



Chancery
of the Holy Synod in Resistance

The Revelation of the Holy Trinity to the
Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

(Acts 7:55-56)

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By the prayers of our Most Reverend Metropolitan and Father Cyprian;
by the mediations of our Immaculate Mother, the *Theotokos*;
by the intercessions of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian;
by the entreaties of the Holy Protomartyr Stephen.

Phyle, Attica
2005

Preface

We confess “in accordance with the Divinely-inspired doctrines of the Saints and the pious mind of the Church”
(*Synodikon of Orthodoxy*)¹

THE PRESENT WORK sets forth concisely a dogmatic framework adequate for the correct interpretation of the revelation of the Holy Protomartyr Stephen (Acts 7:55-56). We deemed this necessary when certain texts, which express aberrant dogmatic and hermeneutic views, were brought to our attention.

On the basis of these views,

“after the Ascension of the Lord, we have at the right hand of God, that is, of the Holy Trinity, the God-Man Christ, that is, the incarnate Word of God,” the phrase “at the right hand of God, that is, of the Holy Trinity” being understood as “outside the Holy Trinity,” because, supposedly, if “the incarnate Word of God exists within the Holy Trinity,” then “we have ‘change’ in the trihypostaticity of the Holy Trinity.”

These seriously questionable views appear to derive from the following patently feeble hermeneutical premises, which preceded them and which serve as their basis.

In the passages Acts 7:55-56 and Revelation 7:10 and 22:1, “CHRIST GOD does not appear beside the Father,” but “CHRIST THE MAN appears beside God; and when we speak of God, here, we are speaking of the entire Godhead, the Holy Trinity”; “Jesus (or the Lamb) stands beside God IN HIS HUMAN NATURE. God exalted His human nature to His right hand. His Divine nature was always part of the Godhead” (*capitals in the original text*).

The heterodoxy of this teaching is obvious: the two natures of the one Christ are separated, in that the Divine nature exists “within” the Holy Trinity, whereas the human nature is “outside” or “beside” the Holy Trinity.

It is our hope that the present dogmatic framework, documented with citations from the Fathers, will demonstrate how utterly objectionable these views are.

¹ “Συνοδικὸν τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Οἰκουμενικῆς Ζ΄ Συνόδου ὑπὲρ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας” [“Synodal Decree of the Holy Seventh Ecumenical Synod in Defense of Orthodoxy”], in *Τριῶδιον Κατανυκτικόν* (Athens: Ekdoseis “Phos,” 1987), p. 162B.

In fact, the phrases “we are speaking of the entire Godhead” and “The Divine [nature of Christ] was always part of the Godhead” would alone give us sufficient grounds for being at least cautious toward these texts.

Let us remember, for example, that the one Divine Essence is common to the three co-honorable and indivisible Divine Hypostases, without, however, being comprised of Them, since They are not understood as being *parts* of the Godhead; each supremely Divine Hypostasis subsists, in and of itself, in one and the same Divine Essence, possessing the fullness of Divinity, with the One Divine Essence remaining indivisible and inseparable.

St. John of Damascus states characteristically in this regard: “For the Godhead is, to put it concisely, inseparable among separate Hypostases, and there is a single admixture and conjunction of Light, as in the case of three suns cleaving to each other without separation.”²

Great attentiveness is required when we engage in the theological interpretation of sacred texts, and we should never forget “what is the proper attitude of one who studies sacred theology,” so that we might avoid slipshod and irresponsible conjectures.

The saintly Evgenios Boulgares reminds us that

the student of sacred theology ought to approach such study with reverence and a humble frame of mind; for he is entering the ocean of the Divine Scriptures and making himself an initiate of the Divine words, than which there is nothing more venerable or more Divine, since here God is the speaker and the Holy Spirit is the interpreter: for, ‘upon whom shall I look,’ Scripture says, ‘save the man that is humble and meek and trembleth at My words?’³

*24 December 2005 (Old Style)
† Commemoration of the repose
of our spiritual mother Parthenia (24 December 2004),
who rests in the arms of the Holy Angels*

² St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. 1, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 829B. See also St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration xxxi (Fifth Theological Oration),” §14, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxvi, col. 149A; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Trinity*, §10, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. lxxvii, col. 1144BC.

³ Evgenios Boulgares, *Θεολογικὸν ἢ Ἱερὰ Θεολογία* [Theologikon, or Sacred Theology] (Thessalonica: Ekdoxis “Basileiou Regopoulou,” 1987), p. 89; Isaiah 66:2.



