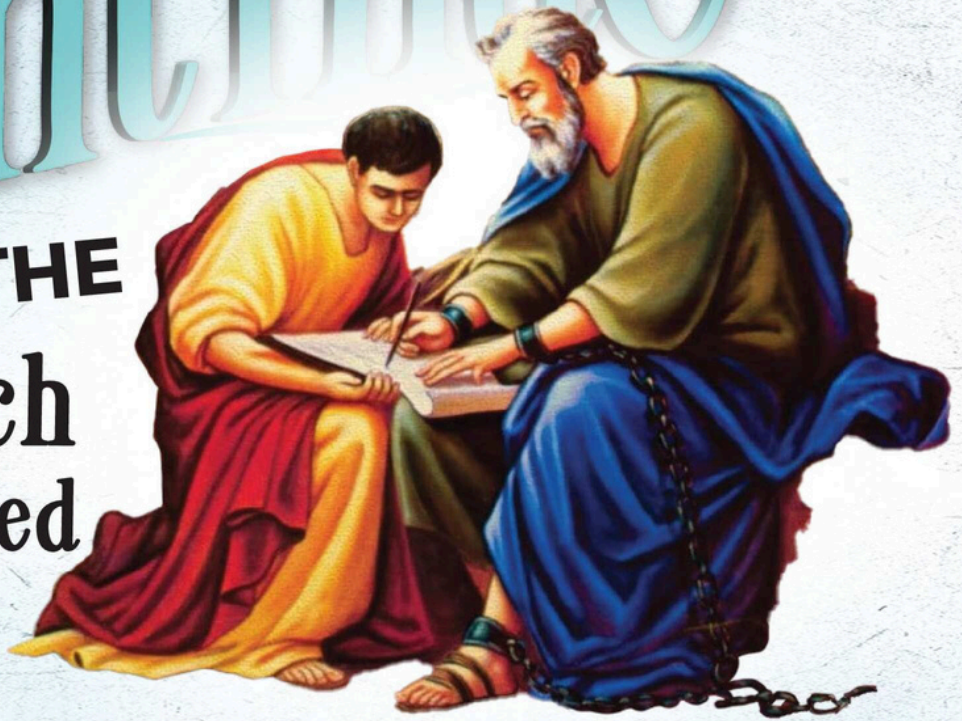


Mahragan El-Keraza
2025

Continue

IN THE
things which
you have learned
(2 Timothy 3:14)



English Edition

Grades 9-12





H.H. Pope Tawadros II

**Pope of Alexandria &
Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark**



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**Bishop of the Diocese of
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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Book of Malachi	21
The Council of Nicaea	49
How & Why	76
Artificial Intelligence	88
Memorization	98



Introduction

The theme of this year is: **“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of” (2 Timothy 3:14)**

Saint Paul the Apostle spoke to his disciple Timothy about the difficulty and corruption of the Last Days. He emphasized the necessity of striving with a spirit of strength, not a spirit of despair, to preserve the true Faith and resist heresies firmly with gentleness and love. He explained to him that Saint Timothy should not be surprised by the presence of these resisters, for at every age, there are those who resist divine work. With the Redemptive Work of Christ manifested, Satan raged against the newborn Church, in external and internal wars. The closer we get to the end of time, evil will naturally increase, for **Satan always resists the Truth**. But what reassures us is the promise of Christ that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. We live with confidence because “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved” (Psalms 46:5) and “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

Our Faith was established from the beginning by our Lord Jesus, preached by the Apostles, preserved by the Church Fathers, lived out by the Church, and handed down from generation to generation in its pure and true form. In this regard, Saint Paul the Apostle instructed his disciple Timothy, the Bishop, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,” (2 Timothy 2:2). We must preserve the Apostolic Faith that was once delivered to the saints, as noted in the Epistles of Saint Jude, and refrain from introducing changes or altering the ancient doctrines established by our forefathers.



For over 2,000 years, our Church, founded by the Lord Jesus, has maintained a steadfast and upright Faith, never swaying to the right or to the left. The Faith we uphold is **“one Faith” (Ephesians 4:5)**. This one Faith is echoed in our morning prayers (in the Prime Hour of the Book of Hours) and is shared by every member of the Church. Its primary source is the **Holy Bible**, followed by the teachings of the **Holy Fathers**. The approved canons of the Holy Councils and the writings found in Church books, especially the Liturgy, also contribute to this Faith. Collectively, these are known as Church Tradition, all of which align with the Holy Bible.

From the early days of the Apostolic Fathers, the Church has been diligent in maintaining the integrity of its teachings to safeguard the purity of the Faith. Saint Paul the Apostle expressed this to his disciple, Titus, Bishop of Crete, *“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine,” (Titus 2:1)*. In his wisdom, King Solomon also said, *“He who keeps instruction is in the way of life,” (Proverbs 10:17)*.



In the Church, **teachers must not share their opinions regarding faith and doctrine**. Instead, they are called to teach the unaltered doctrine as it has been passed down to them. While every individual is free to hold their own beliefs, diverging from the established teachings can lead to disunity within the One Church. It is essential to maintain the integrity of the Faith without introducing personal interpretations. Consequently, those prioritizing their opinions over sound doctrine should not be allowed to teach.



The content of teachings must be aligned with the Faith that was once delivered to the saints. The Church has consistently taken care to preserve and convey the Faith and doctrine throughout its history. For instance, the heresy of the Alexandrian priest Arius sparked the convening of a local council attended by the holy Patriarch St. Peter, the seal of the martyrs, Pope Alexander, and hundreds of bishops from Alexandria and Libya. This led to the ecumenical **Council at Nicaea in 325 A.D.**, which included 318 bishops from around the world. During this council, the true doctrine was affirmed, and the false heresy of Arius was condemned. At no point was it suggested that everyone should be free to hold their own opinion.

What leads to heresies?

1: Heresies often arise from incorrect beliefs or teachings. This can occur when someone becomes intertwined with different faith backgrounds and is influenced by their teachings. It may also happen when an individual is influenced by others through their works and writings. St. Paul warns his disciple, St. Timothy, *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you,”* (1 Timothy 4:16).

2: The tendency to **value one’s own opinions over established truths**, leading to **a refusal to change or to obey the teachings of the Church**. St. Paul reminds us that *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables,”* (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

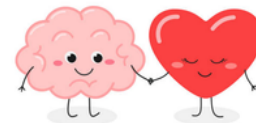
3: **Pride** can lead individuals to firmly believe they are correct while dismissing others as wrong, under the assumption that they know better than everyone else.





Characteristics of the Believing Christian

A Believing Christian is...



Filled with Christ:

An Orthodox believer must embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, dwelling in Him constantly in both heart and mind. This includes studying His Word and understanding His Divinity as One of the Holy Trinity. Knowledge of doctrine and theology is gained through the life of the Church and her teachings. It is essential to be filled internally through the Eucharist, as stated in John 6:56: *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”* This union with the Lord Jesus Christ transforms a believer's life, making Him the essence of his or her existence. The Lord Himself is manifested daily in their lives! Salvation can only be found through the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can one teach effectively without being in fellowship with the Lord? If a person is not continually connected to Him, their understanding will be superficial; the Lord will not be their life. *“For in Him, we live and move and have our being,”* (Acts 17:28). When we look at the **saints**, we see **reflections of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Thus, it is crucial to learn their stories and strive to imitate them in faith since it is Christ who leads to the sanctification of people to become saints. He who loves the saints loves the Lord Jesus Christ.





We also cultivate our relationship with the Lord through **prayer**, which serves as a continuous channel connecting us with God. Through prayer, believers receive wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church encourages her children to maintain a daily relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of the Book of Hours, the Agpeya. This practice connects us with the Lord throughout the day.



In the **Prime Hour**, we celebrate the **Resurrection**. During the **Third Hour**, we are **filled with the Holy Spirit**. At the **Sixth Hour**, we meditate on the events of the **Crucifixion**. The **Ninth Hour** reminds us to die to ourselves in the **death** of the Lord Jesus Christ. The **Eleventh Hour** reflects on the Lord as He is **taken down from the Cross**. The **Twelfth Hour** focuses on His **burial**, and with the **Midnight Prayer**, we await His **Second Coming**. Thus, through the prayers of the Book of Hours, we continually meditate on the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the day.



One of the most important prayers that the Church teaches us is the Jesus Prayer: *"My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."* We also say, *"My Lord Jesus Christ, help me."* *"I praise you, my Lord Jesus Christ."* These are known as **"arrow prayers."** Thus, Christians live in daily fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, turning to Him for guidance throughout the events of the day. As Psalm 34:8 reminds us, *"Oh taste and see that the Lord is good."* The love of the Lord Jesus Christ is both the **sign** and the **key** to our faith in Him.



Filled with Holy Bible:

In this fast-paced age of knowledge, new ideas, both good and bad, are constantly at our fingertips. The youth are exposed to various philosophies, thoughts, and moral challenges that can threaten their lives, futures, spirituality, and understanding of eternal life. Therefore, we must learn and understand the Holy Scripture. The **Holy Bible is our primary source of faith and ecclesiastical teaching and must be studied personally as a message from God to us.** We should pray with the words we read and meditate on them. Additionally, we need to study them in the context of the teachings of the Church Fathers, which will enable us to understand God's words through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will support us with verses that are relevant to various situations.

Filled with the Holy Church:

This is how we truly live the depth of Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy represents a way of life; it reflects the **straight path of glorifying God.** By living the Coptic Orthodox life, we participate in a liturgical and ecclesiastical Life. The Church is the assembly of believers who gather in the consecrated House of God, under the leadership of clergy, amidst angels and saints, around the Holy Body and Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, we find the gathering of doctrine, consecrated rituals, clergy, sacraments, holy angels, and saints, all guiding us as *“members of the household of God,”* (Ephesians 2:19). They support us in genuine fellowship centered around the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and Savior, especially in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In every Divine Liturgy, we experience a profound power in the Church—doctrine, rites, history, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Each ritual encompasses all these elements because rites and rituals explain the doctrine they convey, relating to us the heavenly teaching. That is why we do not change rituals; we hand them down as we have received them from the Fathers.



Filled with the Fathers:

As a Church, we inherited the teachings from the holy Apostles and Fathers, which they received directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is known as **Holy Tradition**. Regarding the Holy Fathers, we must:

- 1) understand their **holy lives**,
- 2) **imitate** them,
- 3) ask them to **pray for us**,
- 4) **consult** their works.



As St. Augustine said, “I read the Holy Bible handed down to me through the Church, explained to me by the Fathers, lived by the saints.” Similarly, St. Anthony the Great advised, “Have for yourself a witness from the Holy Bible for every work you perform.” Additionally, we must have faith, “my books are the lives of those who came before me, and when I want to read, I read the word of God.” (St. Anthony) Studying the works and lives of the Fathers is vital for us as Christians, particularly in these times. Their sayings should guide our teaching and preaching; **a church lacking a foundation lacks life**. These Fathers are pillars of unity in thought, and therefore, we should not rely on just one.

Filled with Understanding Perfection:

We need to be aware of our surroundings and the cultural challenges we face, both ecumenically and locally. **Discernment** is key, and we should be filled with the Holy Spirit and His enlightened word. We must embody the love of God for others and build strong relationships with them. The Coptic Orthodox Church offers a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the Holy Scriptures, doctrine, rites and rituals, patristics, and spirituality. This richness equips both the servants and those being served to lead lives of virtue and spirituality as part of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Church. Let us express gratitude to God for the maturity and growth of our youth and the servants of the Church, who have developed the discernment to distinguish between good and evil.



Sources of the Coptic Orthodox Doctrine:

The Holy Bible:

The Holy Bible is the most significant source and the primary guardian of all teachings in the Church. It holds this primary status because it is the **original declaration of God**. The Holy Fathers dedicated their lives and efforts to understanding, studying, and conveying to us the central theme of the Bible: **the salvation of mankind**.

Church Doctrine:

The concept of “Doctrine”:

Doctrine involves the transmission of teachings that help us comprehend how the Fathers interpreted the faith, religious rituals, and ecclesiastical teachings passed down through generations. **Holy Tradition** is *how we have received the Holy Bible*. As St. Paul states, “*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered,*” (Romans 6:17). He also says, “*Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you,*” (1 Corinthians 11:2). From the beginning, the Fathers received the Faith and teachings directly from our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, and they preserved and preached these teachings. The early life of the Church and the early Fathers hold great significance in maintaining the Faith. Before the great schism of Chalcedon, the entire world—both East and West—upheld these doctrines faithfully. The whole Church adhered to the Apostolic Tradition, which has been handed down through generations and centuries.





The Role of Doctrine in Keeping and Interpreting the Christian Faith:

The goal of Christianity is to **live** and **experience** the Faith. It is not possible to truly have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ without embodying and actively living it. This is the fundamental teaching of the Holy Church. As St. Cyprian states, "You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the Church as your Mother."

There is no salvation outside of the Church; it serves as a **haven** and the **ark of salvation**.



Liturgical Services:

The liturgical services of the church are also a vital source of faith and are as significant as ecumenical dogmas. They serve as a **practical interpretation of doctrine**. Generations have prayed these same words of the Liturgy, which express a shared faith in the Spirit of virtue. We must not teach anything that contradicts what we pray in the liturgies. As St. Irenaeus said, "We pray what we believe, and we believe what we pray."



During Liturgical Prayers, We Declare:

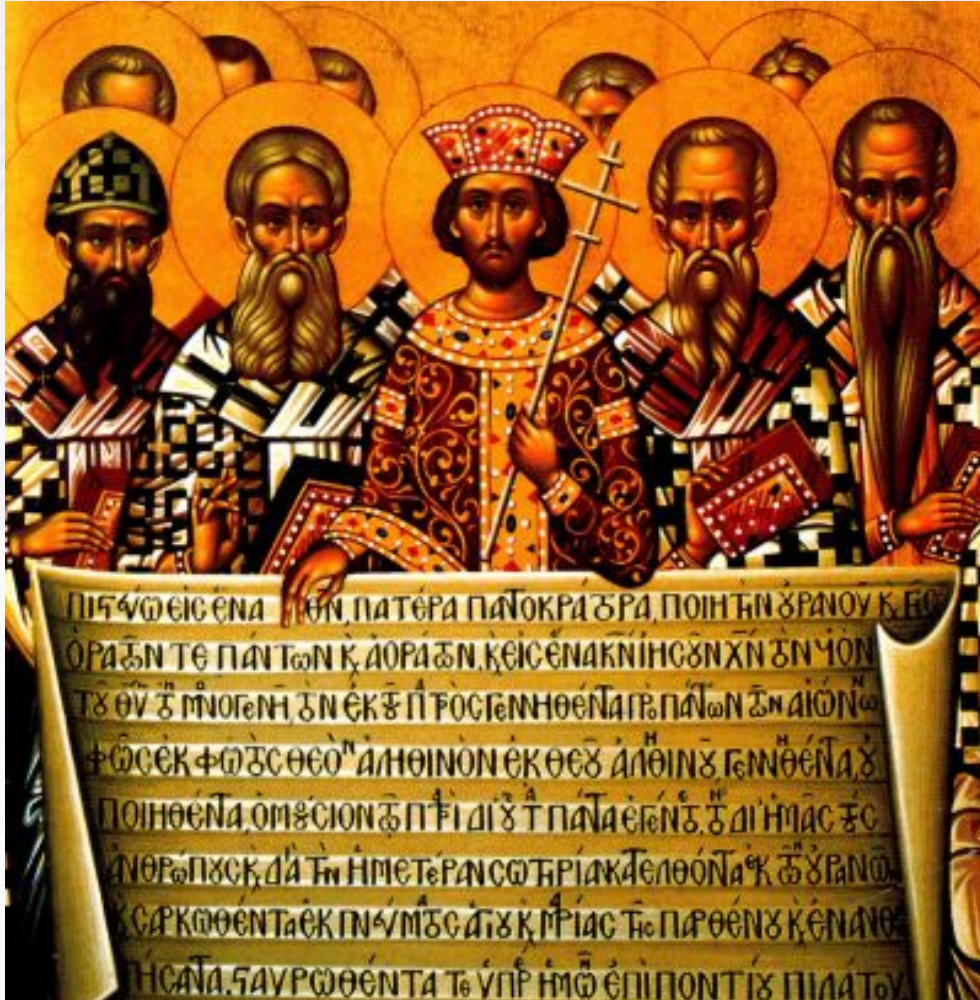
- Our faith in the **Holy Trinity**
- Our faith in the **Incarnation** of the Only Begotten Son of God and His work of salvation, His **death** on the Holy Cross, His Holy **Resurrection** on the third day, and His **Ascension** into heaven
- Our faith in the **descent of the Holy Spirit** upon us, who established the Holy Church
- Our faith in His **Second Coming**, the general **resurrection of the body**, and the **judgment** of the world
- Our faith in the **holy sacraments**, especially the essentiality of Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist
- Our faith in the work of the Holy Spirit within us and in the Church
- Our faith in the Holy Virgin Mary as the **Theotokos**, the Mother of God, and the Mother of all the saints

We believe in the intercession of the saints and that we are part of one Church—the **struggling Church**, which consists of those of us **living on earth**, and the **victorious Church**, which includes those who have **gone before us into paradise**. All these teachings are encapsulated in the Creed and in the holy liturgics, which we firmly believe express the pure Faith through prayers and praises to God.

