. indivisibility [no parts or divisions in God – editor’s addition] and at the same time (to) keep intact the distinction between God and the world, identify God’s energy with His essence (as opposed to the distinction between the two made by the Greek patristic fathers, most notably St Gregory Palamas), calling Him “actus purus” (pure energy), and at the same time consider the providential and saving
energy of God as created. In this way God, according to western theology, has no actual relationship with the world in His uncreated energy, but only through created means and created energies. But this teaching impairs the whole basis and content of man's salvation."\(^8^4\)

b) “According to Western theology, which was based on St. Augustine, the ancestral sin (IE Original Sin in the West – editor’s addition) is inherited from Adam by all the descendants, and God’s justice has condemned all mankind to Hell and prescribed the penalty of death. Therefore, according to the Franco-Latin tradition, hell and death are a punishment by God and not an illness, as the Orthodox Church teaches."\(^8^5\)

7) [West] Scholastic theology (further) divided truths into *natural* and *supernatural* categories:

a) Natural truths can be proven
   
i) Intellectual emphasis; intellectual – emotional disconnect

b) Supernatural truths cannot be proven or disproven
   
i) Disconnect be: Natural and Supernatural

8) Thus began a division in the West between the intellectual/rational/ scientific and the supernatural (“the holy mysteries”)

\(^{8^4}\) John Romanides: The ancestral sin, Page b52, quoted in Life after death; Page 197

\(^{8^5}\) Op Cit; Page 197
a) Often the “supernatural” was relegated to a “mystical” or “charismatic” sub-category within Catholicism

b) The loss of “mystery” and awe

c) Sacraments explained in “natural” terms
   i) Transubstantiation, etc.

9) Various theological ideas were added by Rome (that were never ecumenically agreed on):
   a) Dogma of Original Sin as “guilt”
   b) Purgatory
   c) The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary
   d) The infallibility of the magisterium Pope of Rome (Vatican I)
      i) Vs Holy Tradition

10) Orthodox accept by faith, not so much that we can understand rationally (although we do not discount the rational), but so that we can cleanse our hearts, attain to faith by “theoria” (vision) and experience the Revelation of God directly
    a) Cf. St Gregory Palamas: the three disciples (Peter, James and John) beheld the glory of God on Mount Tabor, thus acquiring the knowledge of the Triune God in theoria (vision of God) and by revelation (not by reason).
    b) It was revealed to them that God is one essence in three persons (hypostases)
c) Saint Paul: Christ revealed Himself to him after His Ascension; by theoria (not by reason)\textsuperscript{86}

11) West tends to be more “rational” (of reason) and “juridical” in emphasis (pertaining to the administration of justice - legal) than Orthodox Christianity, using courtroom terminology and concepts from the Roman law court to explain the mysteries and the atonement

a) Words like: “justification”; “guilt”; “acquit”; “condemn”; reckoning; “pardon”\textsuperscript{87}

12) The Western European Reformers or ‘Protestantism,’ built on Augustinianism, and German/Swiss Reformation moved even further from the Greek East - never developed a “therapeutic” approach at all

13) Supernatural / mystical element almost obliterated in Protestant tradition

14) Sacramentality (Zwingli, etc.) rejected in favor of “faith alone”

15) Rejection of universal Church tradition

16) Almost entirely “juridical” in terminology and conceptuality

a) Cf John Calvin

17) Atonement (the work of Christ through His death) understood in the West almost exclusively as the payment of penalty due us by Christ, applied by God to the believer forensically

a) Called ‘Penal substitution’ atonement model; also called “Satisfaction” model

\textsuperscript{86} Met Hieretheos

\textsuperscript{87} David J. Williams; Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context And Character
b) Augustine and St Anselm (11\textsuperscript{th} century; \textit{Cur Deus Homo})

18) Orthodox views (metaphors) of the atonement are \textit{not} singular [IE only one metaphor], not penal and far more varied\textsuperscript{88}:

a) Redemption (Athanasius)

b) Reconciliation

c) Sacrifice

d) Triumph over evil (Irenaeus)

e) Ransom (Gregory of Nyssa)

