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## **The Orthodox View of the World**

**Abstract.** The Biblical and Holy Fathers’ interpretations of the Original Sin and the salvation of the world coincide with contemporary Orthodox theology. The world was created by God beautiful, nice and good, as everything done by the Creator. The Original Sin leads to corruptive destruction. For this reason, the Biblical and Holy Fathers’ texts interpret the negative aspects of the sin and the world. The Christ came to our world to make humans and the world as beautiful as it was before Adam and Eve’s sin. This metamorphosis of man and the world exists in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

**Key words:** world, sin, metamorphosis, liturgical life, communion

The subject so phrased “The orthodox view of the world” is in connection with two other particularly important themes, namely what represents the orthodox mentality today and how it is built, and in the second place: how the Eucharistic tradition of the Church and the monastic – ascetical tradition influence it. The aim of that exploration is not to issue some definitions on what is orthodox view of the world like, but rather to look for its formation on the basis of two Church traditions. I chose it to be able to accommodate in an appropriate way in the present conference. The subject is really wide and provides opportunity for different interpretations, therefore I will try to reveal only some aspects of it. Primarily – what is the Biblical understanding on the world?

In the Old Testament there is a certain tendency to imply that as if the world has more negative, than a positive account. The Nation of Israel, the chosen people of God, rips through multitude of obstructions and peripetys, for his faith in the One God to be confirmed.

At those peripetys the people of Israel confronts and opposes to the rest of the world, which on the one hand does not believe in the One God, and on the other hand, due to the original sin, berries this sin with all his consequences.

In the New Testament this course is continued. Christ states for his followers: “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). The

Christ's apostles repeat the same: "we have received, not the spirit of the world" (1Cor. 2:12). The beloved disciple of Christ – St. John Theologian expresses the Christian teaching of the world even more clearly: "Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1John 2:15-17).

The quoted biblical passages show clear that the world is understood in its negative meaning – as a bearer of the sin, in contradiction to the Kingdom of God, which Christians await and which is the life in the age to come. That's why St. Paul says, that "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1Cor. 7:31), in a sense of this age, of this time, of this epoch.

The interpretations of the Holy Fathers about the sin, the world and the Kingdom of God are similar to the biblical. The Fathers of the Church describe the creation of the world as something good, perfect and wonderful, in agreement with the Bible, where it is said that God created everything as good – "καλά λiαν", quite good, beautiful.

The Church fathers speak about the beauty of the God's creation, among which the man is created as a "crown of the creation", according St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Basil the Great call the man also "a microcosmos", because he gathers within himself the good from everything created before him. St. John Chrysostom calls him even "μικροθεόν" – little god. Most of the Fathers and teachers of the Church describe the creation of man according the image and likeness of God and some of them mark that the image of God includes the soul and the body of man. Consequently he was created so nice and beautiful that to reflect everything most splendid in the God's creation. He expressed this beauty and harmony, which reign in the divine life within the Holy Trinity.

The ancestral sin of Adam and Eve in heaven is namely a denial of this beauty. Their fall leads to a loss of the beauty of the man, to an alienation from God and to a darkening of the God's image in him. The first men's communion with God in Heaven was a premise for their sanctification and holiness, needed to become so wonderful as the Creator Himself. But the interruption of the communion with God, the alienation from Him brings a loss of the good and the beauty and to the infiltration of the passions into the man. He realizes that he is naked, lacking the beauty and the good, lacking the God's glory and harmony. That's why God dressed him in "coats of skin" (Gen. 3:21),

which, according to the interpretations of Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maxim the Confessor represent the passions in the man. The Incarnation of the Logos is fulfillment of God's providence – the man has to become an inheritor of the Kingdom of God and His blessings. In Lord Jesus Christ there is unity of the both natures – divine and human. All humanity is adopted in the hypostasis of God the Word. Everybody is called to participate in the divine life and to be “sons of God”. This happens in the life of the Christians in the Church. The baptism vests us with the God's glory, beauty, purity and incorruption. It engrafts us into the Body of Christ and establishes the new Life in us. The Eucharist and all mysteries of the Church bring Christians together with Christ, make them participants of the coming Kingdom of glory and transform them into holy and righteous persons as Christ Himself is. Thus we are convinced in full harmony and agreement between Holy Fathers' and Biblical Tradition concerning the interpretation of the sin, the world and the Redemption. Despite God created the world good, beautiful and wonderful, it is not perfect. The sin brings the death and corruption into it. The coming of Christ aims healing of this corruption, recovery of the ailing organism, restitution of the initial beauty, engrafting of every creature to the Body of Christ and its ennoblement, sanctification, transfiguration and divinization. This is the vocation of the Church. And the world is a part of the Church and his destination is sanctity and Christianization.