The Lives and Sayings of the Church Fathers:

These are the Fathers who helped interpret the Faith. How must we read the Fathers?

- We must read the original works of the Fathers or trusted translations of such. As stated in 2 Timothy 2:2, *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* Saint Athanasius emphasizes, “Let us examine the Holy Tradition of the One Church. Her Teachings and her Faith, which have been present since the beginning, were given by the Lord, preached by the Apostles, and preserved by the Fathers. Upon this foundation, the Church was established. He who falls away from this is not a Christian and must not be called such.”



- We must study **Patristics**, which researchers have explored and taught, representing the pure Spirit of the Church, her Faith, and her Teachings. We must always work with a spirit of discernment. Romans 2:18 advises, *“and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law.”*
- We must read the **Fathers** who are considered **pillars of the Church**, those who faithfully explained the Faith, supported by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Bible, Holy Tradition, and the teachings handed down from their Fathers. Our Coptic Church does not believe in the infallibility of individuals, as the Holy Bible has noted the sins of fathers, prophets, and saints. We also sin, but blessed is the one who self-corrects and does not continue stubbornly in sin.



The Decisions And Dogmas of the Ecumenical Councils:

These dogmas and decisions supersede all teachings because they were made ecumenically under the guidance of the **Holy Spirit**. Such councils also anathematized those who teach otherwise. St. Paul states in Galatians 1:8, *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be anathema (accursed).”*

Submitting to Our Faith and Remaining Steadfast in It

The Lord Jesus Christ established His Holy Church upon the rock of the Orthodox faith, as expressed in Matthew 16:18, *“And on this rock, I will build my church.”* He exhorted His disciples to shepherd the people, saying, *“Tend my sheep”* (John 21:16). He urged them to keep the faith and teachings, instructing them to *“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you,”* (Matthew 28:20).

The Coptic Orthodox Church rejects false teachings; nothing upsets the Church more than false teachings. The struggle of the Fathers is evident as they fought against heresies and warned us about false teachings. They established protective measures around the Faith to **prevent heresies** from entering, to **preserve the Oneness of the Church**, and to **prevent division by handing down the true Faith**—Holy and Pure—to the people according to their age.

The Role of Our Father, the Bishop, in the Holy Church:

- The primary responsibility of our father, the bishop, is to preserve the Faith and pass it down to future generations purely and truly. As stated in 2 Timothy 2:2, *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* This is the promise the bishop makes before the Holy Altar of God during his ordination.



- The bishop must be **skilled in teaching** in a positive and edifying way, demonstrating strength, love, and compassion. According to 2 Timothy 2:23-24, *“But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.”* He must hold firmly to the faithful Word, as he was taught, so that he can encourage and correct those who oppose him. This is emphasized in Titus 1:9, which states, *“that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”* Revelation 3:2 also advises, *“Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain.”*
- In the understanding of the Church, the Faith is a **treasure** handed down by the fathers and bishops, preserved with great care for those who are faithful and capable of teaching correctly from one generation to the next. Throughout each generation, the Church has been blessed with devoted individuals who can preach the word of God in truth, guided by the Holy Spirit and exemplifying justice. There is no partiality in matters of faith or toward those who oppose it.





Why and How do we Confront False Teachings and Heresies?

Why Confront?

- Some say, why the confrontation? How could the Church of Peace, which should bring about peace in the world and should proclaim the mind of Christ and the depth of the Spirit of love, fight people and heresies and excommunicate them? Isn't this harshness a form of philosophical terrorism? On the other hand, should the Church just leave each person to think and teach as he pleases -- even false teachings, under the umbrella of an open heart? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself warns us during His Sermon on the Mount, saying, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves,”* (Mat 7:15). Throughout the ages, our Church has relied on Councils to investigate and judge heresies, excommunicating those who refused to obey the doctrine of the Truth. We applaud the heroes of the Faith who were invested in these Councils and the decisions made by them to excommunicate heresies and anathemize them. They spent their whole lives struggling against false teachings. Some examples of these heroes are St. Athanasius the Apostolic, St. Cyril the Great, St. Dioscorus, the Light of Orthodoxy, St. Samuel the Confessor, who tore Leo's Toma, and others in the history of the Church. These were great fathers who defended the Faith, once delivered to the saints, with their lives. We also must follow in their footsteps and be faithful as they were in keeping the Truth which we have received.

Opposing Heresies is a Biblical Matter

- The unity of the Body of Christ cannot accept heresy. **Rejecting heresies is essential to keeping the unity of the body, the spirit, and the thought.** Heresy destroys the unity of the Church, destroys its peace, destroys its faith and well-being.



- “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple,” (Rom 16:17-18). Thus, **heresy leads to division**. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us saying, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Mat 12:25).

Our Fathers the Apostles Opposed and Confronted Heresies:

- The Holy Apostles **struggled** in spreading the Word of the Gospel and **keeping the true Faith pure without blemish**, so that the Gospel of Christ may not be changed. They stood fast against all those who opposed the Orthodox Faith. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching,” (2 Timothy 4:2).

How Do We Confront Heresies?

- **Warn** - “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother,” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). Another reference is in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 which says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”.
- **Avoid** - “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,” (Titus 3:10). Other references are found in Romans 16:17 and 1 Timothy 6:5.
- **Rebuke** - “This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth” (Titus 1:13-14).



- **Excommunicate** – “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds,” (2 Jn 1:10-11). In these situations, excommunication is not done out of hatred or vengeance, it is necessary for 2 reasons:
 - The **salvation** of the heretics.
 - To **declare that the Church does not accept the false teachings** of the heretics so that her believers may not follow them and stray away. The Church is not only responsible for keeping the true Faith, but also for keeping her congregation safe from ravenous wolves, who, “feed themselves” (Ezekiel 34:2).
- As the wise man exhorts us, “Cease listening to instruction, my son, And you will stray from the words of knowledge “(Proverbs 19:27)
- Therefore, every Christian must do his part towards his home, his children, and those served by the church, and provide the pure, sound teaching that we have learned and received from our glorious Coptic Orthodox Church, because it was said long ago:
 - *” My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6)*

We beseech our Lord that He may keep us all in the upright faith, the Coptic Orthodox teachings, holiness, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit unto the last breath.





The Book of Malachi

Historical Context

Malachi is the last prophet, and he wrote the last book in the Old Testament. Historians believe he wrote his book after the return of Nehemiah from Persia. The name Malachi means "**my angel**" or "**my messenger.**"

Key Questions to Explore:

- What is the meaning of the name Malachi?
- Why is this book of special importance to the Jewish people?
- What declarations did the Lord make through this book?



Summary of the Book:

The Book of Malachi was written to **awaken the Jewish people from their spiritual complacency** and to **warn them of the impending judgment** if they do not repent. The people questioned God's love and neglected His commandments, even though He was their King, as stated, "*For My name shall be great among the nations,' Says the Lord of hosts,*" (Malachi 1:11). Malachi repeatedly urged the people to obey and respect God's commandments, emphasizing that He deserves honor. God is identified as the Father and Creator of Israel. However, the people shamefully disregarded the Name of the Lord. Consequently, the Lord proclaimed that He would send His messenger to prepare the way before Him. This event foreshadowed St. John the Baptist, who called the nation of Israel to repentance. The Lord Jesus Christ later came to purify the Temple. This purification will be fulfilled when the Lord returns (Malachi 3:2-4) and the Lord judges the wicked (Malachi 4:1).



As the last book of the Old Testament, the Book of Malachi **seals the prophetic message**, encouraging hearts to be ready for the Lord Jesus Christ, “the Sun of Righteousness.” St. John the Baptist served as the messenger preparing the way for Him. Thus, the people repented, looking forward to the Messiah whom all the prophets had foreseen. The Messiah is the King of the covenant (Malachi 3:1), and His arrival will be preceded by His messenger. This connection highlights the relationship between Malachi’s name and the theme of his prophecy.

The Narrative of the Book:

The prophet Malachi employs a unique method of communication, using a series of questions and answers. For example, *“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?”* (Malachi 1:2). This format records the conversations Malachi had with the people, urging them to repent.

Malachi depicts a dialogue between God and His people, including the priests, to provide **truthful answers**. As a father to his children, he exposes the weaknesses of both the priests and the people. He instills hope by declaring the coming of the awaited Messiah, **“the Sun of Righteousness,”** shining upon those who reside in darkness.

He also conveys the profound love of God, which transcends understanding and opens the door to His mercies with the coming of the Savior, the Messiah—a love that purifies the sinful. Malachi emphasizes the relationship between honor and reverence: *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?”* (Malachi 1:6).



СВЯТЫЙ ПРР

МАЛАХИЯ





Chapter 1:

God's Love for His People and His Rejection of Esau (1:1-5)

Malachi begins his book by contrasting **God's love for His people** with His **rejection of Edom (Esau)**. This affirmation of God's love is met with a perplexing question: *"How have you loved us?"* God's love for His people is demonstrated through His covenant with them at Mount Sinai, following their liberation from slavery in Egypt. He chose Israel as His special people, while the descendants of Esau were not chosen.



Both nations faced invasion and destruction, but **only the children of Israel returned to their homeland after captivity**, whereas the people of Edom did not return or regain their strength. Through His judgment on Edom, the Lord demonstrates to His people that He reigns over all nations (1:5) and that He will not forget His people.

The people of Israel had a complaint: although the temple had been built for decades, they had not seen the temporal glory they were waiting for, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. In response, God declares His love for them, saying, *"I have loved you."* He stirs up feelings of love within them to encourage their repentance because His love is unconditional. Despite this, they did not reciprocate His feelings and even questioned, "How have You loved us?" This question implies as if they were saying, *"Prove to us, O Lord, that You have loved us because we believe that evidence of love is found in temporal glory."*



To address their doubts, God provides a comparison: “If you want proof of My love, look at Edom and what has happened to it, for I have made its mountains a desolation.” Edom was a bitter enemy of Jacob, and the Edomites actively incited Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. When the people of Judah fled from Babylon, the Edomites pursued them, killed many, and sold the survivors into slavery. As a result, **God punished Edom**, and it was **destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar five years** after the fall of Jerusalem, remaining **a desolate land** to this day.

The difference is significant; although Jerusalem was destroyed, **it has been rebuilt**. In contrast, **Edom’s destruction is eternal**. The destruction of Jerusalem served as discipline and purification, as indicated in Revelation 3:19: *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."*

When the Edomites said, "We will rebuild," they attempted to defy God's decision regarding their fate. However, anyone who goes against the will of God will face His opposition, as stated: *"They may build, but I will throw down," (Malachi 1:4).*

Furthermore, it is said about Edom, "they shall be called the **Territory of Wickedness**." This means that everyone who sees the devastation of Edom, both the current and future generations, will recognize that the wickedness of the Edomites led to their destruction. It seems this has become a proverb: anything that enters the borders of Edom results in devastation; their land is marked by destruction and evil due to God's wrath. In contrast, within Israel, there is a blessing and clear evidence of God's mercy—*"Your eyes shall see it, and you shall say, 'The Lord is magnified.'"* This stands in stark opposition to what occurred in Edom.



The Rebuke of the Priests and the People (1:6-9)

Although God deserves all honor and respect from the people of Israel, both the people and the priests disregarded His Law and commandments. It is noteworthy that the priests led the people into **disobedience**. The sacrifices and offerings were meant to atone for sin, however, the animals offered by the priests defiled the altar (Malachi 1:7,12). The Law prohibited the offering of animals with defect (Lev. 22:20-24), yet Malachi notes that the priests presented **lame and sick animals** (Mal. 1:8) and challenged them, asking, *“Offer it then to your governor! Would he be please with you?”* (Malachi 1:8). Rather than continue offering these defective sacrifices, the Lord asks the priests to close the doors of the temple. Formalism (the practice or the doctrine of strict adherence to prescribed or external forms) has never pleased God, whether in the past or in the present. When the priests claimed, *“The table of the Lord is defiled”* (Mal. 1:7), they were no better than the wicked **sons of Eli the priest**, whose wrongdoings led to their early demise.

In contrast to the actions of the priests, Malachi emphasizes the greatness of God. God is stronger than all the gods of the nations, and even if the priests of Israel and the people do not honor Him, pure offerings are presented by believers from all nations. This could refer to prayer and praise, but some interpret this verse literally, as seen in Peter’s speech in the house of Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:35).





The Priest's Offerings Not Accepted (1:10-14)

In this passage, God holds the priests accountable for their actions, as they have despised His name: *"You priests who despise My name" (Malachi 1:6)*. God rebukes them in two ways: First, if they are **truly sons of God**, nature itself reveals the principle that *"a son honors his father" (1:6)*. Secondly, if they view themselves as **slaves**, a slave honors his master out of fear and obedience. Although the priests are both sons and servants of God, they fail to honor and fear Him, leading God to ask, *"Where is my honor?" (1:6)*.

These priests have disrespected God's name by seeking reverence for themselves while giving the Lord very little or no glory. Consequently, the people have also come to despise the offerings made to the Lord. The priests have become emotionally numb, which is a common response of arrogant sinners. They defensively ask, *"In what way have we despised Your name?" (Malachi 1:6)* and *"in what way have we defiled You?" (Malachi 1:7)*. Their **ignorance of the Law** makes this situation even more troubling.

If the priests had approached this situation with humility and asked, "How did we despise Your name? Teach us, and we will repent," God would not have been grieved. This inquiry would have demonstrated their genuine desire to repent. In verse 1:7, God points out, *"You offer defiled food on My altar."* According to the Law, an offering of **flour mixed with oil** was required with every sacrifice. However, it seems they offered substandard bread—possibly dry, moldy, or made from the cheapest grain. They expressed contempt by saying, *"The table of the Lord is contemptible,"* indicating that they treated this table, which could refer to either the table of showbread or the altar of burnt offerings, with **disrespect**. Disrespecting the rituals they practiced is equivalent to **despising the honorable name of God**.