The Martyrdom of St. Stephen



Museum of the Holy Monastery of the Great Meteoron.
Menologion. 1552.

Apolytikion. Fourth Tone. Be swift to anticipate.

A royal diadem doth crown thine head from the contests which thou didst endure for Christ God, O First Contestant among the Martyrs; for when thou hadst censured the madness of the Jews, thou didst behold thy Savior at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, ever adjure Him on behalf of our souls.





The Revelation of the Holy Trinity to the Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into Heaven, and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God”
(Acts 7:55-56)

I

“The Holy Trinity Is Again Ineffably Present”

1. The Holy Fathers teach us, by Divine inspiration, that the Divine and Blessed Holy Trinity was revealed both at the fashioning and creation of man in Paradise and at his refashioning and recreation in the Incarnation.

2. Then, the three Persons of the supraëssential Trinity worked together: God the Father exhorted the Son and the Spirit: “Let us make man according to Our image and according to Our likeness.”¹

3. Now, “when the refashioning takes place, the Holy Trinity is again ineffably present; for, that [image] which had a single fashioning also has, again, a joint refashioning.”²

4. It was, therefore, through the common creative energy of the Holy Trinity that the Divinely-enhypostatized Body of Our Lord, that is, His human nature, was made and created from the immaculate blood of the Virgin Mary: the Father showed His good pleasure in the Incarnation of His Son, the Son effected it, and the Holy Spirit consummated it:

¹ Genesis 1:26.

² St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Annunciation of the *Theotokos* and Against the Impious Arios,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXII, col. 767. • This homily is by St. John Chrysostomos, but is ascribed by some manuscripts to St. Gregory of Nyssa.

The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.³

5. “For where the Holy Spirit is,” says St. Gregory of Nyssa, “there also is the Son, and where the Son is, there also is the Father. The Trinity is inseparable, the Trinity is indiscerptible, the Trinity is indivisible.”⁴ The Divine Chrysostomos reaffirms this point: “For wherever one Hypostasis of the Trinity is present, there the whole Trinity is present. For He is undivided in relation to Himself and is united in all exactitude.”⁵



³ St. Luke 1:35.

⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *op. cit.* • The phrase “the Trinity is indiscerptible” (“ἀμέριστος ἡ Τριάς”) is added by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἑορτοδρόμιον* [Commentary on the Great Feasts] (Venice: 1836), p. 220.

⁵ St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily XIII on Romans,” §8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LX, col. 519.

II “Flesh of God the Word”

1. The Divinely-enhypostatized Body of Our Savior Jesus Christ, that is, the human nature assumed by God the Word, was not God either by nature or by adoption, but was deified from the moment of conception, “from the first instant of Its existence,”¹ from the hypostatic union itself.

2. The Holy Fathers explicitly assure us that the ineffable conception and creation of His Flesh “of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” the hypostatic union, the assumption and deification of His Flesh, “took place simultaneously”;² “there was at once flesh, at the same time flesh of God the Word, animated flesh, flesh endowed with both reason and intellect.”³

3. The Divine Damascene teaches that “it [the assumed flesh] was deified by Him [the Word] as soon as it was brought into being, so that these three things took place simultaneously: the assumption of the flesh, its coming into being, and the deification of man. The conception [of the Word] and the existence [of the flesh in the Word Himself] were miraculously brought about at the same time.... [Christ,] from the first instant of the existence [of the assumed flesh] always existed according to both [His two natures], because the assumed flesh had its existence in the Word Himself from the moment of His Conception.”⁴

4. The assumed human nature, therefore, was deified and divinized “as a result of the actual hypostatic union and communion of God the Word,” “Who assumed human nature and divinized it.”⁵



¹ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 22, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1088A.

² St. Nikodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 220, n. 1.

³ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 2, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xciv, cols. 985C-988A.

⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Against the Jacobites*, §83, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1481CD; cf. *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 12, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1032C.

⁵ St. Nikodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 593.

