

WOUNDED BY LOVE



Such are the contests and such the prizes
that lie before us. How long, then, shall we
mock ourselves by pretending to be devout,
serving the Lord with hypocrisy, being
thought one thing by men but clearly seen to
be quite different by Him who
knows our secrets?

Venerable Mark the Faster of Egypt
Philokalia, Vol. 1 p.150

Man's Ethos of Freedom



St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed his catechumens at one point as follows:



“True religion consists of these two elements: pious doctrines and virtuous actions. Neither does God accept doctrines apart from good works, nor are works, when divorced from godly doctrine, accepted by God. What does it profit a man to

be an expert theologian if he is a shameless fornicator; or to be nobly temperate, but an impious blasphemer? ***The knowledge of doctrines is a precious possession; there is need of a vigilant soul***, since many there are who would deceive you by philosophy and vain deceit.” (Cyril of Jerusalem, 1969, pp. 119-120).

Heresy was one of the reasons why the Church established and enunciated its doctrine in a very clear and unequivocal way. The doctrinal system of the Church contains

- dogmas decreed by the Councils that opposed heresy and
- all the other doctrines that the Church always proclaimed as being part of the message of salvation that she addresses to the world.

These include The Triune God, the doctrine of creation of angels and man, man's fall, the divine plan of salvation, Christ's person and work, the Church, the Virgin Mary, the Saints, the Sacraments, and Orthodox eschatology (the "last things").



The 'knowledge of doctrines' is inextricably bound up with the growth toward theosis. It assures truth, provides discernment, protects from error and guides the Church and the individual Christian towards theosis. But, since Christians are in different stages of belief and understanding, our attitude towards 'knowledge of doctrines' differs from individual to individual.

Moreover, every individual connects himself with freedom. Freedom when defined in its moral and philosophical sense is the possibility of choice and preference. We also observe that our freedom can only exist in the relative sense due to the fact that every being which has a beginning owes its existence to some other being (e.g. our biological relation with our parents). This being the fact, mostly we use the experience of others as a guiding factor to take our decisions. This is due to the moral constraint where we are conscious of the fact that we live in a society which follows a rule to respect the freedom of others as well. We take care that our choices will not conflict with the freedom of others so that order is maintained and there is no chaos.

But this in the actual sense is no freedom to many in today's times, especially the youth of today define freedom as the choice where they are free to do whatever they wish without regards to any rules. It is, for them the right to choose whatever they like be it in terms of education, friends or relations, lifestyle etc. To be free, for some again means to do anything even if it is an irresponsible action without having to think that it could be a wrong choice; an action that can harm.

In such a case, moral values are under attack, i.e. we see that some set of moral values at one point of time lose credibility at another point of time. It remains just as a social convention. Flattery and dishonesty have become a part of our everyday life. People don't dwell on the moral quality of life. Today's motto of 'do your own

thing' and the principle of instant gratification fostered by our consumer society causes more harm to the ethics.

What is the reason for such differences arising among a set of values or morality/ethics at different times, among different groups of people? How is ethics defined in a society?

The scale of objective virtues or values¹ known as ethics which determine the morality of the individual is the



result of religious, philosophical or scientific interpretation of problems to do with the behaviour of the individual in the society. Ethics

may arise out of a philosophical interpretation of man's ethos, or it may result from a given body of religious law determining how man should behave. It can also be a science, the branch of so-called "human sciences", which tries to find the most effective values for the best organisation of men's social coexistence. There are two preconditions for application of ethics: authority and convention. The supreme authority can be "divine" in a religious or mythological sense; it can also be represented by party leadership, or by the impersonal principle of state power. If we reject authority, then we are obliged to accept the conventional character of social ethics. The rules of behaviour for the individual follow an agreement or convention, either conscious or dictated by custom. We accept, on utilitarian grounds, ideas about good and evil, which may be those put forward in particular case or those by experience. And we constantly seek to improve them, using philosophy or science to study the manifestations of social behaviour.

Distorted understanding of freedom has damaged our lives and darkened our understanding. We have blindfolded ourselves in such a way that we cannot connect to the actual reality even if we wish to do so. Due to all these factors the two basic building blocks of any society, the family and the church, are being undermined and suffer unrelenting attack.