19) In West, belief in God \textit{intellectually} tends to constitute salvation (except in some “holiness” traditions)

a) Because of its emphasis on reason and its gradual separation from an experiential tradition

b) Orthodox characterize such a concept of salvation as “very naïve”

c) Orthodoxy: Salvation is not a matter of intellectual acceptance of truth: rather it is a person’s transformation and divinization by grace\textsuperscript{89} beginning in this life

20) [West] Initial conversion/salvation combined (made into one) because of the understanding of “forensic justification” (something God did pro-actively; humans receive it passively; once-for-all package by faith alone)

a) Orthodoxy: salvation as a process of divinization-sanctification

\textsuperscript{88} Recovering The Scandal of the Cross; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker

\textsuperscript{89} Met Hierotheos
21) [West] Salvation separated from actual “Sanctification”

22) Bible and bible hermeneutics (interpretation) separated from the teaching of the historic Church fathers and *re-defined* (they would say restored) by the 16th century “new Church fathers of Western Europe"

a) Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc.

b) Orthodoxy: Biblical interpretation must be consistent with Holy Tradition
Suffering, Affliction and Disease

1) When we or a loved one suffers (especially innocently) it is natural to ask where God is:

“If God loves me (us) why do I – or my loved one(s) – suffer? If God is all-loving and all-powerful why does God not intervene?”

a) The problem of evil

2) Orthodox Christianity teaches God is not the cause of our suffering, affliction, and disease

a) Karma is (obviously) not the cause of our suffering, affliction, disease and affliction

3) Then why does suffering exist?

4) The holy fathers teach that death, suffering and affliction are an inherent characteristic of life, a result of the fall of Adam and a consequence of the on-going effects of the “ancient curse” to which all humans, animals, and nature are subject

a) Cf. inherited “original sin” which is a Western-Augustinian concept not accepted by the Eastern churches

5) “The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for it.”

6) What role does (can/should) suffering play in our “therapy”?

a) Wakes us up from our “sleep walking”

b) Purification of the soul

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90 We share this with Buddhism

91 Simone Weil, quoted in The End of Suffering; Page 114
i) “Stripping away of self”

b) Leads us to repentance

d) Turning from the temporal to the eternal

e) Causes us to have compassion for others

7) With our use of God-given will, we participate in and expand our falleness and sin

a) “Every choice in our lives that separates us from communion with God, and every decision that clouds our awareness of His presence or erodes our relationships with one another has a profound and expanding effect – as the proverbial ripples in a pool.”92

8) Saint Athanasius viewed the fall as a reversal of creation, as a relapse into non-being (from which God rescues the Christian)

9) Gregory Nazianzen described material or corporeal existence as a “flowing stream” that “bears with it chaos”

10) God incarnated to rescue us from our suffering

11) God gives us free will and much of our suffering is a consequence of our use thereof

12) Role of our thoughts in our afflictions?

a) Logismoi, etc. (Explain); demonic

b) Wis 1:3: “For perverse thoughts separate men from God”.

c) Elder Paisios said: A single positive thought equals a vigil in Mount Athos

d) How do we keep our thoughts “positive” and “pure”?

92 Op Cit; 62
13) Demonic activity – individual; corporate (over nations; regions etc.) re: to suffering, affliction, disasters

14) St Maximus (Ambiguam 7): The constant change or flux of material things as a way to redirect deluded creatures toward that which is enduring

15) **In the end Christ incarnated to rescue us – not to punish us**, although He often uses suffering and affliction to draw us to Him

   a) Buddhism teaches that suffering is an inherent characteristic of life; it is fundamentally a pessimistic view and sees the “cure” as an “escape” from life and its consequent suffering

   b) Orthodox Christianity, while acknowledging the fall as a reality, is “optimistic” in that the “cure” is Jesus Christ, who died, was buried and rose from the dead (taking our fallen human nature with Him) and alone provides “true” and “eternal” life
Heaven, Hell and the ‘After Life’

1) Orthodox Christianity teaches a “life” after this life and a resurrection from the dead
   a) “…when the soul departs from the body, it immediately enters into the state proper to itself, whereon it dwells until the resurrection”\(^{93}\)

