

Trinitarian Theology and the Common Good

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TRINITY DEFINED

I want to begin with discussing the Trinity and the relevance of the Trinity to our public life.

As Eastern Christians we hear a lot more about the Holy Trinity than do our Western brethren; not only in our Liturgy, which is the most obvious place, but also in our theology. Above all though the Trinity is an essential concept in our soteriology. It is custom in the East for the Trinity to be correlated to the ecclesiology of the Church structure, and out of that ecclesiological Trinitarian understanding comes the extension of what I would like to speak on today. I want to discuss the Trinity, and explore how being members of a Trinitarian faith has ramifications for our public and political life. By political though I do not mean "what party" with which we may identify or the candidate we admire most. By "political" I mean the classic Aristotelian definition which defines the political as the "affairs of state." So the question is begged, how are we, as human beings, to organize our governmental affairs to reflect our faith, and more so, how is our public sphere to mirror the Holy Trinity, since the Trinity is the meditative summit of our common belief. Metropolitan Bishop Mar Osthathios of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is convinced that "there is no solution for the world's ills except a Trinitarian theology and ethics" (TOCS 46), and this view for him has societal as well as heavenly implications.

Mar Osthathios, on whom this talk is based, and whose background I shall give momentarily, states that "politics is the art of the possible and so political action is extremely necessary. Theology must condition politics" (SBRPW 71). Metropolitan Mar Osthathios believes that as a human family we must strive to mirror the inner life of the Holy Trinity, which is a family bonded by love. It should be noted that I am not using the counterpart Western understanding of Trinity here, where the Holy Spirit is the bond of Love between Father and Son, rather I am using the Eastern emphasis, as declared by Mar Osthathios, that "God is eternally, functionally, ontologically Trinity" (TOCS 28). When we say "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4:16), as the apostle John teaches us, we are verifying Mar Osthathios assertion that "God is Trinity and that love in its ultimacy is co-equal, co-eternal, co-essential as the

Blessed Trinity" (TOCS 11).

Some of us may object, *prima facie*, to theorizing that we can build a society on the grounds of reflecting the inner life of the Holy Trinity because of our Palamite inheritance. The great St. Gregory Palamas, who penned so much of our dogmatic Eastern theology, teaches us that God is not knowable in His essence, only in His energies. I ardently agree that no analogy from our created order can properly express the mystery of the Godhead, and that only in the Heavenly Kingdom can we know any perfection. Jesus teaches us that "if you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mt. 19:21). Jesus is telling us how to strive toward the Good, toward the Father, and toward our eternal cotemplation of the Blessed Trinity. Returning to the point of trinitarian faith and society it would seem we Christians are called to transform and understand the social realm as a creation in the image of God. The living of our ever-incomplete attempts toward Christian perfection also calls us to the social dimension of the aforementioned teaching of our Savior which is that society too, being composed of human beings, must strive to be "perfect."

MAR OSTHATHIOS AND ORIENTAL ORTHODOXY

I would like to now delve into a little background information on Metropolitan Mar Osthathios and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Most of us may be wondering who this Mar Osthathios is that I keep referring to? Geervarghese Mar Osthathios is a Metropolitan Bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India. "Mar" is a Syriac title of respect applied to bishops and saints, akin to how we may say "Reverend Father" to a pious priest. Mar Osthathios is still alive today at ninety-two years of age. He is Metropolitan emeritus of the Niranam region in the state of Kerala in India. Kerala is home to a good amount of Indian Christians, many of whom live in impoverished conditions. Mar Osthathios was a seminary professor, and a distinguished member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Why do I bring him up, a seemingly rather obscure reference to a lesser known (at least in the West) Oriental Orthodox hierarch? I discovered Mar Osthathios about a year ago when I befriended an Indian Orthodox priest of Anglo-Saxon heritage in Indiana. I met the priest on the social-networking internet site Facebook. I asked the priest if there was an Orthodox equivalent to the Roman Catholic movement of a theology of liberation. He suggested to me this particular

Metropolitan Osthathios who had written on the topic. I bought two his English-language books and loved them; unfortunately for those that only read English most of his works are written in Malayalam untranslated. Mar Osthathios works express a divine love for the human race from a third-world perspective. His work is completely grounded in small orthodox Trinitarian theology along with the firm conviction of the dignity of all persons and the need to create an egalitarian society which insures that all persons will live with dignity. Mar Osthathios was educated in the United States at Drew University, a Methodist college in New Jersey. This noble Metropolitan has so much faith in our Blessed Trinity that he believes "there is no dogma more permanent for a Christian understanding of God than the dogma of holy Trinity. God wants us to look into this venerable dogma again, not as an article of belief, but as one of praxis" (TOCS 17). Thus for Mar Osthathios, unlike many other theologians, the Trinity has practical social and political consequences.

Syrian Indian Orthodoxy sounds rather geographically confusing, though as Byzantine Catholics we are used to that because we are Ruthenian Catholics in America. Syrian Orthodoxy is part of the six-member ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are the Churches that did not accept the Council of Chalcedon, somewhat pejoratively referred to as the "monophysite" Churches. Those Churches were born through controversies over the proper understanding of Christ's nature, which most historians and scholars agree was actually primarily a semantical and linguistic difference not a conceptual one. These Oriental Churches are historically comprised of the following jurisdictions: Coptic (Egyptian), Armenian, Ethiopian, Syriac (Syrian-Jacobite), Indian, and as of the 1990's the Eritrean (though the Eritrean autocephalic status remains controversial within the Oriental Church). Be that as it may, Oriental Orthodoxy is alive and well today and there are four Oriental Orthodox parishes in the twin cities alone. Mar Osthathios belongs to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, colloquially called the Indian Orthodox Church. As a side-note the Oriental Orthodox also have Uniate analogs in union with Rome.