The Church history itself proves that. After St. Constantine the Great's decree in Mediolanum (313) the Roman empire, which according to the notion of that time included all world, begins to Christianize. Take on more broad scales we can tell that this process continues right in our days. But on the other side, immediately need to note that this process is probably bidirectional, which is again witnessed by the history of the Christian Church. After the year of 313 large quantities of heathens enter the Church, but they do not want to deny easily their traditional faith in “gods”, their traditions, culture, attitude, customs and so on. Inside the Church, this causes confrontation, compromises and battles for assertion of the Christian view of life.

On the other hand, the Church imperceptibly begins to secularize. She accepts the world within herself and instead of Christianizing it, she secularizes. It is obvious in the culture, the view of life, in the spiritual and liturgical life of Christians. It happens that while in a second century the testimony of the anonymous essay, well-known as “Epistle of Diognetus”, represents the Christians as inhabitants of Heaven, though they live in this world, but spiritually belong to the Heavenly world, and live as if being not from this world and do not participate in the negative processes and exhibitions of the sin in the world;

but after the fourth century and even to our days Christians are not distinguished from the heathens at all. We do not speak only for Christian culture, view and behavior, but even for some minimum of intellectual knowledge of the Christian faith. Of course, it is out of question that there is no mere theoretical knowledge of the Christian faith without liturgical life, because Christianity is experience, practice, life, where the Liturgy or the Eucharist is source of the knowledge of God.

The monasticism appears in the life of the Church in the fourth century. Usually it is indicated that the main reason for the rise of monasticism is the secularization of the Church. Some of the Christians, that wanted to live pure and holy life, preferred to flee “this world” and to save themselves, keeping the Christian virtues and aiming for Christian perfection, away from the breath of the sin in this world. In this manner the monasticism separated from the world, but there was a danger for it to separate from the Church as well. Due to efforts of Alexandrian bishops, St. Basil the Great and St. Benedict of Nursia the monasticism was set in the ecclesiastical space and limits, but in its history again it had opposed the world, but also the Church.

Especially, there is an antagonism and confrontation between the Eucharistic tradition of the Church and monastic – ascetical tradition. The salvation of the world and the man is taking place namely in the Eucharist. Participating in the thanksgiving sacrifice and receiving the Body and the Blood of Christ, not only the man becomes God by grace, but also all the creation is included in this process of divinization. This is a process, which will accomplish in fullness in the eschaton, in the age to come. St. Paul says, that “the fashion of this world passeth away” (1Cor. 7:31), because the Christians await “new heaven and new earth” (2 Pet. 3:13). The Eucharist is an icon, an image of the coming Kingdom of God. In this Kingdom of Christ all creation, whole cosmos and whole world are called to participate. Participating in the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist every one of us becomes a “new creation” and participates in the process of theosis, which accomplishes in fullness in the eschaton. All members of the Body of Christ unite with each other and with their Head – Christ in the Holy Eucharist. As in the Hypostasis of Christ the whole humankind is adopted, so and every single man, who receives the Holy Communion participates in the process of divinization. The fruits of this communion with God are visible even here, in this world – these are the Christian virtues, which are gifts from God for those who live in Christ. This is the holiness, which transforms the human nature. To this effect there is no confrontation or some antagonism between the Eucharist and the world, but rather the world should ennoble and dignify itself. The society should christianize and every creature should sanctify itself. But

very often we see the very reverse process in the history of the Church. Today we have to acknowledge with grief that there is a total de-Christianization of the society and secularization of the Church. I think that there are a lot of reasons for this ailing situation, but the main are several. On the first place, there is an absence of correct Christian view and church cathehization, not some kind of information for the Christian faith, but specific, clear and accurate knowledge about it. Then, there is an insufficiency of Church cadres, above all of clerics. It is obvious that the good shepherds come from good laity and good laity comes from nice Christian families.

The aim of this lecture is not to point the way of overcoming of the Church crisis, even though according to me it is in the renewal of the liturgical life, the liturgical cathechezis and the communion between the Christians themselves. The aim of this lecture was to point out what is the Christian view of life and how the orthodox Church looks to the world – as a community of sinners, which she must resist or as a creation of God, which as everything created by God is good, beautiful and wonderful and which should be led to its Creator and to become one in Christ. And this is possible not in some intellectual way, but only in a practical way – through the liturgical life of the Church.

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## **Православни поглед на свет**

**Т**умачења која нам нуди Библија и Св Оци о првородном греху и спасењу света се поклапају са савременом православном теолошком мишљу. Бог је створио свет прекрасним, добрим и лепим, као што је све што Господ учини. Првородни грех одводи у пропадљивост. Стога библијски и отачки текстови тумаче негативне аспекте греха и палог света. Христос је дошао у свет да људе и целокупну творевину васпостави онако лепим као пре Адамовог и Евиног греха. Преображење човека и света се догађа у св тајни Евхаристије.