2) We cannot and should not try to visualize a heaven or hell image or anything beyond the grave

3) Biological death is a beginning, not an end

4) Post-death/pre-Resurrection state is often referred to by the holy fathers as “repose” or “sleep”

5) “Although a person’s physical, sensual functions have been suspended, the mind has not ceased to function....The ‘intelligent faculty’, the soul, ‘the image of God’ in man continues to be alive because God wills it so, and it perceives in a different dimension, on a different plane and level; thus we see the metaphor of ‘sleeping’ and ‘dreaming’...The primary reason for the use of the term ‘sleep’ to describe the person’s state after death is to teach the resurrection, for a person who is sleeping will awaken and rise up and resume his [full] functions once more...”\(^{94}\)

6) The Eastern Orthodox understanding of “Hell” is very different from the Western view, which based on legal and penal paradigms (jail; torture chambers, etc.)

7) Hell [gehenna] is not an instrument of punishment created by God

\(^{93}\) The Soul, The Body and Death; Lazar Puhalo; Page 24

\(^{94}\) IBID; 25
8) The “fire” of the Last Judgment represents the love of God.

9) The holy fathers teach it is the SAME radiance of God’s love which both warms, radiates and gives joy to the faithful (and pure in heart) AND burns and torments the wicked.

10) Those persons who in this life preferred “darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” will in the next life, after the resurrection, find no such darkness and will not be able to hide from that light which they hated in this life.

11) They will abide forever in the state they chose for themselves in this life.

12) St Mark of Ephesus:

13) “We reply that Heaven is not a physical place where the angels dwell like as we, but it is a noetic place, surpassing sense perception, if indeed this should be called a place at all; but more properly, it must be called the ‘place of God.’ For John the Damascene says in his thirteenth Theological Chapter entitled “On The Place of God”: ‘The place of God is said to be that which [or he who] has a greater share in His energy and grace. For this reason the heaven is His throne, for in it are the angels who do His will,’ and again, ‘A noetic place is where the noetic and bodiless nature functions noetically and exists, both is active and is present.” We say, then, that such a place, super celestial and super mundane, noetic and bodiless, contains both the angels and the saints, and we are accustomed to call it Heaven”.

95 The Soul, The Body And Death; Lazar Puhalo; Page 93-94
14) Contrary to popular Christian belief, “Heaven” or “Hell” do not exist at present, and no one is in “Heaven” or “Hell” yet.

15) St Mark of Ephesus:

16) “…it is evident that neither are the saints in perfect enjoyment of those good things and of the blessedness to come, nor have sinners already received condemnation and been sent away to torment. And, indeed, since they are incomplete and, as it were, cut in half, being bereft of their bodies which they wait to receive incorruptible after the resurrection, how could they attain to these perfect rewards?”

17) Where do we go then?

18) “As for now…the righteous abide is all gladness and rejoicing, already awaiting and only not holding in their grasp the Kingdom promised to them and those ineffable good things. But sinners, on the contrary, are in all straitness and inconsolable sorrow, like criminals awaiting the decision of the judge…”

19) In recent years many people, Christians included — not only in the West, but at times also in the Orthodox Church — have come to think that the idea of Hell is inconsistent with belief in a loving God.

a) Cf. Hindus speak in terms of hellish states, not an eternal hell.

b) Cf. Buddhist cosmology includes a variety of heavens and hells into which a being may be born (also not eternal).

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96 IBID; Page 97
20) While it is true that God loves us with an infinite love, it is also true that He has given us free will.

21) Since we have free will, it is possible for us to reject God.

22) Since free will exists, Hell exists; for *Hell is nothing else than the rejection of God*.

23) If we deny Hell, we deny free will.

24) God will not force us to love Him, for love is no longer love if it is not free; how then can God reconcile to Himself those who refuse all reconciliation?

25) Hell is not so much a place where God imprisons man, as a place where man, by misusing his free will, chooses to imprison himself.