TRINITARIAN GLOBAL FAMILY

I would now like to consider the Trinity as a model of the global family.

Let us first examine these concepts of the Trinity and society from a more traditional Orthodox and Catholic perspective. Holy

Scripture teaches that man is made in the Image of God, *imago Dei*. This leads us to conclude that society too is made in the image of the Trinity. Mar Osthathios holds that "though the potentiality of *imago Dei* is a divine gift, the actualization of it is in encounter with other persons" (TOCS 84). God, in-Himself, is a nuclear family as Mar Osthathios teaches, and therefore we in our own personal families are but a microcosm reaching toward the goal of a global family (c.f.SBRPW 29). Mar Osthathios contends that "the Church is the nuclear family of God consisting of God the Father of all, the Church guided and used by the Holy Spirit which is Mother, and Jesus Christ the eldest eternal brother where all Christians are his direct brothers and sisters" (TOCS 63). Vatican II echoes Mar Osthathios' statement when the Council declared that "the whole human race should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood" (Flannery, 925). Let it be recalled, however obvious, that when we pray the prayer Jesus taught us we say "Our Father" not "my Father" (c.f.TOCS 112).

So when we speak of the Trinity needing to be reflected in the social arena we need also recall that the Trinity is modeled on the nuclear family, for the Trinity is simplified by Mar Osthathios as "one family of three persons" (TOCS 149). This view of the political and the familial is encouraged by the Second Vatican Council's conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes* which suppose that "the social ties necessary for man's development [which] correspond to his innermost nature [are]: the family... and the political community" (Flannery 926). Like the Trinity which lives in equality, so too does the family structure strive to teach freedom, dignity, and equality to each member. Mar Osthathios remarks "what we need is a world family in which each member works for the whole family and the whole family takes care of the old and sick who cannot work" (TOCS 43, see Mt. 20, Mt. 25, and 2 Thes. 3:10).

FILIOQUE

I will make a quick aside because no conversation about the Trinity can be complete without a brief discussion of the *filioque*, especially in an Eastern Catholic Church where our rite seems to straddle both Creedal usages. As many remember in the pre-2007 Liturgical pew books of the Ruthenian recension Liturgy there was an optional use of the *filioque* in the recitation of the Creed. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in our tradition is referred to as the "Symbol of Faith." The *filioque* means "and the Son" which is said in most Western Churches following "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father", and it

is here that the Latin Church adds "and the Son." The addition of "and the Son" came to the Western Church during the Arian controversy in the sixth century whereupon a Local council in Visigothic Spain added *Filioque*. Prior to the sixth century several Western theological luminaries (Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers), held the opinion that the *filioque* was doctrinally correct. However the *filioque's* creedal insertion was to combat Arianism (Jesus as less than the Father; literally a belief that there was a time when the Word was-not).

I personally do not see this as a major issue, nor a Church dividing matter. The controversial document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000 titled *Dominus Iesus* insists, *de facto*, that Catholics may use the *filioque* or not, and both the current Pontiff and John Paul II of blessed memory have publicly recited the Creed without the *filioque*. I personally do not think the *filioque* should be used in Christian Churches, especially Eastern Christian Churches, but by that same token I do not think its usage is a cause of irreconcilable Church difference. For me the instructions of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, the Vatican II conciliar document on the Eastern Catholic Churches, encourages us to return to our ancestral traditions "with scrupulous fidelity to the traditions of the East", which would mean omitting the *filioque* (Flannery 449). It is interesting to note that the Episcopal Church USA, which we Catholics and Orthodox often think of as doctrinally indifferent, passed a resolution in 1985 to drop the *filioque*, but alas this resolution was never adopted. Mar Osthathios concludes this discussion with a one-sentence summation that "the term 'Father' is sufficient to show the Orthodox emphasis of the unity of Trinity in Him" (SBRRPW 44).

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE: WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

Now I would like us to look at the idea of the Development of Doctrine in Western Christianity as expressed by Cardinal John Henry Newman and how it relates to Eastern conception of Development.

Returning to the idea of Trinity and the common good it would behoove us to look at the attitude of Catholic and Orthodox Church teaching on the topic of the social consequences of faith since the nineteenth century. A concept that is crucial to the Pope's recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, and to the whole post-Vatican II Catholic Church, is the concept of "development". In his recent

encyclical Pope Benedict uses human social history as a category of knowledge, and therefore as a way of knowing the God of history. It can be claimed that liberation theologians used the academic discipline of "history" and have made it into a theological category. With the current discussion regarding the canonization of Cardinal John Henry Newman and his contributions to Catholic thought, especially the development of doctrine, it is worth noting that Trinitarianism in the public sphere relies heavily on a similar, yet different, understanding of development. To address Western Christian notions of development we must examine Cardinal Newman. Cardinal Newman is integral to this discussion on development, as his ideas really have become a foundation for Western understandings of theological development. Now let us review Newman's thought. All Christian revelation ends with the death of the last apostle. This is an idea that almost all mainstream Christians would agree with. The difference that lies in Newman is that for the Catholic Church "reason" continues to elaborate on revealed truth, and exposes aspects of that truth which were not manifestly obvious at the time of their revelation. Newman defines his theory as "the germination, growth and perfection of some living, that is, influential truth, or apparent truth, in the minds of men during a sufficient period" (Hotchkiss & Henry 49). Newman concludes that this view is validated in the Roman Papal See, which serves to verify what is doctrinally developmentally valid (i.e.: Trinitarianism, Incarnation, purgatory, cult of the saints, Mariology, original sin, *filioque*, etc). Newman's idea is not solely about understanding "change" for the sake of understanding, but also about being witnesses to "progress." This idea of development in Newman's work is really at home in the nineteenth century milieu that constructed grand narratives about human teleological existence which we see in Darwinism, Hegelianism, Marxism and the other fashions of that era. What Newman does is apply his mode of developmental understanding to theological doctrine.