Verse 10: *"Who is there even among you who would shut the doors so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain?"* indicates that they refused to perform even a small task, like shutting a door, **unless they were compensated for it**. They offered sacrifices on the altar because they benefited from eating the meat, as they had a share in it. Although God generously rewarded them, they were overly focused on material things. *"I have no pleasure in you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from your hands."* God cares more about the **heart** of the person making the offering than about the offering itself. It is insufficient to merely give; one must do so with a heart filled with holiness and love.

Verse 11: there is a prophecy regarding Christianity, *"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My Name shall be great among the Gentiles."* The Jews defiled and disdained the Name of God in Jerusalem, so God will welcome the nations into the Faith, leading them to magnify His Name. In this verse, God expresses that **He will reject the Jews with their rituals** and instead **establish a new spiritual worship** that includes the offering of incense: "And a pure offering," which refers to the sacrament of the **Eucharist**.

Verse 12: *"And its fruit, its food, is contemptible."* This implies that they looked down upon the material rewards of their service and compared themselves to the wealthy and their delicacies. They disdained the rituals, believing that the returns were not worth their effort and undervaluing the honor of serving the Lord.

Verse 13: *"You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' and you sneer at it."* It is a grave sin to approach God with such an attitude, **where the servant perceives his service as a burden and feels disgusted by it**. Instead, he should take pride in serving.



Verse 14: "Who has in his flock a male" This means that a person should **offer the best they have to God**. "But cursed be the deceiver," refers to those who believe they can trick God like a human being by offering Him their blemished animals. Those who do this will find a curse instead of a blessing. God has bestowed many blessings upon them, and their behavior demonstrates their ingratitude.





Chapter 2:

The Punishment of the Priests (2:1-9)

“*This commandment*” is directed at the priests in response to their corruption of the priestly service. The phrase “*if you will not take it to heart*” means that they must heed this warning, repent, and live righteously to glorify the Lord’s Name.

- **Application:** When we offer heartfelt repentance, respond to God's word of rebuke, and feel ashamed of our sins, **we glorify God**. Conversely, those who despise His calling **dishonor Him**.

God warns, “*I will send a curse upon you,*” indicating that He will not bless those who are unfaithful. In verse 3, an example of this curse states, “*I will rebuke your descendants.*” This can mean either that they will not have offspring or that due to poor water and crop yields, tithes will diminish, thereby reducing the priests' share.

Another curse involves God's rejection of them and their offerings. As they have despised the Lord, He will despise them in return. “*And spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts*” refers to the dung from the entrails of the sacrifices, which is considered impure. The sacrifices they offered during the feasts, rather than pleasing God, will cause Him to reject them. This image suggests that they will be **thrown out with the dung, indicating destruction**.

What should have been a celebration has turned into a disgrace.

- **Application:** Instead of being a source of blessing and honoring our Lord through our actions, we see Him grieved because we resemble the world. Jesus said, “*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men,*” (Matthew 5:13).



Verse 4: *"Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you,"* highlights that they will recognize this through the fulfillment of threats and curses if they refuse to respond and change. God continues to send His messages because He had previously promised their fathers, *"That My covenant with Levi may continue."* They are loved for the sake of their ancestors.

Verse 5: God describes His covenant with their forefathers as one of *"life and peace."* He set them apart for Himself, appointing them as His servants so that they might enjoy peace in this world and eternal life.

Verse 6: The tribe of Levi was righteous and held a significant place in Scripture: *"The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips."* He did not distort God's Word for personal gain. *"They walked with Me in peace and equity"* means their lives reflected their teachings. Such individuals are good examples, as *"they turned many away from iniquity,"* illustrating that God blessed their efforts, and saved many souls through their teachings and good conduct.

Verse 7: it is emphasized that a priest should be knowledgeable, understanding religious matters and teaching them to the people. *"For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts"* – the term "messenger" is also translated as "angel."

Verse 8: *"You have caused many to stumble at the law,"* because they corrupted the covenant of Levi. They betrayed the trust placed in them and failed to uphold the commandments, saying, *"you have not kept My ways."*



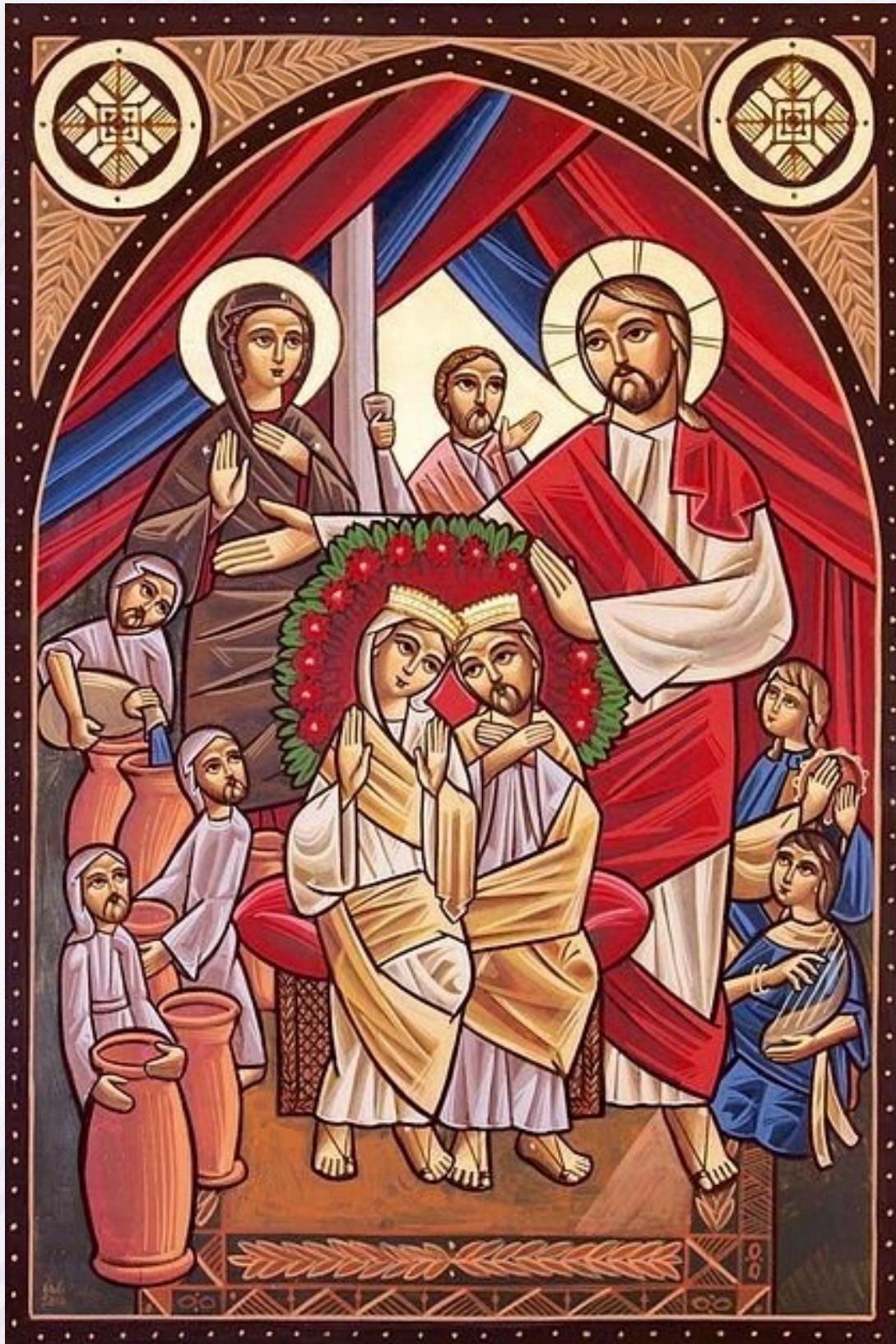
Verse 9: *"But have shown partiality in the law,"* indicates that they interpreted the law to favor those who paid them more while ignoring the sins of the wealthy and condemning the sins of the poor. Consequently, *"Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people,"* illustrates that God grants honor and respect from the people to faithful servants, and this respect is reciprocated.

The People's Unfaithfulness (Malachi 2:10-16)

Given the attitude of the priests, it is not surprising that the common people were **unfaithful** to the Lord. God had chosen the people of Israel as His special people, but they broke their covenant with Him. A significant factor contributing to their unfaithfulness was **their marriages to foreign women**, a transgression highlighted in the books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. By marrying pagan women, the Israelite men began to worship idols and turn away from God. Often, when an Israelite man married a foreign woman, he divorced his Israelite wife. God states in Malachi 2:14-15 that He is a witness to the marriage covenant and that **He hates the breaking of this covenant through divorce** (Malachi 2:16), particularly if the divorce is pursued to marry a more attractive foreign woman.

The prophet conveys a message about marriage in response to the desecration of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. In verse 10, Malachi emphasizes that God is the Father of us all. Therefore, it is wrong for anyone to betray their brother, as we are all united before God. Since our Father in Heaven is Holy, **He does not tolerate sin, betrayal, or treachery**. The prophet shifts the focus from the relationship between individuals to the relationship between a man and his wife, which is even more significant since they are united as one body. It is unacceptable for a man to betray his wife. Someone who is unfaithful to God will also be unfaithful to his or her brothers, as he or she has acted treacherously towards God in their tithes and offerings.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





Verse 11: God commands them not to marry foreign women or pagans. Such marriages have profaned the Lord's holy institution. The phrase "*Lord's holy institution*" refers to both the temple of the Lord and the people of the Lord. This sin is regarded as treachery against God because there is a covenant between Him and His children, requiring them to be dedicated to Him. Note in verse 10 that the prophet, although he did not sin, places himself among the sinners, saying, "*Why do we deal treacherously with one another?*" Daniel and Nehemiah also did this.

- Why does God command us to refrain from betraying our brothers or wives?
 - He is a **Father** to us all, and **His eye is on the oppressed**, for the oppressed are His sons and daughters.

Verse 12: the punishment for those who betray is: "*May the Lord cut off... the man who does this.*" By marrying a pagan woman, he has cut himself off from the holy nation and joined himself to strangers; therefore, God will cut him off from his portion in the heavenly Jerusalem. The phrase "*being awake and aware*" indicates that being "**awake**" refers to someone who calls out this evil and watches over teaching the people about this sin. "**Aware**" refers to someone who responds to and accepts this teaching. "*From the tents of Jacob*" signifies that God will not recognize such individuals as affiliated with His people. "Who brings an offering" means that any priest who engages in this behavior will also be cut off.

Verse 13: "*And this is the second thing you do.*" They had previously expelled foreign women but returned to their former ways and married foreign women again. They covered the altar of the Lord with tears when they mistreated their wives and divorced them without cause, only to marry foreign women. God sees that their tears have covered His altar; He will not accept their sacrifices. "*So He does not regard the offering anymore,*" nor will He receive it with goodwill from their hands. God desires His children to **find joy in Him**, and **He rejects those who deprive His children of true joy**—He rejects their offerings.



Verse 14: They ask, *"For what reason?"* In their blindness, they lose sight of the wrongness of their actions. A person may boldly claim not to have sinned in this regard, but *"Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth."* The Lord serves as a witness to the marriage; thus, this bond is **not merely a social contract** but a **divine act integral to the life of faith**. Therefore, He punishes because He knows the hidden depths of the hearts and He is the One who will judge justly between the husband and the wife of his youth, *"and your wife by covenant,"* with whom one is closely bound, as she is a partner and not a servant.



Verse 15: It asks, *"But did He not make them one?"* Other translations say, "Did He not create them one?" God created **one Adam** and from him, **one Eve**; they are one, and their children are part of both. **God longs for them to enter unity with Him**, but **Adam chose the path of separation** from God, which God had previously warned against. Christ came to restore this unity between man and his brother, establishing us as one body and one spirit. There is unity between us and Christ, hence we become the Body of Christ, with **Holy Matrimony** serving as a **model of this unity** (Ephesians 5:22-33). "Having a remnant of the Spirit?" God created Adam in His image, breathed into him the breath of life, and gave him the capacity to create living offspring of his kind. *"And why one? He seeks godly offspring."* God gave us this ability and united man and wife in one body to create holy offspring. However, man has turned this ability toward lust and pleasures instead of sacred purposes. Here, God blames the man who indulges in his lusts, divorces his wife to marry pagan women, or neglects his wife by taking concubines. God states he has "a remnant of the Spirit"—man is not only flesh but also Spirit. **The Spirit is from God.**



Verse 16: God declares, *"He hates divorce."* "Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate," (Mark 10:9). For it "covers one's garment with violence," meaning that in God's eyes, the person becomes **unjust**. "Therefore, take heed to your spirit," for God will certainly punish and destroy any unjust individual. Whoever **indulges in their lusts** exposes their spirit to **eternal destruction**.

Verse 17: *"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord."* This reflects the false accusation that God shows favor to those who do wrong. The people's vision was limited to the present moment and physical circumstances. When they observed the wicked prospering and gaining material wealth, they grew upset and asked, "Where is the God of justice?" By suggesting *"He delights in them,"* they **wearied the Lord** and annoyed Him. Note their audacity in questioning how they wearied Him.





Chapter 3:

Preparing For the Coming of the Savior (3:1-6)

The first words of this chapter answer the question, “*Where is the God of justice?*” The response is, **He will soon appear**; He is **at the door** and will come to correct all situations. His coming will be preceded by a forerunner, St. John the Baptist.

The term “**Messenger**” refers to **God’s angel**, serving as a divine herald. It is widely accepted that John the Baptist was a prophet who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ by calling people to repentance. He was instrumental in preparing the path for Christ’s arrival. Following John’s ministry, Christ came, as stated: “*And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.*” He is the one that the pious Jews had been anticipating. His arrival is described as **sudden**, indicating that the time for His coming is near and that He will appear immediately after John. His manifestation will differ from what people expect, as He will come to the temple. Christ first came to the temple when He was 40 days old, then again at 12 years old, and later when **He entered Jerusalem to purify it**.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as the “**Messenger of the Covenant.**” The Son is called a Messenger because the Father sent Him to establish a New Covenant. The phrase “*to His temple*” signifies the Incarnation, meaning that the temple Christ established is the **temple of His Body** (as mentioned in John 2:21).

The text poses the question, “*But who can endure the day of His coming?*” The glory of Christ was often revealed, even though He humbled Himself. This glory was evident during His Transfiguration and when those who came to arrest Him fell before Him as He declared, “*I am He.*” His miracles also terrified demons, who asked, “*Did You come to destroy us?*” However, His divine glory remained hidden.



The question continues, “*And who can stand when He appears?*” He is described as a **refiner's fire**; the Jewish nation could not withstand the crucifixion of the Lord. God tolerated the mistakes of the Roman Empire because He knew that they would eventually convert to the faith. However, the fate of the emperors who persecuted Christianity was dire. Meanwhile, demons have quaked since His appearance and are tormented by the **sign of the Cross**. Despite this, God demonstrates **great longsuffering** toward sinners. He may allow some suffering to bring about repentance and foster purity in their lives. The term “*launderers' soap*” refers to soap used for cleaning and bleaching fabrics. It refers to the cleansing agent used to prepare and purify materials. The phrase “*fire of the refiner*” refers to the process of purification.



Why is it necessary to treat the rebellious soul?

The statement, “*He will purify the sons of Levi,*” refers to everyone who is dedicated to God's service, specifically the priests. The **judgment will begin at the house of the Lord**, starting with the **priests**. They will be purified to ensure they are fit for their sacred duties, to offer the Lord “an offering in righteousness.” This is the priests' role: to present sacrifices to God. For them to fulfill this duty, God will purify them so they can offer their sacrifices in righteousness.

The term “*the offering of Judah and Jerusalem*” symbolizes the Christian Church. The offering of the Church will be **pleasant to the Lord** when both the priests and the people are purified.