26) [And] even in Hell the wicked are not deprived of the love of God, but by their own choice they experience as suffering what the saints experience as joy.

a) ‘The love of God will be an intolerable torment for those who have not acquired it within themselves’ (V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 234).

27) The life of the soul from its departure to the Second Coming of Christ, awaits its reuniting with the risen body, in what has been called “the intermediate state”.

28) Paradise and Hell are not obtained completely but they have a foretaste of the coming joy of the just and the suffering of the sinners.

29) This intermediate state is not to be confused with purgatory or the purifying fire of the Latins (Roman Catholic Church).

From Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware)
30) Until the Last Day comes, we must not despair of anyone’s salvation, but must long and pray for the reconciliation of all without exception.

31) No one must be excluded from our loving intercession

32) ‘What is a merciful heart?’ asked Isaac the Syrian. ‘It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for all creatures’ (Mystic Treatises, edited by A. J. Wensinck, Amsterdam, 1923, p. 341)

33) The holy fathers do NOT teach a concept of Heaven in which the person remains in a static, immutable, cosmic stagnation

34) Entering a timeless existence unbound by mundane physical and temporal restrictions, the person progresses, begun in earthly life, with the beginnings of theosis, unabated and throughout eternity

35) “As we ascend the ladder of spiritual enlightenment, we must embark upon an upward movement that is endless, for the infinitude of God has no bounds and the splendors of God are ineffable.”

98 IBID; 29
**Immortality and the Resurrection**

1) Orthodox belief centers on the “resurrection of the dead”, not the “immortality of the soul” (Gnostic / New Age/ Eastern)
   
a) “I believe in the resurrection of the dead...” – Nicene Creed

2) Immortality of soul as commonly taught is an Eastern and Greek philosophical idea
   
i) **Body-soul dualism**
   
ii) **Spiritual-material dualism**
   
iii) **The soul is unbegotten and uncreated**
   
iv) **The soul has great value compared to the body, which has little to no value**

3) Connected with reincarnation / transmigration of the soul characteristic of most – many of the religions that emerged during the Axial Age (800-200 B.C.E.)

4) Rejected by Second Council of Constantinople in 553

5) Why? Not the teaching and experience of Christ and the Apostles or the Judaic tradition

6) Matter = good (Genesis)

7) God created ex nihilo; out of nothing; nothing precedes or is outside of God (eternal souls; preexistent matter, etc.)

8) Individual identity does not survive
   
a) Incompatible with the Christian idea of personhood

9) God did not create man to die as a being with soul/nous/body, to die

10) Man: body and soul (which includes rational and emotive) as a psychosomatic whole by design

11) St Paul (1 Corinthians 15:35) distinguishes between resuscitation and resurrection
12) Resurrection is not mere resuscitation of a dead body

13) *Resurrection implies transformation*, as manifested in the description of the Risen Lord

14) “The same body that is buried is the body that is raised up. The identity of the body or the human being is preserved, and yet the whole man is transformed. The resurrection, according to the New Testament witness and teaching as well as the thought of the Fathers of the early Church, is neither a resuscitation of the body – which would exclude any change or transformation – nor a kind of spiritualized resurrection not involving the body.”99

15) Why do Orthodox Christians pray and serve commemorations for the departed?

16) The prayers and commemorations for the reposed are acts of love and confessions of faith, not bribes to God, or means of satisfying His need for vengeance, or an appeasement to demons or Satan

17) The benefit to the reposed is in the form of spiritual increase, an increase in their joy and in the mutual exchange of co-suffering and love

18) Our prayers do NOT change the condition or the inheritance of the reposed or obtain for them anything which God will not give them even without our prayers. They are expressions of faith in God’s promises

19) They serve primarily to instruct the living

99 Quoted in Steven Kostoff article; author: Prof. Veselin Kesich, First Day of the New creation
The Life of the World to Come

1) “...And (I believe in) the life of the world to come...” Nicene Creed

2) What will that “world” look like?