The truth of the Orthodox Christian Church is that Freedom² is in fact a reality connected to man. Man is in the image of God. In the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the image is closely connected with freedom, independence. And *this* is what characterises man. In patristic (holy fathers) thinking the definition of freedom is different from the secular meaning as defined above. It is clear that ethics as defined above separates the ethos or morality of man, his individual behaviour and value as a character, from his existential truth and hypostatic identity i.e. from what man is, prior to any social or objective evaluation of him. The ethics leaves outside its scope the ontological question of the truth and reality of human existence, the question of what man really is as distinct from what he ought to be and whether he corresponds to this "ought".

Does human individuality have an ontological hypostasis, a hypostasis of life and freedom beyond space and time?

Does it have a unique, distinctive, unrepeatable hypostatic identity which is prior to character and behaviour, and which determines them?

Or is it a transient by-product of biological, psychological and historical conditions by which it is necessarily determined so that "improvement" in character and behaviour is all we can achieve by resorting to a utilitarian code of law?

If we accept morality simply as man's conformity to an authoritative or conventional code of law, then ethics becomes man's alibi for his existential problem. He takes refuge in ethics, whether religious, philosophical or even political, and hides the tragedy of his mortal, biological existence behind idealized and fabulous objective aims. **He wears a mask of behaviour** borrowed from ideological or party authorities, so as to be safe from his own self and the questions with which it confronts him.

According to the Fathers, freedom as a possibility of choice is the indication of the imperfection of man's nature (fallen nature). Only God has absolute freedom³, since God is uncreated. 'God is uncreated' means 'God is unbounded by any "necessity" including his own existence'. Since we are created, such a reality does not exist for us i.e. we do not have absolute freedom. But

¹ Christos Yannaras on Morality

² The person in the Orthodox Tradition, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos

³ ibid

man, within his limits can, *as far as* possible acquire absolute freedom, only when he is reborn in Christ, when he becomes a dwelling of Trinitarian God and a Temple of the Holy Spirit. Then, by grace, he becomes fatherless, motherless and without genealogy. Thus freedom in patristic teaching is the *possibility* of the person determining his existence. And since by our biological birth there is no possibility of our living this out, therefore it is by spiritual birth, which takes place in the Church, that we acquire real freedom. Moreover, it is by our own will that we seek this new birth, which is clearly higher than the biological one.

Since in the Orthodox Church morality is not an objective measure for evaluating character or behaviour, but the dynamic response of personal freedom to the existential truth and authenticity of man, we do not use the term ethics/ethical life but this kind of 'spiritual living out' by our own will is the ascetical living of every Christian defined by the Church. This understanding is detailed with example in the next article of this issue. Ascetism in its simplest form of understanding is that as children of God, we have significant duties towards the manifestation of the true meaning of what it is to be a human being. To be truly human is to be righteous, pure, truthful, and good. Simply stated, it is to become by grace what God is by nature. In other words, it is to struggle to grow towards the infinite perfection of our Creator. We are called to "be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48).

Therefore, asceticism has purely dogmatic/doctrinal character, because it concerns the correct evaluation of concepts. Someone must know exactly what these concepts are, what type they are, and what relationship they bear to the reality that they symbolise or express." When a man who accepts the Christian doctrine/dogma

lives unworthily of it, it is much clearer to say he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian. The whole struggle is, as Vladimir Lossky so eloquently put it, to "live the dogma".

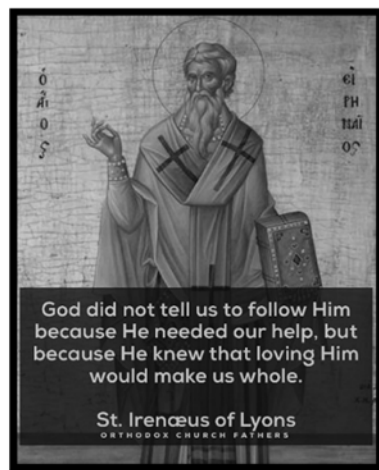
We see this in the history of the Church. Many people accept dogma in order to be saved, but they do not observe the ascetical teaching of the Church connected with the dogma.