Let us note, parenthetically, that Newman was very suspicious of the First Vatican Council's declaration of Papal infallibility, *which* for us Eastern Catholics is a constant difficulty as well, but ultimately Newman came to see Papal infallibility as a organic consequence of his theory. As some of Newman's Eastern Orthodox and Anglican critics point out the notion of "Papal authority" is itself subject to the "development of doctrine" idea. As Eastern Christians, we do not share in the idea of a Development of Doctrine, at least in Newman's framework.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE: EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

Now let us explore the Eastern idea of development and how it is similar and differs from the West.

It is an unfair accusation lodged toward Eastern Christians that we are intentionally anachronistic, reactionary, anti-modern, or tradition-worshipper. Just because our last Council concluded in Nicea in 787 does not mean we Eastern Christians do not have our own theory of development; but our understanding does not exist in the meta-narrative enlightenment worldview of Newman. We as Eastern Christians instead have the concept of "memory." By this I do not mean "we remember", but that memory itself is a living and relational process. What we do is turn to the Fathers, the great Fathers of our Holy Church, and ask them to deepen our knowledge of Christian truth and mystery. To quote a Pentacost troparion:

"Blessed are you, Christ our God, who revealed the fishermen to be most wise by sending down the Holy Spirit, and so through them catching the whole world in a net. Lover of mankind, glory to you"!

Likewise with the Ecumenical Councils, it is the actual lived-history that follows a Council which determines the Council's validity. This is because the relationship between conciliar promulgation by the hierarchy and reception by the faithful ultimately decides a Council's legitimacy and applicability. It is a reciprocal relationship between conciliar promulgation and the faithful's reception of it which legitimates doctrine for the Christian East, and that process therefore is believed to be an imitation of the inner life of the Trinity. Let it be duly noted that the Holy Spirit is trusted by all parties to guide this process. This method is understood in an ecclesiological schema known as a *sobor*. A *sobor* is an assembly of bishops, clerics and laity that meet to discuss matters of Church importance; the word is Slavic in origin but the practice is found across the spectrum of Orthodoxy worldwide. If we want to get at the root of Eastern ecclesiology it is summarized within the worldview of Orthodox philosopher Paul Evdokimov "who contented that the Church is simply assumed, since it is a lived experience" (Karkkainen 19).

RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH FATHERS TO THE IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT

Now I want us to explore how the Church Fathers understood

the idea of "Development."

Personally I am not a fan of Newman, but I do respect his thought. I find that his philosophy quickly falls into intellectual elitism, historical negation, and limits our openness to the Fathers of the Church. When we start thinking that Athanasius did not have the full understanding of the Truth because of the era in which he lived, we become another example of secular deconstruction in religious garb. Newman, having been of an Anglican background, brings some of his Protestant baggage with him in his conversion to Catholicism, reinventing Luther's religious "Justification by Faith" into a dogmatic "Historical Justification by Reason." The crucial fact that we all need to keep constantly in mind is that the Fathers of the one undivided Church are our Fathers. We do not know more than the Fathers: the Father dwell in the heavenly realms with the choirs of angels for the purpose of guiding human beings into the ever unknowable loving depths of the Blessed Trinity.

I had occasion to attend Vespers and a lecture by the Pope of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, Catholicos Karekin II, in 2007. He concluded his talk by asking all the parents at the event to take care of his spiritual children in the Armenian diaspora. I found that most beautiful. We must have this type of relationship with the Fathers of the Church; they are here to take care of us in our spiritual life as well as our physical life. We are the spiritual children of the Fathers of the Church. As the *troparion* of the feast of the First Ecumenical Council states "O Christ our God, who hast established our fathers as luminaries on earth." Our understanding of Father is not limited to the saintly "Church Fathers", for on earth our fathers in God are the bishops in communion with their chief bishop. As the Church Fathers guide our prayers and spiritual knowledge of the Living God, so too do the bishops, as our religious fathers, guide as in living a life in the Church on Earth. Historically there are four criteria for someone to be considered a "Father" of the Church. Above all (1) to be a "Church Father" the saint must have been an author. The additional requirements are (2) eminent sanctity, (3) catholicity (in the sense of universal, orthodox and in communion with the whole Church) and (4) one who lived in antiquity (Fortescue xviii). For both Catholics and Orthodox an individual must manifest these criteria in order to be considered a Church Father. These prerequisites were codified by Pope Alexander III in the twelfth century and are generally accepted in the Christian East as well the West (even if these prerequisites are not systematized in the East). For the East, the last

Father was the eighth century St. John Damascene, considered the great dogmatist of the Orthodox faith. In the West the last Father is the twelfth century St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Cistercians. This does not mean that there can be no additional Church Fathers, for this tradition has continued in the West in the creation of "Doctors of the Church." In the East the Patristic period has informally never ended as the Fathers beyond the eighth century are usually honored as "saints", "elders". or "Pillars of the Faith."