III

“Nature Made One With God”

1. However, this deification of the Divinely-enhypostatized *assumptum* [the human nature assumed by the Word—*Trans.*] elevated it to a position incomparably superior to our own nature, and also to the rest of creation, in that it became “God by deification”¹ and “a nature made one with God”;² not only “the unsurpassable condescension” of the preëternal Word but “also the Divine and ineffable sublimity of the *assumptum* so exceeds all thought and discourse that it cannot in any way admit of comparison to the creation.”³

2. Through divinization the Divine nature of the Word “imparts its own splendors to the flesh,”⁴ and the humanity of Our Savior became a partaker of the excellences and splendors of His Divinity, but without departing from its physical limits or forfeiting its natural attributes in such a way as to be converted into Divinity; “the Lord’s flesh,” says the Divine Damascene, “was enriched with the Divine Energies on account of its most unalloyed union with the Word, that is to say, the hypostatic union, without undergoing the loss of any of its natural attributes.”⁵

3. St. Cyril of Alexandria, with reference to the preternatural “wealth” of the Divinely-enhypostatized *assumptum*, writes that ‘when we talk from the standpoint of what is superior, we speak of deification of the flesh, becoming the Word, exaltation, and the like, manifesting the wealth that accrues to the flesh from its union and connaturality with the Most High God the Word’; ‘for, through the hypostatic union, the flesh is said to have been deified, and to have become God and one in Divinity with the Word.’⁶

¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration xxxix,” §16, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxvi, col. 353B.

² St. Gregory Palamas, “Homily LVIII, ‘On the Salvific Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ,” §2, “Ἕλληνας Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (Thesalonica: Paterikai Ekdoseis “Gregorios ho Palamas,” 1986), Vol. xi, pp. 456-458.

³ See note 2.

⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1012C.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1069B.

⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the All-Holy Trinity*, §24, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. lxxvii, col. 1165C.

4. St. Anastasios of Antioch also adverts to the “Divine and ineffable sublimity” of the Master’s Body when he says that

‘the humanity of Christ is wholly God, imbued with God, and united with God,’ and ‘the all-holy body and the soul of Christ are so different in splendor and glory from our souls and bodies’ that ‘we say that His all-holy body and everything belonging to it was imbued with God, that His immaculate soul was united with God and that all of its attributes were imbued with God and one with God, without confusion, change, or division, each nature preserving its own identity in a single composite Person, according to the tradition piously handed down to us by the blessed Fathers.’⁷

5. The Divine Damascene declares that

‘The Lord’s flesh’ ‘is said to have been deified’ ‘not by a change of nature,’ ‘but by the mutual circumincission [περιχώρησις] of the natures,’ ‘and to have become one with God and to have become God, as St. Gregory the Theologian says: “one of whom deified, while the other was deified, and, I make bold to assert, one with God; that which anointed became man, and that which was anointed became God.”’⁸



⁷ St. Anastasios of Antioch, *Guide*, §24, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXXIX, col. 281B, D.

⁸ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1069A; cf. *Against the Jacobites*, §83, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1481C. • Cf. also St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration XLV,” §13, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXVI, col. 641A.

IV “Without Confusion or Division”

1. The Fourth Œcumenical Synod proclaimed that the Church confesses “One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, known in two natures without confusion, alteration, division, or separation.”¹

2. The humanity of the Lord, assumed by the Divinity “in an ineffable union,” existed from the very beginning, continues to exist, and will exist eternally “in one and the same Hypostasis of the Word”:

The two natures in Christ remain inseparable and indivisible from each other, united in the same Hypostasis; for Christ, being twofold in essences and natures, that is, in His Divinity and His humanity, and in their essential and natural attributes, wills, and energies, is simple in His Hypostasis. Therefore, Christ, being, as God, the beloved Son of the Father before the ages, also subsequently, as man, became the beloved Son of God the Father; for the Son begotten of the Father before the ages as God and the Son born of the Virgin in the last times as man are one and the same; not one and another, nor divided into two Sons—God forbid!—for this is the heretical attitude that marks the babble spouted by Nestorios the man-worshipper.²

3. On account of this unconfused, indivisible, and ineffable union, the erstwhile “simple, incomposite, incorporeal, and uncreated,” and now, still one, yet “composite” Hypostasis of God the Word incarnate, “is adored with a single adoration together with His flesh”;³ “for the Lord is adored with one and the same adoration together with the flesh that He assumed.”⁴

4. “I adore the combined natures of Christ,” says the Divine Damascene, “because of the Divinity that is united to the flesh. For I do not introduce a fourth Person into the Trinity—God forbid!—but I

¹ Ioannes N. Karmires, *Τὰ Δογματικά καὶ Συμβολικά Μνημεῖα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* [The Dogmatic and Credal Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church] (Athens: 1960), Vol. 1, p. 175.