"But what connection does this dogma – the Holy trinity, the incarnation, all these things – what connection does the dogma of the Holy Trinity have with man's therapeutic treatment (i.e. the ontological question of the truth and reality of human existence, the question of what man really is as distinct from what he ought to be)?

What saves is ascetical living which includes the doctrine/dogmas of the Church as a therapeutic treatment of man. For man to be saved means that he becomes "safe and sound", or whole, and realizes to the full his potential for existence and life beyond space time and conventional relationships: it means conquering death. The insatiable thirst common to all human existence is a thirst for his salvation, not for conventional improvements in character or behaviour. This is why for the Church, the question of ethics takes as its starting point the freedom of morality—freedom from any schematic valuation of utilitarian predetermination.

The strange thing is that most of the Orthodox Christians today in ignorance, live the ethical life rather than the ascetical life defined by the Church, and at the same time have become very much involved in moralising. In this context with only ethics, moralism develops⁴. For e.g. If we ask: "Why ought I to be unselfish?" and you reply "Because it is good for society," we may then ask, "Why should I care what's good for society except when it happens to pay me personally?" and then you will have to say, "Because you ought to be unselfish"—which simply brings us back to where we started.

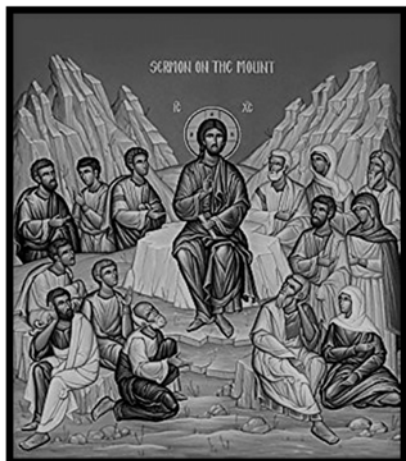
Similarly, if we consider only dogma that is separated from ethics, speculation prevails. Since it is viewed with the idea of being theoretical and not concerned with our everyday living, it just remains vague. For e.g. the view prevailed that the dogma exists and we ought to believe



⁴ Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, according to the spoken teaching of Fr. John Romanides, Volume 1

the dogma so as not to go to Hell. It is believed among many that God is such that, we shall go to Hell, if we do not accept the dogma, even though we are good people and that God punishes us for not believing in dogmas.

Thus, practical living should include the understanding of the dogma or the doctrine of the Church. The



doctrines/dogmas help in discernment. So as to guard the right path of faith, the Church has had to forge strict forms for the expression of the truths of faith: it has had to build up the fortresses of truth for the repulsion of

influences foreign to the Church (these definitions of truth declared by the Church have been called, since the days of the Apostles as dogmas).

In the discourses of Mar Philexenos of Mabbug we read thus, “As for the cure of our soul, the commandment of the word of God urges us to cure its diseases and to heal its passions and to satisfy its hunger with the nourishment of doctrine, to give it the drink of the knowledge of God, to clothe it in the clothing of faith, to put on it the shoe of the preparation of hope, and to rear it in good habits and in the fullness of all virtues, and in the obedience that prepares [it] for the work of the commandments of God. For while our inner actions are holy and our outer actions are pure, let us become vessels prepared for the spirit of God, so that it may dwell in us purely and in a holy way, while through knowledge and wisdom we heal the diseases that occur within us, and heal the wounds of sin from our soul.”

To conclude in the words of H.G Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, “He thus “was seen on earth and had concourse with human beings” (Baruch 3:38), so that men may no longer need to rely on their own notions for their view of self-existent, making up doctrines out of conjectures and guess work. Rather, convinced that truly God was manifested in the flesh, let us believe this alone

to be the ‘mystery of Godliness’, the faith handed over to us by the Logos-God Himself, in direct face to face conversation with the Apostles. Let us then receive the teaching concerning Transcendent Nature, given to us through a mirror and as in a paradox (ainigmatos), through the most ancient Scriptures concretised as Law, the Prophets, and Proverbial wisdom, as a witness to the Truth revealed to us reverently (eusebos) apprehending the sense of words, in accord with the faith (hos....pistei) set forth by Lord of All, let us guard that faith in literal and untampered purity, regarding the slightest deviation from the words traditionally handed down as the highest blasphemy and impiety.”.