We may wonder why there are no "Church Mothers"? Not because the men of the distant past were prejudiced, *per se*, but because we do not have any major extant writings from early Church women by which we could establish a female saint as a "Church Mother." Women simply did not write copiously in the early first millennia the way men did. There are, however, some well-known Desert Mothers. It should be recalled that Pope Paul VI did women the ultimate honor when he declared Mary to be "Mother of the Church" at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, an idea he inherited and credited to St. Ambrose of Milan. For us, as Eastern Christians, a proper understanding of the Church Father is very important, because it is the consensus of the Church Fathers' teachings which is the basis of our faith. This Patristic foundation is called *unanimem consensum Patrum*, which literally means the "unanimous consent of the Fathers", commonly understood to mean those truths which are held by small-o orthodox Christians everywhere. Thus, we see again in the East an example of conciliarity, or *sobor*, or if we want to use more contemporary secular terminology, a patristic "collective democracy." To live our faith in a conciliar Church, as opposed to monarchical Church, is to replicate the internal functioning of the Holy Trinity: an equality of perfections (c.f. TOCS 69).

A SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT

Now I would just like to summarize Development in a global Christian context.

Therefore for us Eastern Christians, our guide in this process of "historical knowledge" and "revealed truth" should be a Father like St. Basil the Great. St. Basil believed that Christian theological categories were perfected through time and preserved in the bosom of the Church in unwritten traditions guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. For us Eastern Christians it is "experience" which reveals the fullness of truth, that truth which our hearts and minds are brought to understand ever more deeply, above all in the

Liturgy. Eastern Christianity is a faith based on experience.

The Romanian Orthodox scholar Mihail Neamtu summarized doctrinal development for the Christian East when he stated that "the development of doctrine.... represents not the evolution from a primitive stage (of the primitive Church) toward more recent and more intelligible levels of understanding, but [is rather] the spontaneous process of unfolding of what is really given in the apostolic and unsurpassable confession of Christ as 'God and Lord' (Hotchkiss & Henry 60, *also for a Western philosophical counterpart to Neamtu's idea see Gaston Bachelard's and Louis Aalthusser's work on the concept "epistemological break"*).

Both the Christian West and East agree on development as an aspect of Christian experience in historical time; but the difference is how the respective Churches emphasize and elucidate the concept of "development."

CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND PROGRESS

Now we will look into the organic outgrowth of "development" which is "progress" and how the Catholic Church has looked at "progress" since the Second Vatican Council, and how that correlates to Eastern Christian conceptions.

"Progress" is a critical concept for Mar Osthathios. He sees "progress" in a dialectical relationship of the ever-unrealizable realization of the Holy Trinity perfectly reflected upon the earth. Basically this means man must continue to reach for what he cannot fully grasp. The social intention of the Catholic Church for at least the last half-century is to bridge the gulf between the Churches and the world. We need to remember that Jesus of Nazareth "was crucified as a political criminal by political powers" (SBRPW 45), and so engagement with the world has been an essential for Christians from the time that the shadow of the cross was first cast over the original followers of Jesus. Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, the great Orthodox theologian, affirms that "Christianity always balances between two extremes: the renunciation of the world and the acceptance of time" (Bulgakov 168); and since the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has made it a priority to locate the place of Christian principles in a world composed of post-confessional states.

"Progress" has received much attention since the Second Vatican Council, and "Paul VI taught that progress, in its origin and essence, is first and foremost a vocation" (Benedict 14). Pope Benedict

recently stated that progressive “development, understood in human and Christian terms,.... [is] the heart of the Christian social message” (Benedict 12). Thus we cannot relegate to a secondary place the call to contribute to social progress, since this call is integral to our own salvation. It is unfortunate that today many traditional conservative Catholics see social justice activism as something that belongs to the purview of liberal modern Catholics. Likewise, it is equally disenchanting to see leftist Catholics treating dogmatic truth so casually. What we need is a middle ground, such-as we see in the works of Mar Osthathios and Pope Benedict. It is our responsibility to be both small-o orthodox Christians who at the same time are engaged in the collective struggles to create a better society. To quote Benedict’s *Caritas in Veritate*: “the Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere” (Benedict 58).

POPE BENEDICT AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Now I want to look into Pope Benedict’s teaching on social progress and its relevancy for contemporary Christians.

Pope Benedict states in his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* that “the development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion” (Benedict 60). In this encyclical the Pontiff calls on Catholics to fight for the power of labor unions (Benedict 71), for environmental stewardship (Benedict 20, 54, 55, 57, 58), for collective bargaining rights (Benedict 24, 39), and for a supranational governing authority to regulate international trade and finance (Benedict 39, 66, 74, 75). He also urges Catholics to work for a limit to profitability (Benedict 19, 39, 43), to create programs for full employment (Benedict 32, 70), for economic democracy (Benedict 40, 46, 53, 74), for regulation (Benedict 23, 41, 74, 75), for a world political authority (Benedict 45, 74, 75), for making the market subservient to human beings (Benedict 4, 10, 19, 26, 37, 42, 44, 51, 64, 72, 78, 79), for generous social welfare programs (Benedict 24, 41, 67), and for redistribution of wealth (Benedict 32, 38, 39, 41, 46, 47, 56). Lastly Benedict implores Catholics to live a life of “universal brotherhood and solidarity for the advancement of global and community development” (Benedict 67). Pope Benedict is basically elaborating on his predecessor Pope Paul VI who entreated the faithful to fight the “international imperialism of money” (Paul VI 17, *see also Pope Pius XI’s encyclical Quadragesimo anno*). All these aforementioned concepts, which sound like a tract belonging to a Western Euro-