This purification occurs through:

- The **Blood of Christ**
- The work of the **Holy Spirit**
- The believer's **acceptance** of the Holy Spirit's work
- The individual's acceptance of **God's discipline** with gratitude

The phrase "*as in the days of old*" indicates that similar to how the Lord was pleased with Noah, Abraham, and the patriarchs—whose offerings were like a soothing aroma to Him (Genesis 8:21)—He will express His pleasure. "*And I will come near you for judgment*" means that He will come to judge. In the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be joy and gladness for those who accept Him, but a fire of judgment for those who reject Him, including **sorcerers** (those who engage with Satan), **adulterers** (those indulging in sinful desires), and **perjurers** (those who profane the name of God). "*Those who turn away an alien*" refers to defenseless individuals; God Himself acts as their defender.

The phrase "*swift witness*" indicates that the judgment of Christ will catch certain people by **surprise**. As stated, "*For I am the Lord, I do not change.*" Despite His love demonstrated on the Cross, **He abhors evil and sin**. God fulfills His promises to the righteous while punishing the wicked. Therefore, we must repent and return to the Lord to experience His promises meant for the righteous.

Return to the Lord of Hosts (3:7-12)

God reproaches His people for straying from His statutes and neglecting to serve Him, as their ancestors did. He calls them to repentance: "*Return to Me, and I will return to you.*" Their response shows their spiritual blindness: "In what way shall we return?" They **assert that they do not sin** and question why God is calling them to return. God observes how our hearts respond to His word. We may either feel upset by the prophets' warnings regarding our sins, fail to recognize any sins of our own, or resolve to continue in our sinful ways.



Verse 8: God accuses them of robbing Him, *"Yet you have robbed Me!"* Stealing that which belongs to God represents the gravest form of theft. God challenges them, asking, *"Will a man rob God?"* Would anyone dare to steal from the One who has been so good to them? **We rob God when we withhold our tithes**—His rightful portion—or refrain from making offerings to the Church. Tithes are not our money; **they belong to God**, who owns everything and has given us everything. He only asks for tithes, which are a **demonstration of practical love towards God, the poor, and His servants** who rely on these contributions.

- **Application:** Remember that tithes owed to God come from both our finances and our time. We should **dedicate time to God** through prayer, Bible study, attending church services and meetings, and serving Him.

Verse 9: God declares, *"You are cursed with a curse."* When a person robs God, they should expect blessings to cease, leading to famines, poor weather, and pests devouring the land's fruits. The nature of their sin was collective, so the **resulting punishment was also collective**.

Verse 10: God instructs, *"Bring all the tithes,"* meaning the entire amount due. Some individuals were bringing only part of their tithes while keeping the rest, as seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. The purpose of bringing tithes is *"that there may be food in My house,"* ensuring that those who serve at the altar have their needs met. Furthermore, God invites us to *"try Me now in this,"* which is unique as it is the **only instance in Scripture where God encourages us to test Him**. This request is a **call to faith**; the believer is encouraged to pay their tithes and anticipate the Lord's abundant blessings.





Verse 11: *"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes."* This means that God will stop the growth of insects, such as locusts, that destroy crops. Thus, all of creation is subject to God's command. The phrase *"Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you"* indicates that **the vine will not be barren.**



Verse 12: *"And all nations will call you blessed."* This signifies that they will speak of you with reverence, recognizing and honoring your God, who has bestowed these blessings upon you. They will regard you as **a blessed person**. God desires this recognition, wanting others to see His blessings on His people and to acknowledge their holiness. In this way, **God's blessings serve as a means of preaching.** It appears that the people have committed to this call, as seen in Nehemiah 13:12, where all of Judah brought in the tithes of their grain.

Verse 13: Your words have become harsh, unyielding, and insistent—unrestrained. You have spoken boldly against the King of kings and have objected to His judgments. You have reviled Him and were not ashamed of what you said. You have spoken with pride and acted defiantly against the Almighty (Job 15:25).

What have we spoken against You? The word "spoken" in Hebrew is a reciprocal verb, suggesting that you were **exchanging words about God**. This implies that you may be softening your statements with logic—asking, "What harm does it do God if we say such and such?"—or you are **denying what you said** and are demanding that the prophet provides evidence for you.



Verse 14: *“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God,’”* indicating that this belief subjects people to pain and sorrow. You claim to worship God, but what wealth or gains have you achieved? *“And that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?”* Although **God desires His people to rejoice**, you perceive prayers, fasting, and repentance as **burdensome**. Instead, you pursue sensual pleasures and worldly joys. Thus, you conclude that worshiping God is too difficult.

The issue is that **you have not experienced the joy that comes from heartfelt worship**. Because you have not tasted the joy of serving the Lord, you demand earthly rewards in exchange for your devotion.

Verse 15: It is expressed that the **evildoers are the ones who benefit and prosper, accumulating wealth**. Those who have tested God were saved, even though the success of the wicked is only temporary. The text notes, *“So now we call the proud blessed,”* highlighting that their short-sightedness led them to believe that the success of the wicked was everlasting, which caused them to praise the wicked.

Verse 16: *“Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another”*

They spoke with love about God in comparison to the wicked who spoke to each other with contempt about God saying *“What have we spoken”* (Malachi 3:13). The godly speak words for edification and increasing faith and holiness. The **more others increase in their wickedness, the more we should increase in piety**.



“And who meditate on His name,” that is, these people who meditate on the name of the Lord and His love for them; this leads to **deepening in fellowship with God** and stirring up feelings of love for His name. *“And the Lord listened,”* that is, God notices all good conversations and does not forget the love of His people. *“So, a book of remembrance was written before Him,”* whoever does not forget a cup of water offered by someone will certainly not forget the love of someone towards him personally.

Verse 17: What will God give to these righteous people? *“They shall be mine,”* says the Lord of hosts, *‘On the day that I make them My jewels,’* that is, on the Day of Eternity they will be special to God, His special beloved people. God remembers those whom He loved and chose as His special treasure, and **He will save those who are faithful to Him from judgment**, just as one saves his own special treasures and He will have mercy on them. *“As a man spares his son who serves him.”* The most precious thing we have received is **sonship**, where we receive our portion with our Father who is in heaven. Note that the word “spares his son” means that God will deal with us not according to what we deserve but **according to His mercies**. Also note that the son must serve his father, that is, worship God in the spirit of sonship.

Verse 18: *“Then you shall again discern”* The difference between the righteous and the wicked will appear, in eternity, for these will be in glory, and those will burn. This will happen even though the difference is now not clear between the righteous and the wicked on earth, but in heaven, **God will distinguish “Between the righteous and the wicked.”** And the righteous will see the result of their righteousness and rejoice and praise. This word is directed to those who say that God does not distinguish between good and evil! And that the worship of God is in vain! So, God tells them that there they will realize their mistake. For those who fear God, God will raise them from the ash heap to his throne, and He casts those who have insulted Him from their thrones.



Chapter 4:

The Rising of the Sun of Righteousness (4:1-3)

“The day is coming, burning like an oven” — it is a day of wrath and fiery jealousy, and the arrogant wicked will become like stubble, fueling this fire. However, those who fear the Lord will be like **gold**, and their light will increase. The arrogant are those whose words have been harsh against the Lord and who have refused to submit to the yoke of His commandments. Note that during the exodus of the people from Egypt, God was the light for His people and the darkness for their enemies.

He will *“leave them neither root nor branch”* means that God will completely eradicate them on this Day. On this Day, the oven will be aflame, and the doers of evil, whose hearts cling to its allure, will be burned. Verses 2-3 contain a promise for those who revere His name. Christ will shine for them as light because **Christ is the Light of the world**. He will be a glorious light for all who worship Him faithfully, as He is the **Sun of Righteousness**. Although this Day is terrifying for the wicked, it will be beautiful and joyful for the God-fearing, bringing refreshment like the sun does for the earth at its rising. He is the Sun of Righteousness, for He is the Lord of our righteousness, and His righteousness will spread throughout the world, illuminating it quickly, just as sunlight does: *“who became for us wisdom from God- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”* (1 Corinthians 1:30).





The phrase *"with healing in His wings"* signifies that we are currently afflicted by the disease of sin and death, and **Christ is our greatest physician**. Sin has distorted our image, but we will be healed of every spiritual, physical, and psychological ailment. This healing will occur immediately, "in His wings," indicating speed, as the ancients considered birds to be the fastest of creatures. Christ began our salvation and the healing of our nature through His redemption, allowing us to become a **new creation**, with complete healing arising at the resurrection of the dead when our glorified bodies are obtained.

"And you shall go out" signifies our emergence from this world, akin to a plant sprouting from a buried seed. *"And grow fat like stall-fed calves"* — in other translations, **"grow fat"** means **"leap,"** referring to a joyful and carefree life, free from worry and sorrow. Spiritual, physical, and psychological health will return to you and vitality will be restored. The **"stall"** represents the **manger**, where you will grow in knowledge, grace, and spiritual strength. These calves will roam freely and leap joyfully—reflecting the joy of the saints who rejoice in the Lord Jesus.

Verse 3: It states that they will be victorious over their enemies, symbolized by the phrase *"Shall trample the wicked."* Although the wicked once trampled them in the world, the roles will be reversed, and the wicked will be trampled by the feet of the **children of God, who have overcome the world**. They will conquer it through faith and will dominate their corrupt passions and desires. The assurance is given that *"they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet,"* indicating that the wicked will be burned in the fires of the furnace on the Last Day (Revelation 2:26-27).

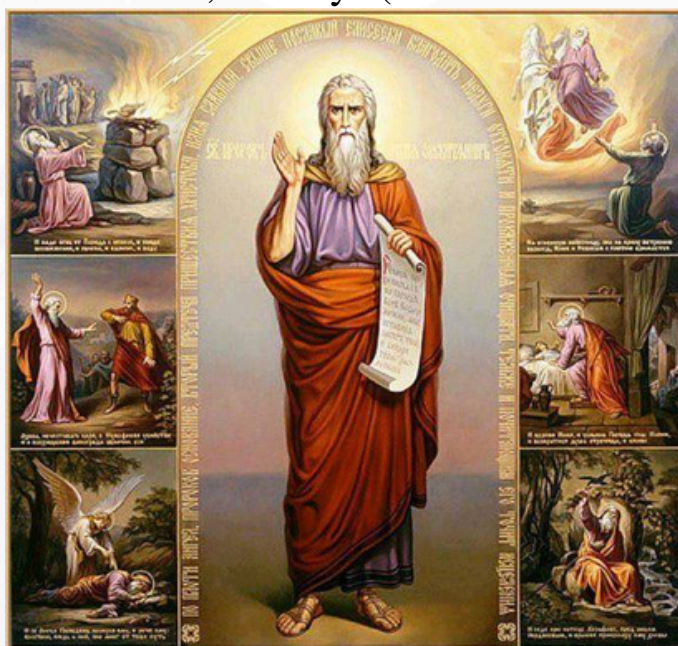
Verse 4: it reads: *"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments."*



The command to *“remember the Law of Moses”* serves as a conclusion not only for this prophecy but also for all the Old Testament books. It emphasizes that there should be no expectation of further prophecies until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase *“with the statutes and judgments”* refers not only to the Ten Commandments, but also to all the judgments, ordinances, and other ceremonial laws. It is important to note that **forgetting the Law is the basis for every transgression against God**. This verse is similar to Revelation 2:25, which states, *“But hold fast what you have until I come.”*

The Coming of the New Elijah (4:5-6)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Here, this refers to the **Day of Judgment**, when Christ returns in His Second Coming. Consequently, most Church Fathers interpret that one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3 is **Elijah**, and the second is **Enoch**—both of whom have not yet died. These two witnesses will arrive before the Second Coming of Christ. It is widely accepted that Elijah will be one of them, as the descriptions of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 align with the actions of Elijah, such as shutting up the heavens, so that it would not rain during the days of their prophecy, which lasted for 1,260 days (about 3 and a half years).





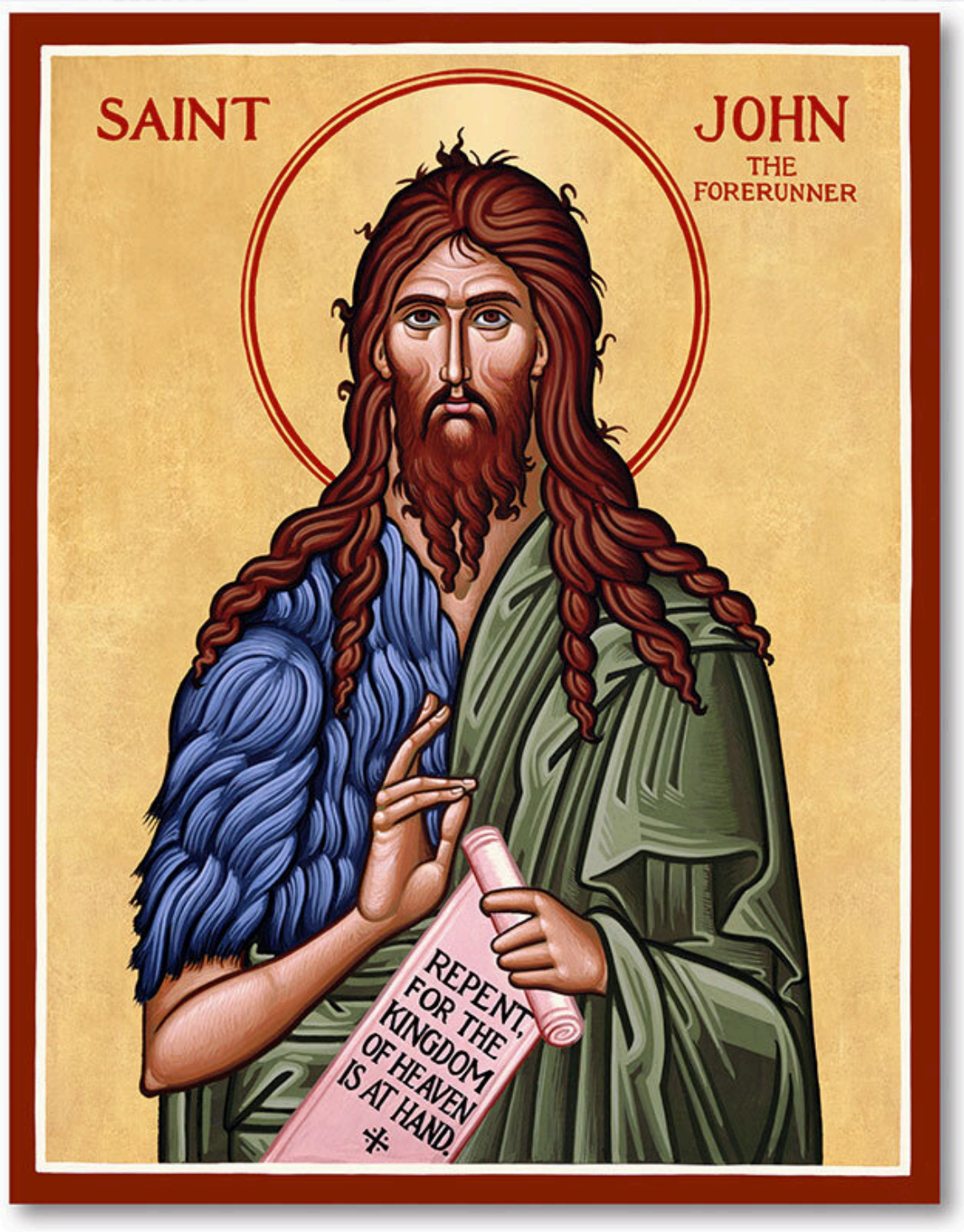
In Christ's First Coming, Elijah did not appear in person; instead, **St. John the Baptist** embodied the spirit and mission of Elijah. Jesus Christ referred to him as the Elijah who was to come (Mat. 11:14), but John himself claimed he was not Elijah. However, in the Second and final Coming of the Lord Christ, **Elijah** will return in person to **testify against the Antichrist and will ultimately be martyred.**

The Lord sent His messenger, Saint John the Baptist, before His First Coming to bring **salvation**. Saint John the Baptist arrived with the fiery spirit of Elijah, who will be sent alongside Enoch during the days of the Antichrist to prepare the way for His Final Coming.