3) Not a science, like the Egyptian Book of the Dead, or the Tibetans

4) “The Church awaits the final consummation of the end, which in Greek theology is termed the ‘apocatastasis’ or ‘restoration,’ when Christ will return in great glory to judge both the living and the dead. This final apocatastasis involves, as we have seen, the redemption and the glorification of matter: at the Last Day the righteous will rise from the grave and be united once more to a body — not such a body as we now possess, but one that is transfigured and ‘spiritual,’ in which inward sanctity is made outwardly manifest. And not only man’s body but the whole material order will be transformed: God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth.”

5) “Yet the Second Coming is not simply an event in the future, for in the life of the Church, the Age to Come has already begun to break through into this present age. For members of God’s Church, the ‘Last Times’ are already inaugurated, since here and now Christians enjoy the first fruits of God’s Kingdom. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. He comes already — in the Holy Liturgy and the worship of the Church.\(^{100}\)

\(^{100}\) Met Kallistos Ware
Addendum

Can Orthodox Christianity Speak To Eastern Religions?

Reprinted from Spring 2008 issue AGAIN Magazine

Kevin Allen

I recently had a conversation with an Eastern Orthodox priest, whose twenty-six year old son recently left home for an indefinite stay at a Buddhist monastery. The priest was heartbroken. His son was not a stranger to Eastern Orthodoxy or to its monastic tradition either, having spent time at several Orthodox monasteries, and even two months on the holy mountain of Mt. Athos. His son’s journey to a non-Christian Eastern religious tradition is not an isolated event. Eastern religions in North America are a growing and competing force in religious life with Christianity. If you count all confessions of Christianity as one, Buddhism is now the third-largest religious group in the United States, with 2.1 – 2.5 million adherents (based on the 2008 “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey”, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life), approximately 800,000 of whom are American western “converts”. There are more Buddhists in America today than Eastern Orthodox Christians! The Dalai Lama (the leader of one of the Tibetan Buddhist sects) is one of the most recognized and admired people in the world and far better known than any Eastern Orthodox hierarch, including the Ecumenical Patriarch. Look in the magazine section of Borders or Barnes and Noble. You will find more publications with names like “Shambala Sun”, “Buddhadharma”, and “What is enlightenment?” than Christian magazines!
In addition to losing seekers (many of them youth) to non-Christian eastern spiritual traditions, eastern metaphysics have also seeped into our western culture without much notice. For example, think of how often one hears the phrase “that’s good (or bad) karma”. Karma is a Hindu word that has to do with the consequences of deeds done in a previous life (reincarnation)! They are doing a better job (sadly) “evangelizing” our culture than we Eastern Orthodox Christians are!

The Lord Himself commands us clearly “that repentance and remission of sins (baptism) should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). Buddhists (of which there are many sects) and Hindus (who comprise another 1.2 million Americans) live among us in America in ever-growing numbers right in our own backyards -- in our college classrooms, on our soccer fields, shopping in our “health foods” stores. They are a rich, potential “mission field” for the Eastern Orthodox Church in the United States. Unfortunately with few exceptions, like the writings of Monk Damascene [Christensen] and Kyriakos S. Markides, we are not talking to this group at all.

As a former Hindu and disciple of a well-known guru, or spiritual teacher, I can tell you Orthodox Christianity shares more “common ground” with seekers of non-Christian spiritual traditions of the east than any other Christian confession! The truth is when Evangelical Protestants attempt to evangelize the eastern spiritual seeker they often do more harm than good, because their approach is culturally western, rational, and legalistic-juridical with (generally) little understanding of the paradigms and spiritual language (or yearnings) of the seekers of these eastern traditions.
There are three “fundamental metaphysical principles” that Buddhists and Hindus generally share in common:

1. A common “supra-natural” reality underlies and pervades the phenomenal world. This Supreme Reality isn’t Personal, but Trans-personal. God or Ultimate Reality in these traditions is ultimately a “pure consciousness” without attributes. Buddhists tend to refer this apathetically, as “emptiness”.

2. The human soul is one in essence with this divine reality. All human nature is divine at its core. According to these traditions, Christ or Buddha isn’t a savior, but simply a paradigm of self-realization, the goal of all mankind.