pean party of social democracy, are taught in Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. We should recall that Benedict's encyclical should be treated with the same authority that we give to encyclicals such as *Humane Vitae*. Catholics cannot claim that not using contraceptives is papal teaching, but then advocate libertarian free-market forms of economic organization. Both ideas have the same weight because they both are grounded in Papal teachings. One can even argue that there is a greater precedence for Benedict's recent economic encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* in Catholic social teaching, historically, than Paul VI's *Humane Vitae*.

Pope Benedict's Christian socioeconomic guidance may sound radical to many American ears, because our country is founded in great part on Calvinist obsessions with individualism, self-reliance, and competitive personal accomplishment within a Masonic framework of secular indifferentism. When Pope Benedict calls for Christian intervention in the state he is not asking for an "altar and throne" social structure, but for Gospel ideas which can be expressed in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society. The Pope states that "without perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing space" (Benedict 10). Mar Osthathios goes a step further and states "selfish accumulation of wealth is normal demonic individualism" (SBRPW 42). We must recall that praying and working for societal betterment is not something we do principally because we are revolutionaries or ideologues, but because of the fact that we are Christians and want society to reflect, albeit imperfectly, the bonding love of the three-persons of the Holy Trinity.

MAR OSTHATHIOS AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Now that we have discussed the Catholic ideas of progress we can now look at Mar Osthathios' ideas of progress since he is really a seminal thinker in the whole school of contemporary socially progressive Orthodox theology.

Now we return to Mar Osthathios', whose ideas are similar to Pope Benedict's but go a step further. Mar Osthathios' brings a third-world perspective and an urgency to the problem that we in the first world are not as aware of. Mar Osthathios also has a more intrinsically theological undercurrent in his advocating of social change. In my opinion the theological inspiration of the Metropolitan's social views are partially due to his *monophysitism* (or more rightly called *Miaphysitism*), a belief which holds that the divinity and humanity of Christ are united in one nature without

separation in the person of Jesus. Mar Osthathios, the Metropolitan and Bishop, believes that to socially reflect the Trinity man must create a classless society.

In-itself the Holy Spirit is an egalitarian community, an equality of three *hypostases* or persons in loving *perichoresis* (inter-penetration). This dogmatic definition of the Trinity causes Mar Osthathios to conclude that "wherever the triune God is present, and his presence is felt by the people, there is a classless society" (TOCS 109). Mar Osthathios does not take his inspiration so much from Bolsheviks or Marxists, but from the new testament and from the Fathers of the Church. For Mar Osthathios the egalitarian society begins with John 3:16: "God so loved the world that He gave ..."; and giving is the chief attribute of our Creator (SBRPW 32).

I really know of no other way to say this, and I realize these are loaded terms especially given our particular Church's history in Eastern and Central Europe. But Mar Osthathios is preaching a radical international democratic socialism of classlessness, and he proclaims that "the holy trinity is not only to be adored and worshipped, but also to be emulated and esteemed as the Ultimate Model for man and society and so distinctions should not nullify basic equality in the redeemed society" (SBRPW 74).

First of all though socialism preached by this Holy Bishop is that not one that would mirror the Soviet experience, but would rather be akin to a radical social democracy, for he says "the basis of this classless society is not Marxism but the eternal love of the Holy Trinity in eternal action" (TOCS 24). Mar Osthathios describes the social order he envisions as "not a dictatorship of any class, but a democratic, socialistic rule based on a parliamentary system" (TOCS 75). Mar Osthathios recognizes that, due to human weakness, the perfect society is incapable of existing because, as he asserts, a perfect classless society is only an eschatological possibility (TOCS 74). For the Metropolitan a classless society is a sign of the coming of the Heavenly Kingdom. Mar Osthathios states that "Heaven will be the perfect classless society" (TOCS 70), imitating the Book of Acts which professed that "all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they were distributed to each according to his need" (Acts 4:35). St. Basil reinforces this Biblical point when he remarks, "Let us zealously imitate the early Christian community, where everything was held in common" (Schroeder 38).

For Mar Osthathios, a global democratic socialist state is the penultimate Kingdom of God on earth. Again, this beloved Bishop of India acknowledges that, "the ideal of the classless society of the Godhead is not attainable in history, but it can be kept as a model and appropriated as closely as possible" (TOCS 68). A classless society is a synthesis of the interior life of the Blessed Trinity and the material world of the human race. We Eastern Christians see the coming of the Kingdom in a spiritual technology of "immanent fulfillment." We Eastern Christians acknowledge that we have been living in the Last Times since the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The great Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who influenced Mar Osthathios, succinctly and seemingly paradoxically simplifies this whole question, noting that "the community is not the kingdom of God, But the Kingdom of God is the community" (SBLPW 54). Christian social order is described by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann as "a primitive Christian communism, which was not the product of any specifically Christian social or economic theory, but a manifestation of Love" (TOCS 89). This vision of a Godly social order is what appears in the Book of Acts, in James, in Amos, in Nehemiah, in Jeremiah, in Mathew, in the Psalms, and throughout the whole courses of Scripture.