The coming of Elijah will serve to *“turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.”* Saint John the Baptist's mission was to call people to repentance, preparing them to know Christ and believe in Him. Those who repent will have their hearts purified and will come to see God, embracing Christ. This will be Elijah's work before the Second Coming, as family relationships have deteriorated, particularly between fathers and their children, due to the corrupting influence of divorce and the pursuit of lust. **Elijah's purpose** will be to **restore the lost love essential for salvation**, as without it, people will face dire consequences at the Second Coming of Christ. More broadly, Elijah will stand against the pervasive sin that has led to the corruption of family bonds.

The phrase *“Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse”* reflects the last word of the Old Testament, which is ‘a curse’. The Messiah of the New Testament will come to remove this curse. The New Testament's final words offer grace and blessing. The curse will fall upon the Jews who rejected the Messiah.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





The Council of Nicaea & The Orthodox Creed

The waves of persecution faced by the Church for three centuries subsided with the issuance of the **Edict of Religious Tolerance** during the reign of King Constantine in **313 A.D.** This document, known as the **Edict of Milan**, recognized Christianity as an officially permitted religion within the Roman Empire. Following this, there arose an urgent need to convene an ecumenical council in the year 325 A.D.

The first ecumenical council was called due to the heresy posed by **Arius**, who **denied the divinity of Jesus Christ**. Pope Alexander wrote to King Constantine the Great, requesting that he convene this council to address the heresy. Constantine agreed and sent a decree to all the bishops in the kingdom, summoning them to the city of Nicaea, located in the province of Bithynia.

Bishops from all corners of the Christian world attended, including **Pope Alexander**, who refuted Arius. He brought alongside him his deacon, **Athanasius**, who was not more than 19 years old and whose face was described as angelic by Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. The discussions at the council resulted in the establishment of the Nicene Creed. The year 2025 marks the anniversary of the passage of **1700 years** since the Council of Nicaea was held.



Who is Pope Alexander?

He was born in Alexandria, was ordained as a priest there, and then was ordained Pope of Alexandria as Pope Peter, the Seal of the Martyrs (17th Pope) had prophesied. Although he had reached an old age, he was serving God actively and devoutly. Saint Athanasius (20th Pope) narrated that Pope Alexander (19th Pope) **never read the Holy Bible while sitting down**; he would stand with the light in front of him. Because of his piety, the people called him a saint. In his love for the poor and needy, they called him the **Father of the Poor**.

The council was headed by Pope Alexander, Pope of Alexandria. They made him a great golden chair to sit on, but he refused to sit on it and sat in the back instead. However, when everyone insisted, he sat on it. It was decided that the president would be **Hosius, Bishop of Cordoba**, but everyone agreed that Pope Alexander would precede them in all sessions because he was the only pope among them. From the words of Pope Athanasius, the Apostolic: *"If the Son is the Word, Wisdom, and Mind of God, how could there have been a time when He did not exist?! This is like saying that there was a time when God was without mind and wisdom..."*

Who is St. Athanasius?

Saint Athanasius possessed two significant qualities: first, he held the **true Faith**; second, he was a **skilled debater capable of presenting strong arguments**. He articulated the Faith passed down from the patriarchs, particularly Pope Alexander, effectively and convincingly. Pope Athanasius' powerful words and compelling arguments struck Arius and his followers with great force. Arius attempted to defend his heresy with verses from the Holy Bible, but Athanasius confronted him with strong, irrefutable responses that won the admiration of those present. Everyone fell to their knees, thanking God for using this young man, and the emperor congratulated him, stating, *"You are the hero of the Church of God."*



Master, who tore your robe?

Arius began teaching his heresy while still a deacon during the reign of Pope Peter, the Seal of the Martyrs, the 17th Pope of Alexandria. Despite Pope Peter's efforts to dissuade him from his false belief, **Arius refused to change**, leading to his excommunication, along with his false teachings and followers. Pope Peter had a vision during his imprisonment in which he saw our Lord Jesus Christ wearing a torn garment. When asked, *"Who tore your garment, my Lord?"* Christ replied, *"Arius."* This revelation led Pope Peter to understand that even if Arius feigned repentance, he would remain a deceiver and cause division within the church. Consequently, he warned his two disciples, Archelaus and Alexander, against Arius and **against absolving him, regardless of any pretensions of repentance.**

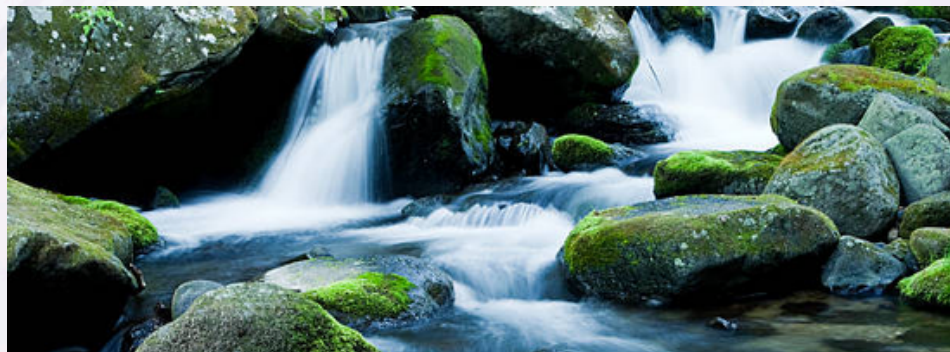
After Pope Peter received the crown of martyrdom, his disciple Archelaus succeeded him. Arius then tried to manipulate the situation to appear as though he had returned to the Faith, and **Archelaus fell for Arius' deceit**, absolving him and promoting him to the rank of priest, even after his earlier excommunication by Pope Peter.



The Heresy of Arius

Arius claimed that the Son is not equal to the Father in essence, meaning **he believed the Son was less than the Father**. A illustration used by Pope Athanasius describes the relationship between the Father and the Son through the analogy of a spring and its stream. He illustrates that the spring and the stream share the **same essence**, likened to **one unit of water**. The **spring** represents the **Father**, while the **stream** symbolizes the **Son**. Importantly, a spring of water does not produce a stream of a different substance, such as oil or mercury. Therefore, there is **no difference in essence between the spring and the stream**. For instance, a spring of sweet water cannot generate a stream of bitter or salty water. This concept is supported by Saint James the Apostle, who states: *“Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear fig? Thus, no spring yields both salt water and fresh,”* (James 3:11-12).

The divinity of the Father is transmitted to the Son without division, as the Lord Jesus Christ says: *“I came forth from the Father”* and *“I came from the Father.”* He is always with the Father and is in the bosom of the Father. This bosom of the Father is never separated from the Son according to His divinity, as stated by Saint John the Evangelist: *“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him,”* (John 1:18). Thus, the bosom of the Father is forever united with the Son, even when He became incarnate, when the Father sent Him into the world and our Lord said: *“I came forth from the Father,”* (John 16:28).





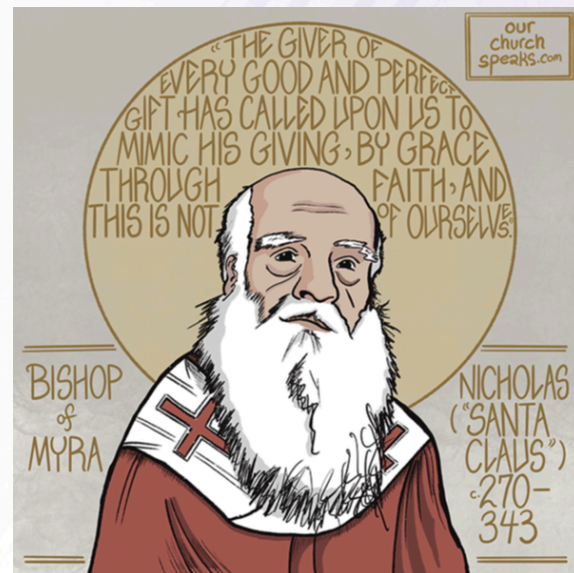
Key Summary Points

- Birth is not an attribute of essence but is a hypostatic attribute specific to the hypostasis of the Son.
- **Fatherhood** is a hypostatic property unique to the Father in the Holy Trinity.
 - The hypostatic attribute of the Father is that He is a **Spring**
- **Sonship** (the fact that He is begotten) is a hypostatic property unique to the Son in the Holy Trinity.
 - The hypostatic attribute of the Son is that He is **Begotten of the Father**
- **Proceeding from the Father** is a hypostatic property unique to the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity.
 - The hypostatic attribute of the Holy Spirit is that He **Proceeds from the Father**



St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra

Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, is celebrated for his **generosity** and **love for the poor**, dedicating his life to serving and helping them. He played a significant role in opposing the heresy of the Arians and is said to have kept the diocese of Myra unaffected by the teachings of Arius. During the Council of Nicea, Saint Nicholas spoke out against Arius and even slapped him on the face. As a result, the council fathers decided to remove Saint Nicholas from his position and imprison him. However, during his imprisonment, **the Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary appeared to him, restoring both his freedom and his rank.**



Simplicity of Faith, and the Obedience of the Disciple

Bishop Spyridon, of Cyprus, was known for his **simplicity**. He and his disciple were riding two donkeys—one black and one white. They stopped to rest at an inn, where they met several other bishops who were there for the same purpose. The other bishops feared that the Arians would deceive Bishop Spyridon because of his simplicity, so they decided to slaughter the two donkeys during the night. The next day, when the bishop and his disciple discovered the two donkeys had been killed, the bishop **instructed his disciple to attach their severed heads**. He then prayed and made the sign of the cross. Miraculously, the two donkeys stood up and continued on their way. Upon entering the city, the bishop realized that the **heads had been switched**—his disciple hadn't noticed and had placed the black donkey's head on the body of the white donkey and vice versa.



Outcomes of the Council of Nicaea

- The Council of Nicaea established the Creed that begins with *"Truly we believe in one God..."* until *"His kingdom shall have no end."* Following this declaration, the Council issued a decision to **anathematize Arius and his followers**. Consequently, the king ordered Arius' exile, the burning of his books, and the execution of anyone who concealed them.
- The Council also addressed several other important matters concerning the Church:
 - They discussed the issue of determining the date of the **Feast of Resurrection**, deciding that it should be observed on the Sunday following the full moon that coincides with the Jewish celebration, ensuring that the Resurrection is not celebrated before or alongside the Jewish holiday.
 - The Council examined the **schism caused by Meltius**, the Bishop of Assiut, due to his ordination of bishops and priests without consulting his superiors. The Council ruled that Meltius should return to his hometown and he was subsequently **deposed**.
 - The Council concluded that the **baptism of heretics would not need to be repeated** if they returned to the faith sincerely.
 - It was determined that **priests should be allowed to marry**, a stance strongly defended and supported by **Saint Paphnutius, the Bishop of Thebes**. However, the Council ruled that widowed priests should not remarry.
 - Finally, the Council enacted twenty laws that remain in effect to this day.





The Orthodox Creed

The Creed (the Constitution of Faith) is the **foundation** of our Christian Faith, and it is believed in by all Christian churches around the world. Those who do not accept it are not considered Christians, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. Due to its significant importance, the Church has incorporated the Creed into all its prayers, both day and night. The goal of this Dogma is to translate it into our daily lives. The importance of the Creed was affirmed by an Ecumenical Council that included representatives from all churches worldwide. The doctrine we hold today was formulated at the **Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.**

Faith was defined by the Holy Spirit through Saint Paul the Apostle as “*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,*” (*Hebrews 11:1*). Faith is belief, trust, and a conviction of the heart, accompanied by total submission of mind and heart. For example, we believe in miracles. This belief does not contradict reason, rather, **it transcends it**. We call it a miracle because human reason cannot explain it; the only explanation is that it is the work of God. The mind accepts it, even if it does not fully understand it.

The Creed encompasses various doctrines, such as the **Unity of the One God in Three Persons (the Holy Trinity)**; we believe in one God in Three Persons. It also states the Divinity of the Son, the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation and Redemption, Baptism, the resurrection of the dead, the life of the age to come, the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ during which judgment will occur, and affirms the existence of the **one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.**



We believe in one God

We believe in the **Holy Trinity**, affirming our belief in one God. There are numerous verses about the oneness of God in the Old Testament. *“I am He. Before Me, there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior,”* (Isaiah 43:10-11). We do not worship multiple gods but believe in one God, as illustrated by the mathematical expression: **1 x 1 x 1 = 1**. *“I am in the Father, and the Father in Me,”* (John 14:10). *“I and My Father are one,”* (John 10:30). The Holy Trinity does not imply multiple gods but rather offers a deeper understanding of the One Divine Essence.

God the Father

The Creed begins by addressing each Person of the Trinity, starting with God the Father, who is our Father. The Old Testament also refers to Him this way: *“But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand,”* (Isaiah 64:8). However, His Fatherhood towards us differs from His Fatherhood towards the Son in the Trinity. The **Son's relationship to the Father** is according to **nature**, while **our relationship** with God is by **adoption**.

The Pantocrator, Creator of Heaven and Earth

The Pantocrator (‘Almighty God’ or ‘Governor of All’) is the Ruler of all circumstances and pressures in life. In His love for humanity, **He grants free will**. However, this freedom is not absolute but rather comes **under the oversight of the Almighty God**. God governs what happens to you and even what comes from you. He governs everything—not only actions but also thoughts and intentions (Philippians 2:13). Knowing that God reads your thoughts, knows your intentions, and examines your heart and feelings should lead to a sense of shame for any wrong actions you commit— before God, the Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth.



We believe in one Lord

The term "Lord" signifies **Master** or **God**. It **underscores the Divinity** of our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ. In the Creed, our Lord Jesus is referred to as Lord and God.

Jesus Christ

The name "**Jesus**" means "**Savior**," it was proclaimed at the annunciation of His birth, "*And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins,*" (Matthew 1:21). As for the word "**Christ**," it means "**the Anointed One**" and its equivalent in Hebrew is the word "**Messiah**," and it announces His message as the King, Priest, and Prophet. The word "messiah" was given to everyone who was **anointed with holy oil** by the prophets, whether he was a priest, king, or prophet. But our Lord Jesus Christ was not a mere messiah. He is "The Messiah." He combined the three functions of those referred to as messiah. He is the **King**, the **Priest**, and the **Prophet** at the same time. He is also the Messiah, Jesus, the Savior of the whole world.





The Only Begotten Son of God

The phrase “**the Only Begotten**” is to distinguish Him from our sonship to God, for He is the Son of God from the **same nature, essence, and divinity**. The phrase “the Only Begotten Son of God” also distinguishes Him from all humans who are called sons of God; they are not from His nature. We are sons of God by adoption, we who are believers. “*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*” (1 John 3:1). Our sonship to God is a kind of **adoption**, but we are not sons from the nature of God, nor from His essence. The only One Who is from the nature of God, and from His essence, from His Divinity, is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an **eternal Sonship - from eternity to eternity, not linked to time**. There is no time difference in His Sonship, as happens in human sonship. He is the Son of God in the sense that He is the Logos, the Rational Mind of God, and the Rational Word of God, which is ever present in God - by the nature of God from eternity. As with the birth of the Divine Mind from the Divine Self, the Father is the Fountain, and the Son is born of Him.