3. Existence is in fundamental unity (monism). Creation isn’t what it appears to the naked eye. It is in essence “illusion”, “unreal” and “impermanent”. There is one underlying ground of being (think “quantum field” in physics!) which unifies all beings and out of which and into which everything can be reduced.

What do these metaphysics have in common with our Eastern Orthodox faith? Not much, on the surface. But in the eastern non-Christian spiritual traditions, knowledge is not primarily about the development or dissemination of metaphysical doctrine or theology. This is one of the problems western Christians have communicating with eastern seekers. Eastern religion is never theoretical or doctrinal. It’s about the struggle for liberation from suffering and death. This “existential” emphasis is the first connection Eastern Orthodoxy has with these traditions, because Orthodoxy is essentially transformative in emphasis.
The second thing we agree on with Buddhists and Hindus is the corrupted state of humanity and human consciousness. The goal of the Christian life according to the Church Fathers is to move from the “sub-natural” or “fallen state” in which we find ourselves (subject to death), to the “natural” or the “according to nature state” after the Image (of God), and ultimately to the “supra-natural” or “beyond nature” state, after the Likeness (of God). According to the teaching of the holy fathers the stages of the spiritual life are purification (metanoia), illumination (theoria) and deification (theosis). This paradigm of spiritual formation and transformation is unique to Eastern Orthodox practice within Christendom. While we don’t agree with Buddhists or Hindus on what “illumination” or “deification” is, we agree on the basic diagnosis of the fallen human condition. As I once said to a practicing Tibetan Buddhist: “We agree on the sickness (of the human condition). Where we disagree is on the cure”.

Eastern Orthodoxy – especially the hesychasm (contemplative) tradition – teaches that true “spiritual knowledge” presupposes a “purified” and “awakened” nous (Greek), which is the “Inner ‘I’” of the soul. For Eastern Orthodox the true theologian isn’t one who simply knows doctrine intellectually or academically, but one “who knows God, or the inner essences or principles of created things by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception. As a well-known Orthodox theologian explains, “When the nous is illuminated, it means that it is receiving the energy of God which illuminates it…” This idea resonates with eastern seekers who struggle to experience – through non-Christian

101 Makarian Homilies; Glossary of The Philokalia

102 Hierotheos Vlachos, Life after death; 1995; Birth of the Theotokos Monastery
ascesis and/or occult methods – spiritual illumination. Most eastern spiritual seekers are not aware that the opportunity for profound spiritual illumination, which our hesychasm tradition calls “theoria”, exists within a Christian context.

As part of their spiritual ascesis, Buddhist and Hindu dhamma (practice) emphasizes cessation of desire, which is necessary to quench the passions. Holy Tradition teaches apatheia, or detachment as a means of combating the fallen passions. Hindu and Buddhist meditation methods teach “stillness”. The word hesychia in Holy Tradition – the root of the word for hesychasm – means “stillness”! Buddhism, especially, teaches “mindfulness”. Holy Tradition teaches “watchfulness” so we do not fall into temptation! Hindus and Buddhists understand it is not wise to live for the present life, but to struggle for the future one. We Orthodox agree! Americans who become Buddhist or Hindu are often fervent spiritual seekers used to struggling with foreign languages and cultures (Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Japanese) and pushing themselves outside their “comfort zones”. Converts to the Eastern Orthodox Church can relate! Some Buddhist and Hindu sects even have complex forms of “liturgy” including chant, prostration and veneration of icons! Tibetan Buddhism, especially, places high value on the lives of (their) ascetics, relics and “saints”.

The main difference in spiritual experience between Orthodox experience and that of the eastern traditions is that what the eastern non-Christian traditions recognize as “spiritual illumination” or “primordial awareness” – achieved through deep contemplation (Moksha, Samadhi) – Orthodox Holy Tradition understands merely as “self contemplation”. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), who was experienced in yoga
('union') before becoming a hesychast – monk, and disciple of St. Silouan of the holy mountain, wrote this from personal experience: “All contemplation arrived at by this means (Yoga, etc.) is self-contemplation, not contemplation of God. In these circumstances we open up for ourselves created beauty, not First Being. And in all this there is no salvation for man.”