The Adventure of Freedom



The teaching about the human person is an existential fact⁵. When the Fathers busied themselves

with theological topics, they did not do so out of philosophical interest, but because they were sure that distortion of dogma about God seriously upsets the matter of man’s salvation. Moreover, the dogmas are medicines which cure man and guide him to acquiring health. The same is true concerning man. Our occupation with the question of what man is, what is his ontology, what are his interpersonal relations, what is the depth of man’s purpose, are topics which form the essential part of Christianity, but which also interest man directly. Moreover, the so-called existential problems have first place in contemporary life.

Analyses of the person are essential, because within this framework we can solve social problems as well. A society cannot exist without man. Man is making our society and social institutions ill. A person who is ill creates various disturbances and is a divisive factor.

⁵ The person in the Orthodox Tradition, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos



The mask destroys the unity of society. If a man *is not* real person (which he becomes through ascetical living), he *cannot* live in love and freedom. Societies

automatically become dominated by tyranny and hatred. But by saying this, it does not mean that we expect man to improve first, and society after that. The struggles must go in parallel, with *priority* given to cure of man.

Fr. Georges Florovsky would begin his lectures in Christian Ethics with the sentence: "For Orthodox Christians there is no such thing as Christian Ethics." This is said so because as discussed in the first article of the same issue, morality is not an objective measure for evaluating character or behaviour, but the dynamic response of personal freedom to the existential truth and authenticity of man. The ascetical life in communion with God defines the person. The following example illustrates this fact.

Let us picture an imaginary hall⁶ out of which doors open into several rooms at different levels as in case of climbing the ladder.



We all are in the hall. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a

considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But getting in the room should be regarded as waiting still, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light: and, of course you must keep obeying

the rules which are common to the whole house. When you are in a room, you must keep asking for a better room, and not prefer only that room as it pleases you best by its paint and panelling. It is also true that you will keep returning to the hall from the rooms. After you return back to the hall, you should aim to climb up to the higher rooms.

This is how the ascetical life of an Orthodox Christian works. Human behavior is rooted in a personal relationship with God. The hall is a place where human beings act according to their personal knowledge, faith, experience, maturity, conditions, commitment and community life— for all of which they become, at some point, fully responsible.

Because we are created in the image and likeness of God, the goodness of God is not alien, or unrelated to our human condition as a law or rule externally imposed. Rather, goodness in human life is iconic, reflective of the divine goodness. Since our purpose is growth toward theosis or God-likeness, all good in the created sphere finds its content, inspiration, direction and force from God. As a consequence, there is no independent or autonomous good, no good which is in substance, 'secular.'



The good of human beings is to achieve theosis - and in the process, to realize our own humanity in its fullness. The good as seen and perceived in the Holy Trinity is the living reality in communion with which human good is realized. This being 'The Truth', each one of us strive towards theosis in the goodness of God. Our growth is like getting into each room which is at different levels. In each room we keep praying for further light and also keep the commandments, as the rules common to the whole house.

When does our growth become difficult?

⁶ Mere Christianity, C. S Lewis

If God is the good, the opposite of good, which is evil, is the absence of God from created life. Evil is the absence of good or the absence of communion with God. This creates a serious corruption, distortion and deformation of created existence. Thus, though evil *is* in an ultimate sense *non-existent* in experience its consequences are disastrous and truly experienced. When these consequences of evil are perceived as affecting the structures of the world and human nature in general, we usually refer to them as evil or more specifically, 'evils.' When similar behavior is perceived on a personal or interpersonal level, we tend to refer to it as 'sin.' In any case, it is both a cause and a result of the creature's separation from God.