MAR OSTHATHIOS ON EVANGELIZATION AND SIN

Now I want us to explore Mar Osthathios' view on evangelism and sin since these notions are directly related to his understanding of development and progress.

Mar Osthathios calls for a new missionary evangelization. This evangelization seeks to create a world family of humanity which will be brought about by Trinitarian theology on the one hand and an international governing body on the other (cf TOCS 129). Mar Osthathios does not see the salvation of the converted individual as the question facing the human race today. Rather, proselytism is not about person alone who is converted but is about Mar Osthathios following question: "if conversion to Christ means the Christianization of the conscience of the converted person, how can such a person rest in peace in a capitalistic system"? (TOCS 130). For Mar Osthathios missionary activity always has as its earthly aim a classless society, and for him classlessness is the societal incarnation of the Holy Trinity.

Thus we preach Christ not by standing on street corners with pious tracts, but by working to transform the structures which create poverty. For the Metropolitan, class distinctions are a result

of the primordial Fall, and classlessness is a sign of our collective redemption (c.f. SBRPW 81). We Christians constantly pray for this just society with the words our Savior taught us: "thy Kingdom come thy Will be done on Earth....". For Mar Osthathios "the psychology of a class society started with the coming of sin" (TOCS 31), therefore class distinctions are a result of "Original Sin" as known in the Western Church or "Ancestral Sin" as understood in the Eastern Church.

INTER-COMMUNION

As a result of these sins of structure and class I want us to look at how we are to approach the idea of Church Eucharistic inter-communion as Christians in a class structured society. I especially want to focus on Mar Osthathios analysis of this situation.

Many of us as Eastern Catholic Christians are constantly put in the middle of the debate over inter-communion between Catholics and Orthodox Christians. For Mar Osthathios we should prescind from this question, because according to him the real question to be raised should be "a hue and cry against the inter-communion of the rich and the poor around the same table of the Lord" (TOCS 134) as Saint Paul did in the eleventh chapter of Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:20). Our Churches are currently using valuable ecclesiastical and ecumenical resources to find points of canonical discipline which either enable or prevent different Christians confessions from taking part in the One Body of Christ, which for Mar Osthathios misses the real point entirely. Instead Metropolitan Mar Osthathios insists that the fundamental consideration is actually that "there is sound scriptural basis for someone who will not inter-commune until there is an international economic order and sharing of all resources of the rich with the poor. The early Church shared in the communion table only after sharing the material riches with their fellow believers (Acts 2:44-48)" (TOCS 135).

Thus, before the Churches continue the fruitful dialogue regarding Eucharistic inter-communion between themselves, we need to return to the more fundamental question: how can a Church whose membership is riddled with class distinctions allow its divided members to share in the Eucharist? Mar Osthathios responds to this query by saying that the "members of the Church must share the Father's property alike before they share in the body and blood of Christ" (SBRPW 25). There is no doubt that Mar Osthathios has inherited this perspective from St. John Chrysostom who told us that "to love thy neighbor is a sacrament," The Orthodox philoso-

pher Nikolai Berdyaev capitalizes on this whole notion when he states that “bread for me is a material question, but bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one” (Plekon and Vinogradov 63).

Dostoyevsky expresses the fact that “without Christ humanity will never be able to share bread” (Plekon and Vinogradov 42). Before we Christians can achieve the mystery of union we must address the causes of the mystery of disunion (c.f. 42). The need for sharing is paramount in the Christian social vocation. In our common Christian “sharing” there is the implication of a radical egalitarianism which replicates the Holy Trinity. The Orthodox philosopher Paul Evdokimov remarks that “for the [Church] Fathers, authentic charity was an act of sharing which was forceful enough to be a sign of the Kingdom here on earth”, and he continues by saying that “sharing is fundamental and central and for the [Church] Fathers constitutes the most radical spiritual revolution” (Plekon and Vinogradov 85). The Didache, which is one of the most revered documents of the Apostolic Age, implores us to “share everything with your brother. Do not say ‘it is private property’. If you share what is everlasting, you should be willing to share that much more the things that do not last.” Mar Osthathios concludes that “humanity will move towards a sharing society when the meaning of the Holy Trinity will be preached as a model for life” (SBRPW 17).

PERSPECTIVE ON OPPRESSION IN THE FATHERS AND MAR OSTHATHIOS

I would like us to now turn to the view of property and oppression in the Fathers and how that is transmitted by Mar Osthathios.

By not seeking to liberate themselves the oppressed classes are in sin and allow the sin of the oppressing classes to continue. Mar Osthathios states “the universality of class structures in the world must be attributed to the universality of sin (TOCS 61). The Metropolitan continues by saying that “the oppressing structures and the oppressed are sinful, but the structures are more demonic than the people who succumb to structures. The Churches in the world are not adequately conscious of the social and structural sin as of personal sins” (SBRPW 16). By not fighting for social justice we in the Church are engaging in both structural and personal sin, St. Cyprian reminds us that “property holds the owner in chains ... chains which shackled their courage and choked their faith and hampered their judgment and throttled their souls. They think of themselves as owners, whereas it is they rather who are owned:

enslaved as they are to their own property, they are not the masters of their money but its slaves." Mar Osthathios echoes Cyprian when he remarks that "in a class-structured society both classes are in sin; the oppressor class is guilty of the sin of a superiority complex and the inferior class of an inferiority complex" (TOCS 123). The Church must harken to its evangelical vocation, for as the great Catholic social theorist Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez says "the role of the ecclesial community is to struggle against the radical causes of social division" (Gutierrez 161). The existence of class divisions in this world is sinful, and is part of the power of the prince of this world. Let all peoples therefore say together with Jesus that "the prince of this world cometh: and hath nothing in me" (Jn. 14:30).