² St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἐρμηνεῖα εἰς τὰς Ἑπτὰ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς* [Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles] (Venice: 1806), p. 165.

³ St. John of Damascus, *Ἐξαίτ Exposition*, Bk. III, chs. 5, 2 *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, cols. 1109c, 1104c.

⁴ St. Nikodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 489.

confess one Person of God the Word and of His flesh; for the Trinity remains Trinity, even after the Incarnation of the Word.”⁵

5. In the Divine and Blessed Trinity, after the Incarnate Economy, there was no “change” either in the number of the supremely Divine Hypostases or in the Divine Essence, since in the ineffable union of Divinity and humanity it is not the case that the two natures were united in themselves and straightforwardly, so as to constitute a single composite nature; nor is the case that two hypostases were united, that is, the human nature, as “an individually subsisting hypostasis in itself”⁶ with the Hypostasis of the Word. Rather, the two natures were united hypostatically, that is, the humanity received its existence (ὕπéστη) in the Hypostasis of God the Word, which thus is, and is said to be, a composite hypostasis “of two perfect natures, Divinity and humanity.”⁷

6. The hypostasis of the Word “is always a Hypostasis of both [the natures] indivisibly and inseparably,” “belonging all to the one [the Divine] and all to the other [the human] indiscerptibly and entirely.”⁸

7. Since, therefore, “Christ is one, perfect God and perfect man,” we worship Christ the Savior

“with the Father and the Spirit, in a single adoration together with His immaculate flesh, not saying that the flesh is not to be worshipped; for it is worshipped in the one Hypostasis of the Word, which has become hypostasis for it [the flesh].”⁹

8. When a Hierarch is consecrated, he confesses, concerning the human nature of Christ, very pointedly, that

His holy flesh is worshipped together with His Divinity by an honorific adoration, the Holy Trinity not admitting any addition—God forbid! For the Trinity remains Trinity even after the union of the Only-Begotten, and His holy flesh remains inseparable and still abides with Him even unto eternity.¹⁰

⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, cols. 1013C-1016A.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 9, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1017B.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1009A.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1017A.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1013C.

¹⁰ “Order for the Consecration of a Bishop,” Second Profession of Faith, in *Εὐχολόγιον τὸ Μέγα* (Athens: Ekdotikos Oikos “Aster,” 1970), p. 173.

V

“The Most Distinctive Attribute”

1. After the ineffable hypostatic union of the two natures of the Savior and since His supremely Divine Hypostasis is henceforth a composite hypostasis, there is indeed a “difference” between the Divine Persons, which constitutes the “most distinctive attribute” of One of the Holy Trinity: God the Word

differs from both the Father and the Spirit...in being at once both God and man; for this we recognize to be the most distinctive attribute of the Hypostasis of Christ.¹

2. Nevertheless, this “difference” does not introduce any “change” or “alteration” whatsoever into the supraessential Trinity, since the difference is hypostatic, and the hypostatic “attributes” in God, that is, “Uncaused, Caused, Unbegotten, Begotten, and Proceeding,” do not impair the Divine unity, for “they are not indicative of the Essence, but of the mutual relationship and mode of existence [of the Persons].”²

3. However, in all that pertains to the Incarnation of the Word, “neither the Father nor the Spirit has any share, save in terms of good pleasure and ineffable wonderworking”;³ to be sure, the Holy Trinity participates and is active in the Incarnation, but it is the Father “by His good pleasure,” the Son “by effecting it Himself,” and the Spirit “by coöperation,” as St. Maximos says:

[I]n the entire Son, Who Himself effected the Mystery of our salvation through the Incarnation, was the entire Father according to essence, not becoming incarnate, but expressing His good pleasure therein; the entire Holy Spirit was in the entire Son according to essence, not taking flesh, but coöperating with the Son in His ineffable Incarnation for our sake.⁴

¹ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 7, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1009B.

² *Ibid.*, Bk. I, ch. 10, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 837C.

³ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, ch. 10, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 841A [in this context, by “wonderworking” (θαυματουργίαν) St. John means the miracle of the Incarnation, in which the Holy Spirit coöperated (see *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 985B)—*Trans.*]

⁴ St. Maximos the Confessor, *To Thalassios, Concerning Various Difficult Passages in Holy Scripture*, Question LX, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xc, col. 624BC.