This then permits evil and sin to achieve a force and drive of their own which pervade our existence, though, *never to the point* where the potential for good is completely obliterated; a measure of that remains no matter how deeply a person is submersed in evil. For example, everyone has heard people quarrelling⁷. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant. They say things like this: "How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?"—"That's my seat, I was there first"—"Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm"—"Why should you shove in first?"—"Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine"—"Come on, you promised." People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups. Here one person is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: "To hell with your standard." Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise.

It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever it can be called, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling

means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. We do not know exactly of the standard we should look up to and often end up in setting up some wrong standards for ourselves.

Thus, due to the widespread agreement on certain natural foundations given (along with) human freedom, passion and sin/sinfulness, human failure is realistic in our life. This failure is our return to the hall, which is our fall. **This fall arises out of man's free decision to reject personal communion with God and restrict himself to the autonomy and self-sufficiency of his own nature (Genesis 3:5).** *Existence⁸ is identified with instinctive natural need for independent survival. The natural needs of individual being, such as nourishment, self-perpetuation and self-sufficiency, become an end in themselves: they dominate man, and end up as "passions," causes of anguish and utmost pain, and ultimately cause of death.*

This natural need of individual survival distorts our personal freedom and our personal distinctiveness, which can be perfected/realised only as love. When we realise this, with the enduring hope and faith in the ultimate triumph of God, we struggle in all good to raise ourselves from the fall and aim towards the next level room through the grace of God.

We keep falling and return back to the hall but *through ceaseless repentance and constant renunciation of individual self-sufficiency (e.g. through physical self-denial the mind has to submit to the contest of love, the arrogance of the intellect has to submit to freedom from the ego) together with pursuit and activation of grace* we climb up to a higher room and *strive* towards the infinite perfection of our Creator. To fulfil our calling "*be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, "Darkness is dispelled only by light and the way to drive out evil is to practice goodness. We *have to*

⁷ Mere Christianity, C.S Lewis

⁸ Christos Yannaras on Morality

contemplate the characteristics of our Father as true children, and should fashion ourselves according to the image.”

The above example of the hall shows the process of growth in man towards theosis. We observe the fact that this experience towards theosis is an individual personal relationship with God, as each person⁹ is unique, distinct and unrepeatable person when compared to the other. It is this personal distinctiveness¹⁰ that is the image of God in us. This personal distinctiveness of each person can be known *only* through his communion and relationship with God and with his fellow men, in the freedom of love and *not* through his biological individuality. This is our existential reality. God is not a vague supreme being who can be approached only through intellect and emotions. He is not a prime mover or a blind energy that sets in motion the mechanism of the world as in case of running a machine. When speaking to Moses, He did not say “I am essence” or define himself as something standard. He said “I am He who is”. The God, whom the Church has experience is The God who reveals Himself in history as personal existence, as distinctiveness and freedom (**e.g. The Life of Saints**). That is each one comes to experience God and His good in all its fullness, through his personal experience. He speaks with man “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodos 33:11). Thus, to each person He is revealed in a measure of growth towards one’s own personal distinctiveness. Each person strives in his own freedom (in the absolute sense) to grow towards theosis. But, the rules/law of the house are common to all which has to be followed by all.

Thus, Christian ethics in this understanding is not a system of morality based on principles to which all reasonable, good-willed adults should voluntarily assent but a conviction that all human beings are made in God’s image and have God’s law “written on their hearts” (see Rom 2). If there is no God and eternal life, it is reasonable for people to do whatever they wanted even to steal, murder and rape— since nothing ultimately matters and all passes into oblivion. This is the definition of Christian Ethics in Orthodoxy.

Morality manifests what man is in principle as an image of God (a personal being) and also what he becomes through the **adventure of his freedom; the adventure of being transformed, or “in the likeness” of God**. Ethical

behavior, in this perspective, is never simply the application of formal principles or rules. Orthodox Christians accept certain rules of behaviour as normative and binding, which in our example of the hall are the rules or law common to the whole house. We are expected to keep these common rules or law which are the commandments of God, not because we consider them as universally applicable to human beings regardless of our beliefs and conditions, but because we believe them to be commanded by the living God who acts in our lives and to whom we are indebted and responsible. When Morality manifests in man according to the true Christian doctrine of being transformed in the likeness of God, man becomes a Cosmic Man. This is the adventure of Freedom.