The Protestant theologian Emil Brunner observes that "the Fathers of the Church in no wise regarded property as something which has been ordered by the Law of Nature; to [the Fathers] the natural thing is communism. To [the Fathers] property seems only an evil which has become necessary owing to the Fall" (SBRPW 56). If anyone wants to see an actual Patristic theory of the state one should read St. John Chrysostom's exposition of the story of Ananias and Sapphira. In this story Chrysostom outlines an absolutely communistic theory of society (c.f.SBRPW 56). A wealth-obsessed society is indicative of a society which lacks trust, both in neighbor and God; for the Scripture tells us "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). The preeminent Catholic theologian of the twentieth-century Karl Rahner said in a talk once that "true spiritual poverty is to live in uncertainty" (Rahner, *also see St. Basil's comments in Schroeder 45-46*). Mar Osthathios concludes that "our unwillingness to part with private property is because it is a symbol of power and we do not want to be powerless" (TOCS 13).

Today too many Christians, especially certain Stains of Protestantism, have succumbed to the thinking that "you have the poor with you always" (Mt. 26:11). Those that say this need to remember that in this passage Jesus alludes to Deuteronomy 15:4-5 which conveys "there may be no poor among you; for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance-only if you carefully obey the voice of the Lord your God" (c.f.SBRPW 18). Likewise Mar Osthathios takes on other passages of Holy Writ which are misused by those who seek to perpetuate a class-based society. He comments on John the Baptist's directive to the Roman soldiers in Luke 3:13 to "be content with your wages." Mar Osthathios has

the understanding that "in the classless society... every one will be content with his wages" (TOCS 42. see Mt. 20:1-16 *and compare with* Mt. 25:14-30; see also 2 Thes. 3:10). Additionally Mar Osthathios points out that "Romans 13 should not be interpreted without the corrective Revelations 13" (SBRPW 76).

Mar Osthathios sees the liberation of the oppressed and the oppressor manifested above all in the *Magnificat*, which we sing at Sunday Matins in imitation of the Mother of God. For the Metropolitan the *Magnificat* is the Christian's "song of high revolution" (SBRPW 69). St. Basil takes these ideas of societal injustice to its extreme when he writes that "whoever has the ability to remedy the suffering of others, but chooses rather to withhold aid out of selfish motives may properly be judged the equivalent of a murderer" (Schroeder 29). This is St. Basil I am talking about here, the saint's whose Liturgy is celebrated during the holiest times of the Church year. St. Basil believed that everyone is called to "redistribute your surplus to the needy" and we need to be aware that "redistribute" in the original Greek means literally to "restore the balance" (Schroeder 83). Why is it we Christians praise Basil as our saintly Father in terms of piety, yet forget his social instructions?

The ideals of classlessness are not limited to third-world Bishop and remote Roman Pontiffs; rather these ideas in their entirety are adopted from the Desert Fathers and the Fathers of the Church, and therefore from the Fathers of our faith. If we want to see real-existing classlessness in our own time we need look no further than the monastic communities. Monasticism, for us as Eastern Christians, is where the roots of our theology lie; so why should the monastery not also be the foundation for our approach to societal economic organization? The monastery is our window to heaven, our social structural icon. Mar Osthathios modestly prophesies that "a classless society will dawn with the messianic age according to Isaiah chapter eleven" (TOCS 41), a Biblical passage we hear read at every Nativity Vespers service.

Logos

The final segment I want to discuss is the idea of the "Logos" and how Christ is the Logos of the Father. This idea of "Logos" is relevant because the Logos is how Christ operates, developmentally, within historical time.

For Mar Osthathios it is the *Logos*, the Word, both pre - and post

- incarnate, that is driving humanity toward a classless society. This Logos is at once both anonymous and incarnate (c.f. TOCS 126), for "there is the same image of God in every man" (TOCS 122). The *Logos* is the mover of human history and the mediator of divine reality. Before the Logos was made flesh in Christ Jesus, the Logos traveled about the heavens and earth seeking to build the Kingdom, preparing the way for the son (see Book of Ecclesiasticus/Sirach regarding "wisdom"). Many of the Fathers hold that before time began, before there was creation, the Son was being eternally generated by the Father. A number of Fathers taught that the Logos, while always the Christ, nevertheless worked before and after the incarnation in the *Logoi spermatikoi* defined as scattered seeds of truth not necessarily always revealing itself in an explicit Christian context (c.f. TOCS 97). The *Logos* some times comes in anonymity and this is how the Fathers justified the use of Greek philosophy to explain Christianity. We see this idea philosophically today in Karl Rahner's theory of "anonymous Christians." All human beings are saved through Christ, the *Logos*, but not all are aware that it is the *Logos*-Christ who is saving them, for "Christ the Logos is at work everywhere to bring all to the incarnate *Logos*" (SBRPW 27). The many *Logoi* (meaning: twinkles, shadows, allusion, and hints of the Father) with a small-1, are shadows of, and a preparation for, the big - L Logos (the perfect reflection of the Father: which is the Son). This means that Christ is operating within a salvific framework for all whether they know it or not, for as Pope Benedict indicates "truth, in fact, is logos which creates dia-logos, and hence communication and communion" (Benedict 3).