Clement of Alexandria, two thousand years ago, wrote that pre-Christian philosophers were often inspired by God, but he cautioned the Christian must be careful what to take from them!

So we acknowledge that the eastern seeker, through his ascesis or contemplative disciplines, may have an experience at deep levels of created beauty, or created being (through self-contemplation), para-normal dimensions, or even an experience of the “quantum field” modern physics has purportedly discovered! But is this what the eastern seeker is really struggling for? This is the key question! Only in the Eastern Orthodox Church, through its deifying mysteries will the seeker be brought into the province of Uncreated Divine Life. It is only in the Orthodox Church – of all Christian confessions - that the eastern seeker will find there is more to “salvation” than simply forgiveness of sins and justification before God. He will be led to participate in the Uncreated Energies of God and through them “be partakers of the divine nature.” (II Peter 1:4). As a member of the Body of Christ he will join in the deifying process and be increasingly transformed after the Likeness! Deification is available to all who enter the Holy Orthodox Church, are baptized (which begins the deifying process) and partakes of the holy mysteries. It is not just the monks, ascetics and the spiritual athletes!

103 On Prayer; Sophrony; pages 168-170
Eastern Orthodoxy has much to share with eastern spiritual seekers. Life and death hangs in the balance in *this* life, not the millions of lives eastern seekers think they have! As the Apostle Paul soberly reminds us, “...it is appointed for men to die once but after this the judgment.” (Heb. 9:27).

May God give us the vision to begin reaching out and sharing the “true light” of the Holy Orthodox faith with seekers of the eastern spiritual traditions.
Saint Athanasius and the ‘Penal Substitutionary’ Atonement Doctrine

Kevin Allen

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In reading *On The Incarnation* (*DE INCARNATION VERBI DEI*) by Saint Athanasius, or parts of it, I am reminded of C.S. Lewis’ admonition that if we must “read only the new or the old, I would advise...to read the old”. His reasoning is that “A new book is still on trial and the amateur is not in a position to judge it. It has to be tested against the great body of Christian thought down the ages.” This is true, I believe, of Christian doctrines and ideas too: they must be consonant with and tested against ‘the great body of Christian thought down the ages.’ Unfortunately many in Christendom today accept without reservation ideas that have been passed down to them that do not meet the “great-body-of-Christian-thought-down-the-ages” test. What is even more troublesome is that many Christians do not know (or care?) that they are accepting theological innovations of later or modern centuries, some of which are not in keeping with early church teaching or ethos (or worse yet, perhaps even contradicting them).

I believe the central Evangelical doctrine of *penal substitution* of the atonement (Christ’s vicarious punishment for my sins as the central work or accomplishment of the cross) is one of these. Contemporary Evangelical Protestant theologian J.I. Packer calls it, “a distinguishing mark of the word-wide evangelical fraternity: namely, the belief that the
cross had the character of penal substitution, and that it was in virtue of this fact that it brought salvation to mankind.”\textsuperscript{104}

One of the interesting discoveries I made reading St Athanasius’ seminal book, written in the early fourth century, is the complete absence of a notion that, for Evangelical Christians, has come to be the central Gospel message itself: the doctrine that Christ paid by vicarious punishment atonement for our individual sins (for which we deserve punishment). Billy Graham is perhaps the most well-known contemporary proponent of this doctrine. I recall hearing him preach many times on television that Christ suffered a horrific death as a punishment (IE penalty) for your and my sins. This idea never resonated with me because it raised disturbing issues about the nature of a God Who required such justice served by sending His Son into the world.

However, as theologian J.I. Packer observes, the stark absence of this view in the early church fathers should not come as a surprise since it is a 16\textsuperscript{th} century-born medieval interpretation:

“...Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melanchthon and their reforming contemporaries were the pioneers in stating it (my emphasis)... What the Reformers did was to redefine satisfactio (satisfaction), the main mediaeval category for thought about the cross. Anselm’s \textit{Cur Deus Homo?}, which largely determined the mediaeval development, saw Christ’s satisfactio for our sins as the offering of compensation or damages for dishonour done, but the Reformers

\textsuperscript{104} What Did the Cross Achieve: The Logic of Penal Substitution: J.I. Packer
saw it as the undergoing of vicarious punishment (*poena*) to meet the claims on us of God’s holy law and wrath (*i.e.* his punitive justice).”