VI

“A Distinction in Thought”

1. The two natures of Our Savior that came together are always viewed together and are never divided, even though they are enumerated: “They are united without confusion” and “divided without separation.”¹

2. There is, to be sure, a distinction or differentiation to be made between uncreated and created, Divinity and co-Divine flesh in the God-Man, but “with all reverence” and only when we refer to the mode of difference between the two natures, which are “numbered according to the manner of their difference only” and divided without separation, since “number applies to the things that differ [the natures], and things that differ are numbered according to the manner in which they differ.”² Even then, however, a distinction is to be made only “with subtle thoughts,” “in thought alone,”³ “by fine thoughts, that is, subtle mental ideations”⁴ and “according to a merely notional division.”⁵

3. “If you distinguish the created from the uncreated by fine thoughts, that is, subtle intuitions of the mind,” says St. John of Damascus, “then the flesh is servile, as long as it is not united to God the Word; but once it is united [with Him] hypostatically, how will it be servile?”⁶

4. “For God would not be His [Christ’s] Father,” unless He be considered one of us, “having appropriated our personality,” “a distinction being made by fine mental ideations between what is seen and what is thought,” that is, between the humanity and the Divinity.⁷

5. St. John of Damascus concludes:

¹ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 8, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1013B.

² See note 1.

³ Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John of Damascus, and Mark of Ephesus, and the *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy, cited in St. Nikodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 184, n. 1.

⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 21, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1085B (cf. St. Cyril of Alexandria, “Epistle XLVI [Second Epistle to Succensus],” §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXVII, col. 245A).

⁵ “Συνοδικόν,” in *Τριῳδίου*, p. 161A.

⁶ See note 4.

⁷ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 24, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1092C.

His [Christ's] flesh, therefore, according to its own nature—if one were to make fine mental distinctions between what is seen and what is thought—is not deserving of worship, since it is created. But once it is united with God the Word, it is worshipped on account of Him and in Him.⁸

6. The *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy superbly expresses, on this issue, “the Divinely-inspired doctrines of the Saints and the pious mind of the Church,” when it declares:

“To those who do not, with all reverence, use the distinction in thought solely for the purpose of affirming the alterity of the two natures that are ineffably conjoined in Christ and are unconfusedly and indivisibly united in Him, but misuse such a distinction [in thought] and say that the *assumptum* is different not only in nature, but also in dignity’ [since it is placed “outside” or “next to” the Holy Trinity], ‘as daring, through such statements, to divide the one Christ, our Lord and God, hypostatically, Anathema, Anathema, Anathema.’⁹



⁸ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, ch. 3, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1105A.

⁹ “Συνοδικόν,” in *Τριῳδιον*, p. 158B.

VII

“He Was Not Changed into Incorporeality”

1. After the glorious Resurrection of Our Savior, His human nature, which was divinized from the very beginning, became impassible and incorruptible and laid aside the unblameworthy passions, to wit, those that “are naturally inherent in all men”¹: “corruptibility, hunger and thirst, sleep, weariness, and the like,”² since, in His inexpressible Œconomy, the Word “assumed the whole man and all of man’s attributes, save sin.”³

2. Nevertheless, the co-Divine flesh of the Word, as the Divine Mystagogues teach us,

was not changed into incorporeality, nor did it lay aside all of its natural properties, to wit, quantity, quality, shape, tridimensionality, spatial circumscription, and finitude; for, if it had discarded these properties, it would no longer have remained a body, but would have had to depart from the limitations of human nature.⁴

3. “After His Resurrection from the dead, He laid aside all of the [unblameworthy] passions,” says St. John of Damascus, “but laid aside none of the elements of His nature, neither body nor soul; rather, He retained both His body and His rational, intellectual, volitional, and active soul, and thus He ascended into the heavens.”⁵

4. It is precisely because “even after the union, the natures remain unconfused and their properties remain intact”⁶ that, according to the decree of the Seventh Œcumenical Synod, “Christ is depicted even now in the heavens as possessing a circumscribed body.”⁷

5. Furthermore, after the Resurrection, the incorrupt and glorified Divinely-enhypostatized flesh of Christ was not only not absorbed by His Divine nature, was not only “not changed into incorporeality,”⁸

¹ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 20, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1081B.

² *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, ch. 1, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1101D.

³ See note 1.

⁴ St. Nikodemos, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 594.

⁵ See note 2.