Why is it that so many atheists, communists, secularists, and non-Christians are doing to work of building the Kingdom of God on earth and so few Christians, the Metropolitan asks (c.f. TOCS 53). The Scripture teaches that "salvation is in no one else [than Jesus], because there is no other Name under heaven which has been given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), but it is not necessary to know explicitly that the holy Name which saves us is ultimately Jesus. If one is open to salvation, no matter what Name one gives to the saving process, means that one receives the *logoi spermatikoi*, the shadows of God. To affirm salvation in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is to know not merely the shadows of God but the fullness of God which is Jesus Christ the *Logos*. The *Logos* sustains many Christians who do not identify themselves as Christians.

Pope Benedict insists that "Christianity must always remember

that it is the religion of the 'Logos' (Ratzinger). Our Liturgy teaches us that "Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, You are everywhere present and fill all things", and so when we look to this world and see what is supposedly a post-Christian secular West, we must remember that Christ is in our midst, and we should, as the first letter of John implores, "believe not every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 Jn. 4:1). Let us take comfort that "In Christ the *Logos*, we have our brother in the Godhead" (SBRPW 55). This is not some postmodern new-age notion of "I'm okay, you're okay"; rather it is a notion that is deeply rooted in the Fathers. Even the Pope known as the traditional Catholic standard-bearer Pius XII, reiterated this idea in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* that "so vast is the love of the divine Spouse that it embraces in His Bride the whole human race without exception"; and "we should recognize in other men, although they are not yet joined to us in the body of the Church, our brothers in Christ according to the flesh, called, together with us, to the same eternal salvation" (Pius XII 96).

Lumen Gentium, one of the most beautiful documents of the Second Vatican Council, proclaims that "those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation" (Flannery 367).

We also should not fail mention that a number of Fathers go a step further taking inspiration from Scriptural passages such as 1 Peter 3:18-19 which states "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just and the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison" (see *also* Mt. 27:52-53, Mt. 12:49, Acts. 2:22-24, 29-32, Acts. 13:34-37, 1 Pet. 4:6, 1 Pet. 3:20-21, Eph. 4:9, 1 Cor. 12:54-57, Rom. 10:7, Col. 2:14-15, Rev. 20:10, 14, and Rev. 1:17-17). Due to this quote in first Peter, and numerous other passages in Scripture as well as early Christian writings, a number of Fathers believed in universal salvation (Gregory of Nyssa as the best known representative) since Christ has forever smashed Hades by His Resurrection. Other commonly held Patristic views on the possibility of universal salvation included praying souls of hell, and ultimately the redemption of all, including the devil, in a process known as the *apocatastasis*.

This world is very precious, and everyone in this world is our

sibling. This world is so cherished by our Heavenly Father that Fr. Coniaris of St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church in Minneapolis tells his parishioners that Jesus reminds us human beings that the second person of the Trinity is one of us. Fr. Sergius Bulgakov states that "every act of labour is a realization of the design for man outside himself. In labour man becomes not only the Logos of the world, but one of its workers" (Bulgakov 172). The *Logos*-Christ is present in all and with all, and we are all, participants in that *Logos*. The *Logos*-Christ is that which envelops the human race and all creation; we are drawing in the overwhelming limitless love of the *Logos*.

A global Church calls for a global faith, and a global citizenry calls for a global government, for Mar Osthathios realizes that "social justice on a world level will be impossible without a world government" (TOCS 106), for the "Church is a brotherhood working for a world brotherhood" (TOCS 117). Our salvation is worked out here on earth, so let our works be a sign of the season of Pentecost which proclaims that the Kingdom is here, it is now, and it is coming into being. The Metropolitan contends that the "church.... was a classless society in the day of Pentecost" (TOCS 130). The Kingdom of Heaven is possible because it is already here.

CONCLUSION

I would just like to conclude by saying that I find immense inspiration in Mar Osthathios. As a Christian in the Eastern tradition I believe Mar Osthathios conveys to us how urgent it is to live out the social dimensions of the Gospel on a world-wide scale while remaining loyal to the doctrines of the faith. I hope that this presentation has shown the Trinitarian project of social organization, the different historical models of social and religious development, the perspective of living in a world wrought by institutional oppression, and the fact that Christ is in our midst in both Name and anonymity.

I believe that Mar Osthathios is correct when he says that the structural sins of capitalism instinctively call all Christians to fight against injustice; for as he states "cosmic evil appears in the guise of too much profit or extreme poverty" (TOCS 29). For myself, I agree with St. John Chrysostom that "feeling the hungry is a greater work than raising the dead." Lastly I do apologize if I have offended anyone. I understand that these are sensitive and controversial topics, but I have attempted to explain the ideas

according to the teachings of the Fathers, the Popes, and the bishops; and above all Metropolitan Mar Osthathios. The social principles I have discussed, and their theological foundations, are not some “left wing hipping thing”, they are the orthodox teachings of many of the Church Fathers. The work of Mar Osthathios “provides an ideology and a programme for a social democratic transformation of our class-ridden society, informed by Christian evangelical concern for justice” (TOCS 9). I find that Fr. Gustavo Guterrez summarizes the social mission of Christ best when he says “Jesus attacks the roots of an unjust order; for Jesus, the liberation of the Jewish people was only one aspect of a universal, permanent revolution” (Guterrez).

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