Begotten of the Father before all ages

This Sonship is by **Nature**, just as a **ray is born from the sun**, and just as **light is born from fire**, it is not related to time, the Rational Mind of God and the Word of the Rational God, and the Mind of God is present in God by the nature of God since eternity. The Lord Christ said to the Jews, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*” (John 8:58).



Light of Light

The Father is Light, and the Son born of Him is Light from Light. The Lord Jesus Christ said about Himself: *"I am the Light of the world,"* (John 8:12), and He also said: *"You are the light of the world,"* (Matthew 5:14). What is the difference in meaning?

Begotten, Not Created

Saint Augustine stated that the Lord Jesus Christ has **two births**: the **first from the Father before all ages**, and another birth **in the fullness of time from a mother without a father**. He is born of the Father, not created, which means He has an eternal birth—there is no beginning of days and no end of life (Hebrews 7:3). Since He has no beginning, **He is not created**; every creature has a beginning. He is born of the Father as a thought is born from the mind, and as a ray of light is born from the sun.

The Difference Between Homoousios and Homoiousios

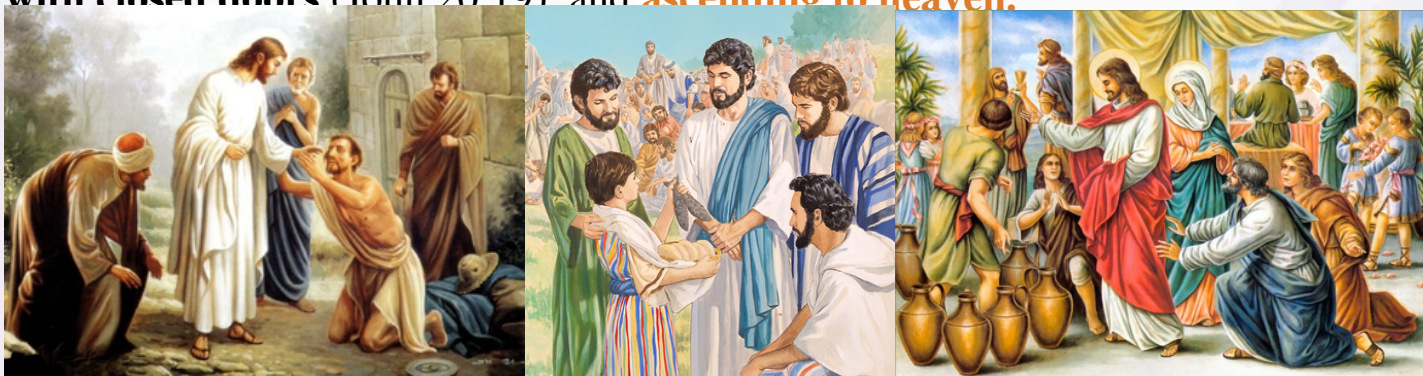
"Homoousios" is a theological term codified and confirmed by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 AD. This term pertains to the relationship of the Son to the Father and means "equal in essence to" or **"of the same essence as the Father."** Pope Athanasius used this expression to refute the Arians' term **"homoiousios,"** which means **"similar in essence to"** in their explanation of the relationship between the Son and the Father.

Pope Athanasius' defense emphasized that the Son cannot simply be similar to the Father, as **He is not separate from the nature of the Father**. Because He is equal to the Father in essence, **He embodies "the equality of unity."** One who shares the essence of God the Father and is equal to Him must be one with Him in the same essence.



Of One Essence with the Father

This concept is a response to Arianism, which misinterpreted the Lord's statement: *"My Father is greater than I,"* (John 14:28). The Father is not greater than the Son in essence because the **Son shares the same nature, essence, and divinity as the Father, making Him equal in all respects.** The phrase "My Father is greater than I" pertains to the state of **self-emptying during the Incarnation**, while the essence of **divinity remains unchanged.** Therefore, in His humanity, Jesus was able to express and perform actions appropriate to His divinity, where He is equal to the Father. He affirmed, *"I and the Father are one,"* (John 10:30), *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father,"* (John 14:9), and *"That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father,"* (John 5:23). He demonstrated His divinity through many works, such as granting sight to the **man born blind** (John 9), forgiving the sins of the **paralytic** (Mark 2:5, 10), creating new matter in the miracle of the **five loaves and two fish** (Matthew 14:17), turning **water into wine** at the wedding at Cana (John 2), **resurrecting** while the tomb was closed, **entering the upper room with closed doors** (John 20:19), and **ascending to heaven.**



Who for Us Men and for Our Salvation

The purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God is **redemption.** **He restored the ideal image in which humanity was created.** The Lord Jesus Christ declared His salvific message before performing the work of redemption through His teachings. He served as the **Teacher**, the **Shepherd** of lost sheep, embodying an ideal example before the people and radiating a heart filled with love.



He Came Down from Heaven

This statement indicates that His original home is heaven. He said: *“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father,”* (John 16:28). His **dwelling in heaven is the first evidence of His divinity**. The phrase “He came down from heaven” does not imply that He left heaven, as He came down to earth while concurrently remaining in heaven. God is present everywhere, and **there is no place devoid of Him**. *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven”* (John 3:13).

Was Incarnate

The term “incarnate” means that our Lord Jesus Christs took flesh from the Virgin, St. Mary, with the **Divine Nature uniting with His humanity through the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Saint Mary for two reasons:

- So that in her womb there would be a body for Christ **without a human seed**.
- To **sanctify her womb**, ensuring that the One born from her would not inherit original sin; therefore, the angel said to her that the Holy One born from her would be called the Son of God.

The phrase "incarnate" does not merely signify that He took a human body but rather a complete human nature, including body, soul, and spirit. Thus, the Creed is not satisfied with just saying "incarnate" but completes it with “and became man.”





And Became Man

He became a full man, embodying the complete human nature. Our teacher, Saint Paul the Apostle, said of Him: *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,”* (1 Timothy 2:5). If He were not a perfect human being, He would not fully represent us in **every way except for sin alone**, nor would He have taken on our nature, which is condemned to death. The Lord Jesus Christ frequently referred to Himself as the **"Son of Man"** because this title signifies **His representation of humanity in His death for our sins**.

He Was Crucified for Us Under Pontius Pilate

This means He died on our behalf, instead of us, we who were deserving of death. As the Scripture states, *“the wages of sin is death,”* (Romans 6:23). *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned,”* (Romans 5:12). Christ, who had no sin and did not deserve to die, **came to die for sinners who were under the sentence of death**. He died for us to redeem us through His death.

Redemption signifies that **a righteous person dies for a guilty person**. A sinner dies because of his own sins, but in redemption, the righteous person dies for the sin of another, thereby redeeming that person from the death sentence. There was no righteous man; Christ is the only righteous one. Scripture tells us, *“They have all turned aside; they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one,”* (Psalms 14:3). Christ is the Holy One capable of dying for others.





In His crucifixion, He was not a sinner but rather **the bearer of our sins**—the sins of others, including the sins of the entire world, from the past, the present, and the future. St. John the Apostle declared, *“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world,”* (1 John 2:1-2). Likewise, St. John the Baptist proclaimed, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29).

He was crucified and died for us so that we might have life through His death. He took our place in the crucifixion, death, shame, and curse. Moreover, He also represented us in His fasting, His baptism, and His obedience to the law, presenting to God the Father a practical image of the perfect Man at a time when perfection was absent on earth.

He Suffered

The **importance of acknowledging His pain is crucial**. The sufferings of the crucifixion are a well-documented fact, as prophesied by Isaiah, who stated: *“A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin,”* (Isaiah 53:3, 4-5, 10). During His pain on the cross, our Lord Jesus cried out, *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”* (Mark 15:34). In His anguish, He also proclaimed, *“I thirst!”* (John 19:28).





The Lord Jesus Christ truly experienced severe suffering. The phrase, "*Why have You forsaken me?*" does not imply **separation** from the Father; rather, it **highlights His acceptable sacrifice on behalf of humanity, with which the Father was well pleased.** Therefore, the Church commemorates the Holy Week of Pascha each year, fasting every Friday to remember Christ's sufferings and every Wednesday to reflect on Judas' betrayal of his Teacher, handing Him over to be crucified. Throughout His time on earth, **Jesus did not use His divinity to ease His humanity.** He experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, and pain—attributes of human nature. His human needs never led Him to sin; they were not compelled by His divinity but rather experienced through His humanity. Thus, the Body of the Lord, born of the Virgin, was never corrupted and could never see corruption.

While carrying the cross to Golgotha (John 19:17), our Lord fell from extreme fatigue, and **Simon the Cyrenian** bore His cross (Mark 15:21). He could have used His divinity to prevent this, but He chose not to. Similarly, He did not use His divine power to stop those who insulted and struck Him (Matthew 27:29-31).

Before His crucifixion, He prophesied about His sufferings, telling His disciples: "*He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day,*" (Matthew 16:21). He added, "*He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*" (Mark 8:31). He also questioned, "*And how is it written concerning the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?*" (Mark 9:12). Lastly, He stated, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day,*" (Luke 9:22).

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





And Was Buried

After **Joseph of Arimathea** and **Nicodemus** had wrapped His Holy Body, they placed the Lord Jesus in a tomb. The Gospel according to St. John describes this event:

- *“Then they took the body of Jesus and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now, in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby,” (John 19:40-42).*

The Gospel according to St. Luke adds, *“And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid,” (Luke 23:55)*. The chief priests and the Pharisees met with Pilate and secured the tomb with guards, sealing the stone at the entrance. This precaution was taken because they feared that the disciples might come at night, steal the body, and claim to the people that He had risen from the dead (Matthew 27:62-66).

All of this serves to support the reality of the Resurrection. How could the disciples have stolen the body with guards present and the tomb sealed and having a large stone blocking the entrance? Additionally, it was the evening of the Sabbath (Mark 15:42), and the Jews rested in accordance with the commandment (Luke 23:56).





He Rose on the Third Day

The Resurrection of the Lord Christ is unique compared to every other person who has come back to life, as **He rose by His own power, without any external assistance**. For instance, in the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah raised the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:25). In the New Testament, Saint Paul the Apostle raised a young man named Eutychus (Acts 20:10). Additionally, the Lord Christ raised the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:15), the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:55), and Lazarus (Jn 11:43-44). In contrast to these accounts, **the Lord Christ is the only One who rose through the power of His divinity**. He rose with a glorified body capable of emerging from a sealed tomb with a large stone.

When Saint Paul the Apostle spoke about our bodies in the general resurrection, he mentioned: *“We also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,”* (Philippians 3:20-21). The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Individual who rose and did not die again; instead, He ascended to heaven and lives forever. He is the **Firstborn of the Resurrection**, the first to experience an eternal resurrection from which there is no death. He Himself proclaimed to Saint John in the Book of Revelation: *“I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen,”* (Revelation 1:17-18).

The Resurrection troubled the Jewish leaders because it **confirmed Christ's divinity and righteousness**, exposing their unjust crucifixion of Him and their guilt of His blood. The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ illustrates His power and victory and brings us the good news that He will raise us with Him. As it is written, *“For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming,”* (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).



How to Calculate the Three Days in the Tomb

The Jewish day begins at **six o'clock** in the evening. Our Lord Jesus died and was buried on Friday before six o'clock, which is considered the **first day**. The entire **Sabbath** is the **second day**, and **Christ rose early on the morning** of the **third day**. It is important to note that part of a day is regarded as a whole day.

If Christ had not risen, He would have been just like any ordinary man, and His enemies and death would have triumphed over Him. Additionally, the Resurrection of the Lord Christ was something He foretold to His disciples before the crucifixion (Matthew 16:21). When the Jews asked Him for a sign after the many miracles He performed, He replied, saying, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,”* (Matthew 12:39-40). Here, He refers to His death and Resurrection on the third day. The Lord Jesus Christ is the **only One who rose from the dead** and **raised others with Him**, those who died in the **hope of Resurrection** and in anticipation of the coming Savior.

On the Third Day

Saint John Chrysostom affirms that God the Father allowed our Lord Jesus Christ to remain in the grave for three days, not just one, to convince non-believers that He truly died. **The Jews believe that a person is not confirmed to be dead until after three days.** For this reason, the mention of three days serves to **validate** the truth of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





According to the Scriptures

The Holy Bible states that the **Resurrection is an event that fulfills the prophecies**, both the Old Testament prophecies and the prophecies of Christ about Himself. The early Church refers to the Resurrection in Psalm 16:10: *“For You will not leave My soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”* This verse is cited twice in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:30, 13:35), indicating the Truth that God will not allow the Messiah to remain in the abyss. Our Lord Jesus Himself prophesied about His Resurrection when the Jews asked Him for a sign after the many miracles He performed. He said to them, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,”* (Matt 12:39-40), referring to His death and Resurrection on the third day.

The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ **demonstrates His ability to raise people from the dead**. During the Pentecostal period, we celebrate the Holy Resurrection by chanting, “Christ has risen from the dead... and to those in the graves, He has granted eternal life.” Even today, our Lord Jesus opens graves and restores life, not just the earthly graves, but the **personal graves we create for ourselves**. He has the power to raise us with Him.



He Ascended into Heaven

The phrase indicates that He ascended in the flesh because His Divinity does not ascend or descend. His Divinity encompasses everything and is omnipresent. He ascended in His spiritual, luminous, glorified Body. We too will be resurrected with bodies like that of the Lord Jesus following His Resurrection. As stated in 1 Corinthians 15:49, *"And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."* The miracle of the **Ascension** is not limited by earthly gravity; rather, it **reflects the nature of a glorified body that transcends the constraints of gravity**. The phrase "ascended into the heavens" refers specifically to the Heaven of heavens. No one has ascended there before—not Elijah, Enoch, or anyone else. As the Lord said to Nicodemus, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven,"* (John 3:13). This Heaven of heavens is reserved for the throne of God and His glory.

And Sat at the Right Hand of His Father

The mention of the Lord Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father appears in several places throughout the New Testament and is prophesied in the Psalms: *"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool,'"* (Psalm 110:1). We also read, *"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God,"* (Mark 16:19). This is what Saint Stephen saw during his martyrdom: being full of the Holy Spirit, he *"gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"* (Acts 7:55).

We should not interpret this literally, as **God does not have a right or left side due to His infinite nature**.



If the Son were to sit at His right hand in a spatial sense, it would contradict His statement, *"I am in the Father and the Father in Me,"* (John 14:11). In Biblical terms, the phrase *"the right hand of God"* signifies His **power, righteousness, honor, and glory**. The word "sat" implies that He is settled and signifies His rule, marking the completion of His self-emptying. The Holy Bible states, *"but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men,"* (Philippians 2:7). Therefore, upon His return, He will come in His power and glory.

He will come in His glory to judge the living and the dead

He will come in the **glory of His divine nature**, not in a new glory given to Him, but in the glory He had before the world existed (John 17:5). The phrase "He comes in the glory of the Father" is profound and significant: *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works,"* (Matthew 16:27). The glory of the Father is also His glory, as the Father and the Son are One in the glory of the Godhead. The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be accompanied by the general resurrection, the Judgment, and the end of the world.

Whose Kingdom Shall Have No End

All earthly kingdoms have been shaken; the kingdoms of the world—Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome—have come to an end, **except for the Kingdom of God**. The Prophet Daniel prophesied: *"His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed,"* (Daniel 7:14). His Kingdom is **spiritual** and not an earthly kingdom limited by time.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





How & Why?

Imagine traffic without traffic lights. Are laws necessary to regulate life? Consider the meaning of the word "law." What are your initial feelings when you hear the word "law?"