In the words of H.G. Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, “Cosmic Man becomes the Divine Presence in Creation.”

Physical works of asceticism are a crucifixion with Christ, a submission to the Father’s will, and a resurrection with Christ into life-giving, filial communion with the Father. Through Christ our asceticism is brought to the Father, and thus every stage and every moment of asceticism is an invocation of the name of Christ. This invocation is able to water and bring to life the cosmopolitan desert of modern living, to give an immediate taste of God amidst the ignorance on which our prosperity is



grounded. The prerequisite for prayer of the heart, beseeching Christ’s mercy, is that man

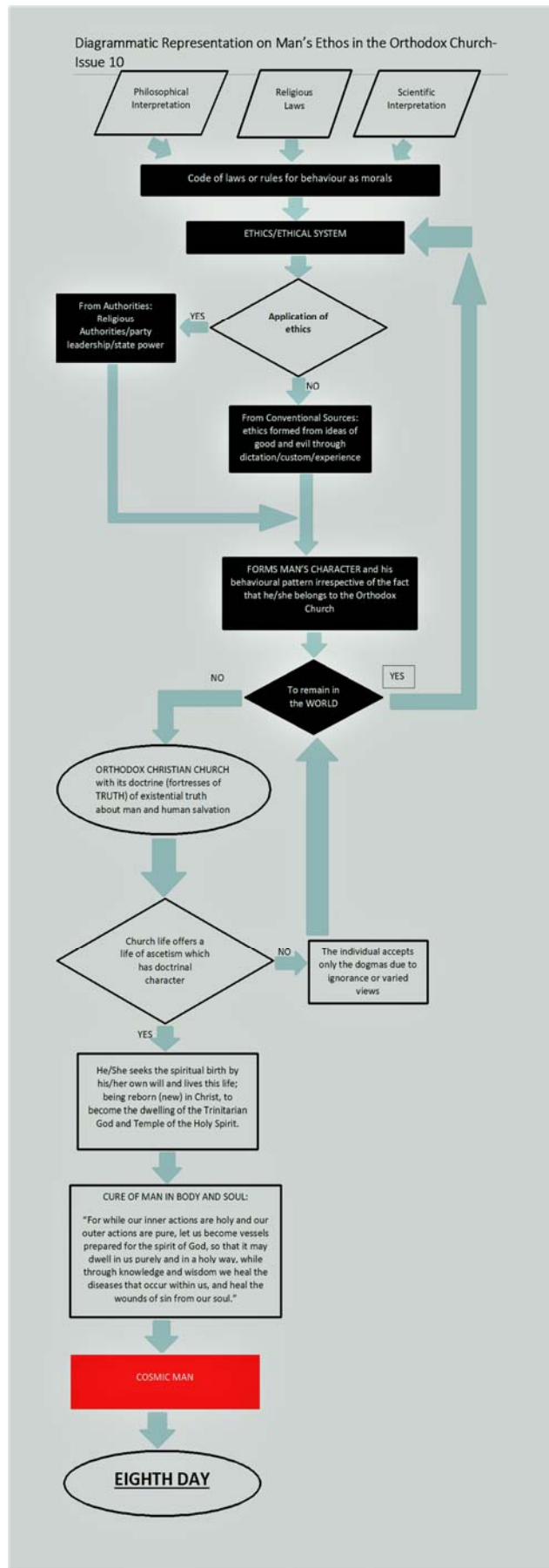
should seek to be humbled, even involuntarily. But today, it is the bankruptcy of our civilization, the tragedy of man’s rebellious and unsatisfied thirst for existential self-sufficiency and autonomous pleasure which has seared humiliation on our bodies and souls involuntarily.

If we can discern and recognise the deprivation of life in our individual lives, honestly and without compromises that gloss it over, then this is the first and crucial step towards letting the invocation of Christ’s name work within us, as an event of life and potential for existential gifts. Certainly man has to pass through many falls, and crushing defeats, through humiliations and suffering and repeated despair, in order to reach that ethos of

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

“innocence” which characterises the mature, and which permits the vision of unseen.



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