The problem with this doctrine is not in the idea of “substitution”. Early church fathers, of course, understood the meaning and redemptive work of the cross as a “substitution” (*i.e.* Christ in place of us). St Athanasius himself writes:

“Thus taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death in place of all, and offered it to the Father (*an offering, not a penalty* – my emphasis). This He did for sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, when He had fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was therefore voided of its power for men.”

Later the Saint writes that His death on the Cross was a “sufficient exchange (my emphasis) for all.” Later yet he writes of His death on the cross as “a debt owing (my emphasis) which must be paid” And finally he writes, “He died to ransom all…”

105 Ibid
106 On The Incarnation; page 34
107 Ibid; 35
108 Ibid; 49
109 Ibid; 51.
So for Saint Athanasius the words *exchange*, *debt*, and *ransom* are used to explain the work of Our Lord on the Cross on our behalf. Contrast this with the more legalistic and penal (IE punishment) explanation of John Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion:

“Thus we perceive Christ representing the character of a sinner and a criminal...and it becomes manifest that he suffers for another's and not for his own crime.”

What is the problem with the theory of penal substitution?

“The penal satisfaction theory is entirely legalistic. It assumes that the order of law and justice is absolute; free forgiveness would be a violation of this absolute order; God’s love must be carefully limited lest it infringe on the demands of justice. Sin is a crime against God and the penalty must be paid before forgiveness can become available. According to this view God’s love is conditioned and limited by his justice; that is, God cannot exercise His love to save man until His righteousness (justice) is satisfied. Since God's justice requires that sin be punished, God’s love cannot save man until the penalty of sin has been paid, satisfying His justice. God’s love is set in opposition to His righteousness, creating a tension and problem in God....According to this legalistic theology, this is why Christ needed to die; he died to pay the penalty of man’s sin and *to satisfy the justice of God* (my emphasis). The necessity of the atonement is the necessity of satisfying the justice of God; *this necessity is in God rather than in man.* (my emphasis). And since this necessity is in God, it is an absolute necessity. If God is to save man, God must satisfy His justice before He can in love save man.”
For many who may want to know Our Lord, or are drawn to know God, the idea that God the Father required Christ to suffer punishment in order to somehow appease or satisfy His sense of righteousness or justice is an abhorrent idea, keeping many people from accepting the actual love and mercy of God and perverting a correct understanding of the nature of God the Father.

How do we Eastern Orthodox and the early church tradition understand the debt, the exchange, the ransom and to whom it was paid?

Saint Athanasius writes,

“For by the sacrifice of His own body He did two things: He put an end to the law of death which barred our way; and He made a new beginning of life for us…” 110

To whom did He make the sacrifice?

“It was by surrendering to death (my emphasis) the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for his human brethren by the offering of the equivalent.” 111

The Saint teaches that Christ died, not to appease God the Father, but to rescue mankind (you and me) from death! That was “to whom” He sacrificed himself – the

110 Ibid; 37
111 Ibid; 35
existential/ontological reality of death; that “through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word’s indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all.”

This may seem like a small difference, perhaps even a nuance; however it is a difference that is significant, as it correctly represents the nature of God as “the lover of mankind,” rather than a cosmic egotistical despot or a slave to divine legalism, and the work of the cross as a supreme act of sacrificial love by Our Lord, in which the Holy Trinity was acting (and continues to act) in one accord.
Books on the Subject for Further Study

- Christ The Eternal Tao; Hieromonk Damascene; St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; 2004
- Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future; Fr. Seraphim Rose; St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; 1990
- The Gurus, The Young Man and Elder Paisios; Dionysius Farasiotis; St Herman of Alaska Press
- The Mountain of Silence; Kyriakos Markides; Image-Doubleday; 2001
- The Pearl of Great Price; Veronica Hughes; WestBow Press; 2011