The Law

A canon is a **system** that arranges certain principles, making them legal and conforming them to an established and recognized system. All of creation follows a **fixed set of laws** in terms of weather, astronomy, and nature. Essentially, there are traffic laws, commercial laws for banks, military laws, punitive codes, university systems, and more.

All of creation teaches us that there must be canons that govern the course of life. If all of creation adheres to laws, then human beings—considered **the crown of creation**—must also follow a clear and specific system in their lives.

- What helps you feel close to God?
 - If all of creation has a fixed law, then our spiritual life must have a Spiritual Canon. The **Spiritual Canon is the system governing spiritual life between the individual and God**, in accordance with the guidance of a Father of Confession. It organizes and directs our lives, spiritual obligations, and behavior, thus controlling the overall course of our spiritual existence.
- Who established these canons?
 - These Canons are derived from the experiences of the saints who strived to apply God's commandments. They arose from their extensive experiences, **guided by the Holy Spirit**, and are fundamentally based on the **commandments found in the Holy Bible**. These Canons serve as a practical translation or application of those commandments.



The Importance of the Spiritual Canon

Meticulousness in fulfilling the Spiritual Canon brings us closer to God. Meeting the Lord each day fosters intimacy, love, and connection between us and Him, resulting in more fervent and loving prayer.

Spiritual Canons facilitate our **spiritual journey and struggle**, serving as a foundation for our spiritual life. They encompass not just practices like fasting and prayer, but also **principles that guide our thoughts, goals, and behaviors**. Just as there are laws governing relationships among people, there must also be canons guiding our relationship with God and our spiritual conduct.

Objectives of the Spiritual Canon

The Spiritual Canon **nourishes the soul**, satisfying our spirit and narrating our existence. Its primary aim is to foster an experience of God's love and help us remain in His presence. Engaging with these Canons deepens our companionship with God and enhances our awareness of His love.

Spiritual Canons also **facilitate our return to God when we feel lazy**. They illuminate the right path and help us discern various choices. The articles of the Spiritual Canon serve as a **standard for evaluating our spiritual lives**, making it easier for us to reflect on our journey. They provide a way to measure ourselves and maintain our spiritual fitness.

Moreover, Spiritual Canons support us in our struggles, bringing joy and a taste of eternal life. They serve as a pledge of eternity and a **ladder to heaven**. The Spiritual Canon acts as a **robust fortress against the attacks of Satan**, a **powerful weapon** against the enemy, and a **remedy for spiritual ailments**. Neglecting these Spiritual Canons exposes us to dangers. How do we cultivate the daily practice of Spiritual Canons? Let's explore together how habits are formed.

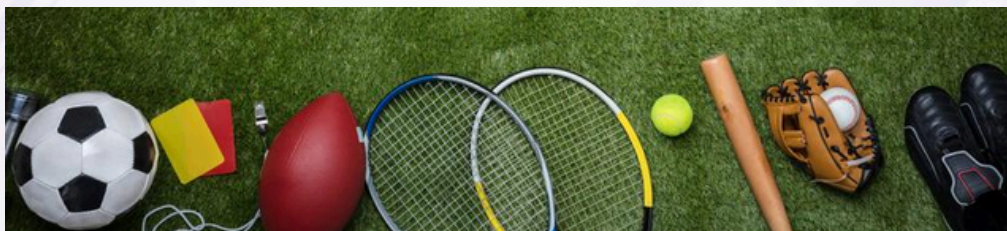


Habit Formation: The Consequences of Non-compliance

Everything operates under specific laws that facilitate the fulfillment of their mission. **Deviating** from these laws will inevitably lead to **failure** in achieving goals and can cause **significant harm** to oneself and others. For example, natural phenomena like astronomy, winds, rain, and seas function according to established natural laws. **When these elements operate outside of their laws, they can trigger devastating natural disasters** such as lightning strikes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods.

Failure to adhere to Spiritual Canons does not invoke God's wrath or punishment but rather results in the **natural consequences of neglecting what is beneficial**. For instance, a student who does not study will likely fail his or her exam. Likewise, individuals force themselves to engage in necessary daily activities like eating or taking medicine; why not apply the same discipline to spiritual practices that ensure salvation and eternity? It is far better to embrace these practices with conviction, awareness, and joy, as an expression of our freedom.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, St. Paul uses the analogy of sports competitions to illustrate this point: *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*





The Prize:

Refers to the reward given to the victor in a race and represents our ultimate goal in life: to **reach the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ**.



Running:

Indicates the **intense struggle, sweat, and effort involved**. It highlights St. Paul's own dedication to preaching and striving for the crown of glory through his service. This message is relevant to all of us; a spiritual life should not be characterized by laziness or negligence. Unlike in sports where typically only one or two earn rewards, **in the spiritual realm, everyone who puts in effort can receive a crown**. We are all called to strive for this prize, with greater effort leading to greater glory, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:41: *"For one star differs from another star in glory."* St. Paul advises his disciple St. Timothy on how to run this race in 2 Timothy 2:1-7.



The Good Soldier:

A soldier fights faithfully for his king or leader. Similarly, **a Christian battles against sin and the devil through the Holy Spirit, under the leadership of Christ**. Just as our Leader triumphed at the Cross, He continues to bring victory within us. If we overcome, all credit belongs to Him. While soldiering has its struggles, spiritual battles involve their own challenges, **believers must be ready to sacrifice for Christ**.



Competitors in Sports:

Competitors **strive for a crown** and endure **rigorous training** to achieve victory. Those who participate in competitions willingly abstain from certain foods and pleasures to prepare for the challenge. Likewise, believers should willingly refrain from anything that hinders their spiritual growth in pursuit of the heavenly crown.





What does it mean to engage in a struggle? To struggle involves overcoming personal desires and whims, accepting every difficulty, much like a soldier who sacrifices his life for his king. As Christians, we must **offer ourselves as living sacrifices**, attributing our victories not to ourselves, but to Christ. Just as victories in worldly battles are credited to the king rather than the individual soldier, **our spiritual victories belong to Christ.**

We should not despair. Despair contradicts the belief that **Christ is the ultimate Victor, not ourselves.** We must engage in our struggles with hope, devoid of pride or self-righteousness. This struggle may include fasting, long prayers, studying the Bible, staying up late, and striving to follow the commandments—understanding that **prayer and service without love are meaningless.** Just as athletes have coaches and adhere to rules, our life with Christ has commandments that we need to strive to follow. The diligent farmer works the land to produce a crop and waits confidently for the harvest, just as we should persevere with hope and patience in our spiritual endeavors, remaining undeterred by life's challenges.

Characteristics of The Spiritual Canon

There is **no contradiction between submission and freedom.** Is the Spiritual Canon a form of slavery? Is it merely an obligation or duty? Is it something that restricts my free will? The Spiritual Canon is not slavery; rather, it is **something I choose to embrace willingly.** Satan deceives us into believing that submission to a Spiritual Canon equates to a lack of spirituality, but this misconception is rooted in dishonesty. We engage with these practices out of spiritual awareness and personal freedom. **A spiritual father presents these canons but does not impose them.** He advises, guides, encourages, and persuades—like a doctor prescribing medicine. Does a doctor force a patient to take medicine, or does he guide them to make the best choices for their health?



It's often uncomfortable to feel bound by laws that seem imposed upon me. However, why don't I feel the same distress toward **traffic laws, commercial regulations**, or even **natural laws**? The Spiritual Canon is an essential system that **promotes humanity's salvation**, and thus must be followed freely, joyfully, and with conviction. One of the saints said, *"Virtue is not achieved by force."*

The essence of submission in following the canon is that I **willingly align my will with God's will**, trusting that it is always for my good. Christianity embodies freedom—there is no coercion or slavery in faith. Instead, we have the freedom to choose; yet, when my will does not align with God's will, **I need to submit** to it to realign myself with His good purpose.

The spiritual canon expresses love. I may voluntarily discipline myself, just as I would for studying or participating in a sport to achieve a goal. **I choose to adhere to these Spiritual Canons, recognizing their importance for my life here on earth and in eternity.** There is a significant difference between force and slavery: force is a deliberate action I take upon myself, while slavery is imposed on me.

One of the key characteristics of the Spiritual Canon is its **"flexibility."** Spiritual Canons are adaptable; while it is essential to adhere to it, it is not rigid. As the saying goes, *"The Canon was made for man, not man for the Canon."* The Canon serves as a **means rather than an end.** The spirit of the Canon is more important than its literal interpretation. **God holds each person accountable according to their individual circumstances, capabilities, and talents.**

Spiritual Canons function similarly to medications prescribed by a skilled doctor, tailored to the needs of each patient. This flexibility allows us to continue practicing the Canon. While the Canon or its application may change, the ultimate goal remains the same: to ensure the salvation of individuals and to lead them toward the love of God.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)





What is the difference between commitment and obligation?

Commitment embodies both **freedom** and **responsibility**. Spiritual Canons require commitment; alongside the flexibility and free will in their practice, there is also a sense of responsibility. Every expression of freedom must come with accountability for success or failure. This sense of **responsibility for my own salvation and eternity** makes it easier for me to adhere to a Spiritual Canon. For instance, there is a responsibility in following traffic laws; even if no one is watching, and I must understand that this commitment is useful and necessary.

The Need for a Spiritual Canon

What most terrifies demons is our commitment to Spiritual Canons. This commitment is akin to that of **a soldier who trains daily, even in peacetime**, to ensure he or she is prepared for conflict. Since the Spiritual Canon pertains to the soul, it must reflect degrees and levels. It is akin to **nourishment for the soul**, requiring growth and gradation, and it also varies from person to person. There are Canons suitable for beginners, intermediates, and advanced practitioners. This growth involves not only an increase in quantity but, more importantly, **an enhancement in quality**—specifically, the depth of my practice and the experience of feeling the presence of our Lord.

The **Spiritual Canon serves as a ladder**, allowing us to ascend gradually to higher spiritual heights. This process signifies our continuous progression toward the **ultimate objective: deepening our knowledge of God and enjoying a lasting presence in His embrace**. Consider how much effort one might exert to meet a boss at work or a prominent societal figure. How much more of a privilege is it to stand in the presence of God?





Challenges in Practicing the Spiritual Canon

Lethargy and Boredom

Many people experience periods of lethargy and boredom in their spiritual practice, often accompanied by **a lack of desire to continue**. In such cases, it's tempting to cut the practice short. However, the spiritual fathers advise that *"something is better than nothing."* Experiencing these feelings can cultivate **humility**, teach **perseverance**, and foster **persistence** in prayer. It's essential not to give up but to gradually return to your Spiritual Canon. During these times, seeking encouragement and support from your spiritual father can be very helpful.

Wasting Time



Procrastination can be a significant obstacle, driven by **distractions that prevent us from dedicating time to our Spiritual Canon**. The Devil tempts us to focus on many other things, leading to a common repetitive phrase: *"I'll do it later."* For instance, a student might spend excessive time on social media, ultimately finding no time for spiritual practices.

- **Application:** It's crucial to prioritize time for your Spiritual Canon. Consider how valuable it is to meet God and reflect on how much time we waste without gaining anything valuable from it. Beware of procrastination—time is fleeting, and the moments that pass will not return. **We should not deprive ourselves of the joy of God's company.**

Pride

Pride can be a serious obstacle, much like the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee, despite his commitment to Spiritual Canons, became self-righteous and disdainful of others. The Bible reminds us, *"When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants,'"* (Luke 17:10). Practicing Spiritual Canons should be seen as a **basic obligation**, not a point of pride.



Irrational Thinking & Daydreaming

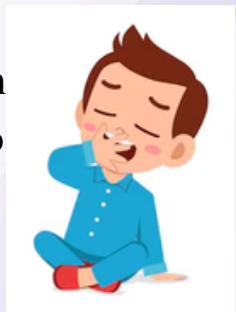
The human mind is often plagued by irrational thoughts and daydreams. When we don't fill our minds with spiritual thoughts, they are **left to wander aimlessly**. Distractions, worries, and excessive preoccupations can consume our attention and time.

- **Application:** Aim to perform your Spiritual Canon at times when your thoughts are calm and in a **quiet environment**, if possible. Even if your prayers feel rushed, they are still better than not praying at all. The spiritual fathers suggest that **reading can help focus the mind**, preventing distractions.

Feeling Tired

Physical fatigue presents a significant challenge in the spiritual journey. Often, individuals postpone their spiritual practices until the end of the day, only to find that **exhaustion prevents them from engaging in their Spiritual Canon**. Fatigue may arise from physical illness, which should be considered when performing the Canon—here, guidance from the person's Father of Confession may be beneficial. Additionally, the enemy may exploit feelings of laziness and drowsiness, especially during prayers and readings. **If the enemy successfully disrupts your Canon, it can lead to a creeping loss of alertness and vitality.**

Understanding these challenges can help us navigate our spiritual journey more effectively. You must **persevere in prayer with determination**, and all the symptoms will eventually disappear.



Changing or Losing the Goal

The evil one seeks to make the Spiritual Canon a goal, which can lead to **frustration** if it's **not completed** or **arrogance** if one **adheres to it**. Sometimes, misguided goals intervene, such as seeking vain glory like the hypocritical Pharisees. At times, the goal may be completely lost, prompting the question: What is the benefit of all this effort?



The most dangerous temptation is when the evil one encourages us to **compare ourselves to others in the world**. They appear to do whatever they want and seem happy, making us question why we should force ourselves to deprive ourselves of many pleasures. It is **crucial to review the objectives of our spiritual practices and assess how they are carried out**.

Hiding the Practice

Hiding our practice under the pretense of modesty can cause us to lose it entirely. For instance, if someone says, *"I don't like to pray in front of anyone at home,"* this can lead to **a withdrawal from prayer**. If concealment results in the loss of practice, it becomes **detrimental**. We should engage in our practices without worrying about being discreet, as this may be a tactic of the evil one whose goal is to stop our spiritual growth.

Extreme Practices

The fathers advise that **moderation can save many**. It is inappropriate to add to the rules of prayer or fasting excessively without guidance from a Father of Confession. Such extreme measures may cause serious physical and spiritual harm. The evil one may lead us to keep such excesses hidden from our Father of Confession, which is extremely harmful. As Romans 12:3 states: *"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."* The fathers teach us that **obedience to our Father of Confession is more valuable than other practices**. All growth must be gradual and orderly, following the guidance of those who are more experienced than we are.





Components of the Spiritual Canon

Prayer: Do you pray regularly? Do you pray with **focus** and **depth**? Are your requests primarily spiritual rather than material? **Do you feel God's presence during your prayers and engage with Him**, or do you view prayer as merely a task?



The Holy Bible: Do you read the Holy Bible regularly, with **understanding** and **focus**? Do you apply its commandments in your life? **Do the teachings of the Holy Bible guide your thoughts and actions?** Do you meditate on what you read, and do you make an effort to memorize a verse each day?



Repentance and Confession: When you confess, do you **genuinely repent** from the heart and **resolve not to return to sin**? Are you actively seeking change, or has confession become merely a habit? **Do you rejoice in the grace of forgiveness**, and take steps toward righteousness every time you repent?



Attending Liturgy and Communion: Do you attend Liturgy **early**? Do you thank God for the blessing of being united with Him in Holy Communion? When you attend Liturgy, **do you ask to experience and feel God's presence in your life?** Do you pray for the needs of others, or do you only pray for yourself?



Spiritual Meetings: Do you attend your weekly meetings **regularly** and **participate actively**? Do you try to implement what you learn? **What impact does your attendance have on your life?** Do you notice a change in your behavior, and does your family recognize it?





Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a field of computer science that aims to **simulate human intelligence by developing systems capable of performing tasks typically requiring human intelligence**. These systems can learn from data and analyze it, allowing them to improve their performance over time without needing additional programming for each new case. They can learn from **experiences**, adapt to **new inputs**, and **perform tasks** like visual perception, image analysis, speech recognition, decision-making, natural language understanding, language translation, problem-solving, and more.

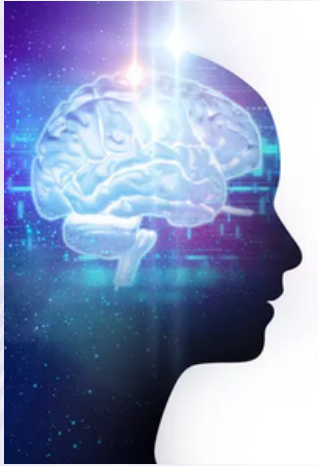
AI Chatbot is used to facilitate various human tasks. There are several fields of study under the umbrella of artificial intelligence. **ChatGPT** (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer), launched in November 2022 by OpenAI—a research and publishing company focused on artificial intelligence—was made available to the public. Although it was not the first public AI platform, it generated significant interest worldwide by making AI technology accessible to a broader audience for various applications.





Characteristics of Artificial Intelligence

Thinking Humanly: This approach focuses on enabling artificial intelligence to think like humans. The **goal is to imitate human mental processes**, such as **decision-making** and learning from experiences. For example, a program may learn to solve a specific puzzle through trial and error, similar to how a human learns.



Thinking Rationally: This method aims to make artificial intelligence think in a **logical** and **organized** manner, independent of human thought processes. Here, AI strives to follow logical rules to reach conclusions.

Acting Humanly: The objective is to **develop a system that behaves in an effective and rational manner to achieve its goals**. It's not essential for its behavior to resemble that of humans; what's important is its logical and intelligent actions to yield the best results. For example, robots in restaurants handle tasks like receiving orders from customers or delivering food, mirroring human actions in their work.



Acting Rationally: The goal is to create **systems that can behave rationally based on logical decision-making processes**. Self-driving cars continuously make decisions about speed and direction to avoid accidents and reach their destinations safely, **relying on logical analyses of their surrounding environment**. Additionally, some AI programs can solve complex mathematical problems using specific, logical mathematical rules without mimicking human thought processes. This highlights the core concepts of artificial intelligence and its various approaches while ensuring proper grammar, punctuation, and clarity.



Advantages of Artificial Intelligence

Increased Efficiency and Productivity: AI can perform tasks **faster** and **more accurately** than humans, leading to greater efficiency and reduced errors, **particularly in repetitive processes**.

Predictive Analysis and Decision-Making: AI analyzes vast amounts of data quickly, **allowing companies and organizations to make better decisions based on data-driven insights** and predictions.

Automation and Process Improvement: AI can automate many tasks that previously required human effort, **saving time** and **enabling people to focus on creative or high-value work**.

Personalization and User Experience: AI helps create personalized experiences for users by analyzing their preferences and behaviors, as seen with platforms like Amazon and Netflix.

Applications in Healthcare: AI enhances medical diagnosis, helps detect diseases at early stages, and provides personalized treatment plans, thus **improving healthcare outcomes**.

Continuous Learning and Development: AI systems have the capability to learn continuously from new data and experiences, making them **increasingly efficient and accurate over time**.

Advancements in Robotics: AI is **utilized to operate robots** that assist in manufacturing, agriculture, and even delicate surgical procedures.



Solutions to Global Problems: AI can help address **global challenges** such as **climate change**, **resource shortages**, and the development of **sustainable agricultural systems**.

Improving Cybersecurity: AI is employed to **detect** and **respond** to **cyberattacks** more quickly and effectively than traditional systems.

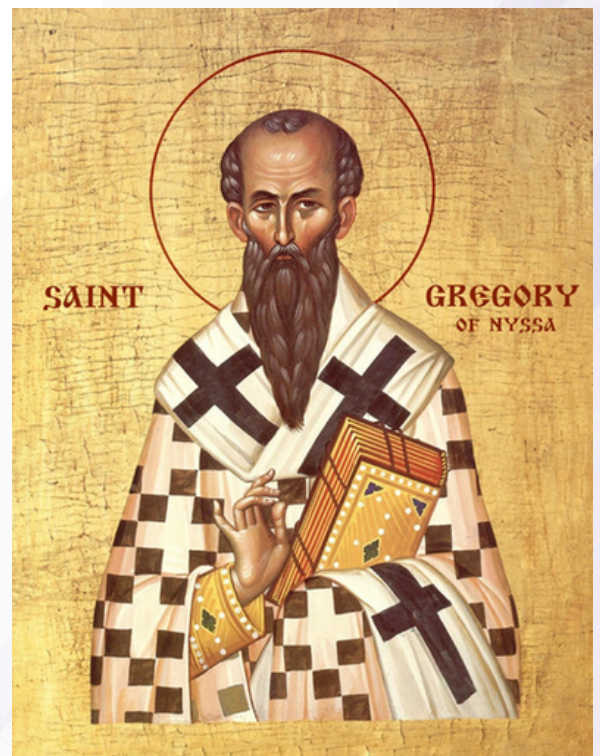
Supporting Innovation Across Various Fields: With its rapid information processing capabilities, AI fosters **innovation** in areas such as self-driving cars, smart cities, and even art and music. In general, artificial intelligence has **tremendous potential to enhance human life across many domains**.

Is Artificial Intelligence a Good or Bad tool?

AI itself is not inherently good or bad; it is a tool that **can be utilized for both positive and negative purposes**.

"No one denies that those who have learned to practice an art for the right purposes can also misuse it for the wrong ones. We can say that the ability to think and imagine is a gift from God, intended for good. However, when individuals misuse this ability as a tool for discovery, it can lead to harmful inventions." — St. Gregory of Nyssa

We cannot simply label fire as bad because it burns, or a knife as harmful because it can be used to kill. **Rather, it is the way things are used that determines their value as good or evil.**





Disadvantages of Artificial Intelligence

Job Loss: Artificial intelligence can lead to the replacement of human workers in various fields, especially in jobs that can be automated, such as manufacturing and customer service. This shift may result in **increased unemployment**.

Bias and Discrimination: AI systems rely on the data they are trained on. If this **data contains biases, the systems may produce unfair** or discriminatory results.

Privacy Violations: AI technologies can collect and analyze vast amounts of personal data, putting individuals **at risk of privacy violations**.

Cybersecurity Threats: Artificial intelligence can be exploited in **cyber-attacks**, thereby increasing accuracy and impact, which in turn raises security threats.

Overreliance on Machines: As we increasingly depend on AI for decision-making, there is a risk that this reliance **may diminish human critical thinking skills** and our ability to intervene when necessary.

Lack of Creativity: AI operates based on the data and algorithms it knows, which may **limit its ability to think creatively or respond effectively to unconventional situations**.

High Costs: Developing and maintaining AI technologies **requires substantial investments in infrastructure and technology**, making it challenging for some companies or





Risks of Artificial Intelligence

AI can never be certain

- Intelligent agents operate within the realm of **probabilities**, and probabilities never reach 100%. Some agents may indicate their confidence levels in the results they provide. For instance, a security camera might identify a car with 60% confidence, while a human eye can easily recognize it as a car.
- To address uncertainty, **model errors may sometimes exhibit bias in a particular direction**. For example, cancer tests may be biased toward false positives rather than false negatives (i.e., it is preferable to misdiagnose than to risk leaving cancer untreated). Similarly, weather forecasts may be skewed toward predicting bad weather instead of good weather (i.e., people generally do not get upset if you forecast rain that doesn't happen, but they do if you predict clear skies and it rains).

AI can be manipulated by its creator or manager

- As noted, intelligent agents primarily rely on **knowledge obtained from various media sources**. The creator or manager of the intelligent agent decides which sources to incorporate during the model training phase. Therefore, if a model is trained using media that is politically or socially biased in a particular direction, the agent utilizing that model will likely display bias in that direction as well. Additionally, an intelligent agent can be programmed to respond in specific ways to queries.



AI can manipulate you

- **Imitation of Human Interaction:** Smart virtual assistants mimic human interaction by imitating voices, facial expressions, and body language, creating the illusion of a personal connection.
- **False Media:** AI can generate realistic simulations of individuals in fake videos, audio, and images, **portraying them as saying or doing things they never actually did.**
- **Information Manipulation:** AI can control the information you access on social media platforms, ensuring that content supporting certain beliefs is more prevalent. This can provoke widespread reactions, such as accusations against social media companies for using AI to manipulate information in ways that could affect elections.

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence

In January 2023, some college students in the US used ChatGPT to write essays on philosophical topics. Although the professor found the articles well-written, he questioned their authenticity. He ran them through OpenAI's ChatGPT detector, which indicated a 99% chance that the articles were generated by AI.

Consequently, the students failed the class.

Inappropriate Use of AI in the Church

A concerning trend has emerged recently where **smart image generators create images of saints that conflict with the church's spirit and icons.** These images often depict saints inappropriately, such as Saint Mary without a head covering or Jesus Christ smiling widely, showing his teeth. Other examples include saints wearing tight dresses and distorted representations of figures like St. Moses the Strong that do not align with their holiness. Additionally, AI-generated images can depict Bible verses literally, which contradicts the Church's interpretations, traditions, and doctrines. These images are shared and spread across social media.



How can I benefit from AI?

Educational Support: Use an AI agent to clarify concepts, ask questions, and seek explanations about the topics you are studying—this is distinct from using AI to cheat or plagiarize.

Writing Assistance: An AI agent can help correct grammar and provide writing tips for materials you have created. However, this may be considered cheating in educational settings that restrict its use.

Learning New Topics: Use AI to ask questions on various topics to facilitate self-learning.

Finding Resources: Request resources related to a particular topic from an AI agent, then explore, read, and analyze these resources on your own.

Language Practice: Interact with the AI agent to practice a foreign language and request translations to improve your proficiency.

Appropriate Use of AI in the Church

The potential for AI use within the Church is significant. For example, an AI agent can transcribe audio or video recordings of sermons or lectures. Another agent could then translate these texts into other languages, making sermons and lectures by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope Tawadros II, and bishops from the Coptic Orthodox Church accessible to English-speaking audiences.



How accurate is AI in providing religious information?

Source-Dependent: AI does not possess religious beliefs or understanding; it treats religious texts like any other type of text. Consequently, **its accuracy relies entirely on the sources available to it.** If these sources are inaccurate or biased toward a specific denomination, the AI will produce results that are also inaccurate, biased, or distorted.

Multiple Religious Interpretations: Religious texts often have various interpretations shaped by cultural and environmental factors, which makes it challenging for AI to achieve a deep understanding. For instance, there are differences in how religious texts, doctrines, and beliefs are interpreted across different sects and denominations.

Potential for Bias: If artificial intelligence is trained on misleading, extremist, or non-sectarian information, it may yield biased or misleading interpretations that conflict with the Coptic Orthodox Faith, **potentially jeopardizing spiritual well-being.**

Challenges of verifying religious information:

The Importance of Reliable Sources: Artificial intelligence (AI) relies on information found online or in databases. If this information is unreliable or interpreted incorrectly, especially in a way that does not align with Coptic Orthodox teachings, the results may be inaccurate.

Religious Diversity: AI sometimes struggles to grasp the diversity and pluralism within a single religion. This challenge is heightened if the data provided to it is not comprehensive, tends toward a specific sect, or lacks a sectarian perspective.



Future Outlook:

AI is a powerful tool with tremendous potential across various fields. However, it must be used with caution due to the possible **social and economic impacts of its development**. When dealing with religion and religious information, it is crucial to ensure the accuracy and validity of the sources utilized. **It is also important to rely on human experts for sensitive matters, such as religious beliefs and interpretations.**

In the future, AI is expected to advance toward **artificial general intelligence (AGI)**, which will be able to think and make decisions in a manner more similar to humans. However, this progress will also bring about increased ethical, legal, and religious challenges related to the safe and responsible use of this technology.

As a member of society, it is your responsibility to understand these technologies, recognizing their positive aspects to make the best use of them, as well as their negative aspects to avoid mishaps. As a Coptic Orthodox Christian, it is important **to be honest and truthful in your use of technology**. Let your guiding principle be what the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: *"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," (1 Corinthians 10:31).*





Memorization

Psalm 119

In my own affliction I cried to You, O Lord, and You heard me. O Lord, You shall deliver my soul from unjust lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What should be given to you, and what should be added to you, a crafty tongue?! The weapons of the mighty are sharpened with coals of the desert! Woe to me, that my sojourning is prolonged; I have lived among the dwellings of Kedar. My soul has long been a sojourner; I was peaceable among those who hated peace; when I spoke to them. they warred against me without a cause. ALLELUIA.

The Gospel of the 11th Hour

THE HOLY GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE (CH. 4 : 38-41)

And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they requested Him concerning her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and served them.

When the sun was setting, all those who had any sick with diverse diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, "You are Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was Christ.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.



Litanies of the 11th Hour

If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I, the sinner, appear? The burden and heat of the day I did not endure because of the weakness of my humanity. But, O merciful God, count me with the fellows of the eleventh hour. For, behold, in iniquities I was conceived, and in sins my mother bore me. Therefore, I do not dare to lift up my eyes to Heaven; but rather, I rely on the abundance of Your mercy and love for mankind, crying out and saying, “God, forgive me, a sinner, and have mercy on me.”

ΔΟΞΑ ΠΑΤΡΙ ΚΕ ΥΙΩ ΚΕ ΑΓΙΩ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ

Hasten, O Savior, to open to me the fatherly bosoms, for I wasted my life in pleasures and lusts, and the day has passed by me and vanished. Therefore, now I rely on the richness of Your neverending compassion. So, then, do not forsake a submissive heart which is in need of your mercy. For unto You I cry, O Lord, humbly, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before You, and I am no longer worthy to be called Your son, so make me as one of Your hired servants.”

ΚΕ ΠΥΗ ΚΕ ΑΙ ΚΕ ΙΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΕΩΝΑΣ ΤΩΗ ΕΩΝΩΗ. ΑΜΗΝ.

Every iniquity I did with prudence and activity, and every sin I committed with eagerness and diligence, and of all torment and judgement I am worthy. Therefore, prepare for me the ways of repentance, O Lady the Virgin; for to you I appeal, and through you I seek intercession, and upon you I call to help me, lest I might be put to shame. And when my soul departs my body attend to me, and defeat the conspiracy of the enemies, and shut the gates of Hades, lest they might swallow my soul, O you, blameless bride of the true Bridegroom.



Absolution of the 11th Hour

We thank You, our compassionate King, for You have granted us to pass this day in peace, and brought us to the evening thankfully, and made us worthy to behold daylight until evening. O God, accept our glorification which is offered now, and save us from the trickeries of the adversary, and abolish all the snares which are set against us. Grant us, in this coming night, peace without pain, or anxiety, or unrest, or illusion; so that we may pass it in peace and chastity, and rise up for praises and prayers. And thus, at all times and everywhere, we glorify Your holy name in everything, together with the Father, who is incomprehensible and without beginning, and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is in one essence with You, now and at all times, and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

*Continue in the things
which you have learned* (2 Timothy 3:14)



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Continue in the things
which you have learned (2 Timothy 3:14)



A series of horizontal lines for writing, spanning the width of the page.

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Continue

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(2 Timothy 3:14)



Through the grace of God and under the auspices of His Grace Bishop David, Bishop of the Diocese of New York and New England and the current Papal Exarch of the Archdiocese of North America for H.H. Pope Tawadros II, this Mahragan book was translated and formatted by the blessed servants of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of New York and New England. All material was translated from the Arabic Language to the English Language.



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