⁶ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 17, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1069B.

⁷ See note 4.

⁸ See note 4.

but, as equal in Divinity, honor, and glory, ascended and “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high in the heavens,”⁹ that is, “at the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁰ He quite literally and precisely sits “with His Father on His Throne.”¹¹

6. The *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy marvellously summarizes “the pious mind of the Church”:

Eternal be the memory, Eternal be the memory, Eternal be the memory of those who say that the flesh of the Lord, exceedingly exalted by the union itself and placed high above all honor, having become one with God from the very outset of the union, without transformation, alteration, confusion, or change, on account of the hypostatic union, and remaining inseparable and inseverable from God the Word Who assumed it, is honored with Him with equal glory, worshipped with a single adoration, and established on the Royal and Divine Throne at the right hand of God the Father, as being enriched by the prerogatives of Divinity, the properties of the natures being preserved.¹²

7. Seated henceforth on the Throne of Divinity, the flesh of the Word, wholly God, imbued with God, and united with God in incorruption and replete with glory, is a “fountain of immortal life”;¹³ that is, it imparts

‘incorruption also to the rest of the corruptible bodies of men’; ‘just as a fountain, divided into many streams, gives drink to many and life to all things, so also the Resurrection of the Divinely-enhypostatized Body of the Lord has become the fountain of immortal life for all of us.’¹⁴

8. “The flesh of the Lord,” declares St. John of Damascus, “which was united hypostatically to God the Word Himself, did not depart from its natural mortality, but became life-giving on account of its hypostatic union with the Word.”¹⁵

9. And when we partake of the “Divine Coal” in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, our sins are consumed, our hearts are illumined,

⁹ Hebrews 1:3; 8:1.

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2.

¹¹ Cf. Revelation 3:21.

¹² “Συνοδικόν,” in *Τριῳδιον*, pp. 160B-161A.

¹³ Canon of Great Saturday, Orthros, Canon, Ode 6, *Troparion* 2, in *Τριῳδιον*, p. 482B.

¹⁴ St. Nikodemos, *Εορτοδρόμιον*, p. 398.

¹⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. III, ch. 21, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, cols. 1084B-1085A.

‘and by partaking of the Divine fire we are set afire and deified,’ since ‘the Bread of Communion is not plain bread, but bread united with Divinity. A body united with Divinity is not a single nature; rather, the nature of the body is one, while that of the Divinity united with it is another; hence, the combination thereof is not one nature, but two.’¹⁶



¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, ch. 13, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, col. 1149B.

VIII

“The Unoriginate and Preëternal Glory”

1. References in sacred texts to the “Throne of God,” as also discourse about the “right hand of God,” should be understood in a manner befitting God, and not in human terms: “these words are expressions of accommodation to our limitations,”¹ since God certainly does not sit, such that He has a “Throne,” “nor is He in a place, such that He has a ‘right’ or a ‘left.’”² “God the Father, being incorporeal, has neither right nor left, for these properties belong to bodies,”³ and “the concepts of right and left have no application to the incorporeal essence.”⁴

2. “It should be known,” says St. John of Damascus, that “in Divine Scripture,” “everything that is said of God in corporeal terms has a hidden meaning, which, through things familiar to us, teaches us things that transcend us”; “everything that is said of God as if He had a body is said symbolically and has a loftier meaning; for the Divine is simple and formless.” Such things are said “in corporeal terms” because “it is quite impossible for us,” as men, “to understand or speak of the Divine and lofty and immaterial Energies of the Godhead”⁵ unless we use images, types, and symbols drawn from created reality.

3. The word “Throne” has always been a “symbol of sovereignty”⁶ and consequently “is an allusion to royalty”;⁷ that is, it discloses royalty figuratively and symbolically.

¹ St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Παύλου αἱ Δέκα Τέσσαρες Ἐπιστολαὶ Ἑρμηνευθεῖσαι ὑπὸ Θεοφυλάκτου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Βουλγαρίας* [The Fourteen Epistles of St. Paul, Interpreted by Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria] (Venice: 1819), Vol. 1, p. 100, n. 1 (on Romans 8:34, with reference to Procopios of Gaza).

² See note 1.

³ Evthymios Zigabenos, *Commentary on the Psalter, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXVIII, col. 1084A (on Psalm 109:1).

⁴ St. Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXV, col. 552D (on Acts 2:33-35).

⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. 1, ch. 11, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCIV, cols. 844B, 841AB; cf. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Holy Trinity*, ch. 12, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXVII, cols. 1145D-1148D.

⁶ Zigabenos, *Commentary on the Psalter, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXVIII, col. 493C (on Psalm 44:7).

⁷ St. Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Exposition of Hebrews, Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CXXV, col. 200A (on Hebrews 1:8).

4. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever”⁸: the “Throne” of God, which is forever firm and unshakable, “is a title of dignity”⁹ and “a mark of royalty”;¹⁰ that is, “the eternal Throne is a sign of royalty, dominion, and Divinity”¹¹ and reveals “His [Christ’s] royalty and Divinity.”¹²

5. Likewise, the phrase “at the right hand of God,” according to Zigabenos, shows “the genuineness, affinity, and equality of honor [of the Son]”¹³ and is indicative of His “God-befitting Glory”¹⁴ and His “majesty.”¹⁵

6. “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand”¹⁶: “right hand,” says St. Basil the Great, “signifies a relationship of equality,” “equality of dignity,” “since ‘right hand’ is not to be understood in a corporeal sense (for if that were so, there would be something ‘sinister’ about God [the Saint is intimating that the “left hand” of God would suggest negative qualities, as it does in most classical cultures]; rather, Scripture puts before us the majesty of the dignity of the Son by using honorific terms that indicate the seat of honor.”¹⁷ “When you hear ‘at the right hand’ and ‘in the highest,’” says St. John of Damascus, “do not suppose that they are indicative of places; for the Divine is uncircumscribable.”¹⁸ “Not because God is confined by a place, but in

⁸ Psalm 44:7.

⁹ St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomios*, I.25, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxix, col. 568b.

¹⁰ Oikoumenios, *Commentary on Hebrews*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxix, col. 288b (on Hebrews 1:8).

¹¹ St. Nikodemos, *Παύλου αἱ Δέκα Τέσσαρες Ἐπιστολαὶ*, Vol. III, p. 275 (on Hebrews 1:8).

¹² St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of Hebrews*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xcvi, col. 933a (on Hebrews 1:8).

¹³ See note 3.

¹⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of Hebrews*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xcvi, col. 932a (on Hebrews 1:3).

¹⁵ St. Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Exposition of Romans*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxiv, col. 456a (on Romans 8:34).

¹⁶ Psalm 149:1.

¹⁷ St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 6, §15, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxxii, cols. 89c, 93b. • “Persons of honor always sit on the right. Here, the ‘honorific term that indicates the seat of honor’ is the verse ‘Sit Thou at My right hand,’ the honorific placing of the Son at the right hand of the Father” (Prof. Theodoros Zeses).

¹⁸ See note 14.

order to show His equality of honor to the Father,” concludes St. Theophylact.¹⁹

7. We confess, therefore, together with St. Athanasios the Great and St. John of Damascus, that the God-Man, after His glorious Ascension, sat “bodily” “at the right hand of God the Father,” without of course meaning “the Father’s physical right hand,” and without circumscribing “places and forms of glory”; “for how could He Who is uncircumscribable have a topical right hand? Right and left hands belong to what is circumscribed,” and “God is uncreated, infinite, formless, and uncircumscribed”; “what we call the right hand of the Father is the glory and honor of the Godhead, in which the Son of God, Who existed as God before the ages and is coëssential with the Father, and Who in the last times became incarnate, is seated bodily, His flesh being glorified together with Him; for He, along with His flesh, is adored with one adoration by all of creation.”²⁰

8. It is quite evident, in conclusion, that the phrase “at the right hand of the Father” does not refer at all to anything created, nor, assuredly, does it suggest a place or state for the co-Divine flesh of the Savior “outside the Holy Trinity,” since—according to the official Confession of Faith of the Orthodox Church, when a Hierarch is consecrated—it is proclaimed that

‘After the Resurrection’ of Christ ‘from the dead, He ascended into Heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father; and by “the right hand of the Father” I do not mean anything topical or circumscribed; what I mean by “the right hand of the Father” is the unoriginate and preëternal Glory which the Son had before the Incarnation and also after the Incarnation.’²¹



¹⁹ St. Theophylact, *Exposition of Hebrews*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. cxxv, col. 196A (on Hebrews 1:3).

²⁰ St. Athanasios the Great, *Saying and Interpretations of the Parables of the Holy Gospel*, *Question 45*, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xxviii, col. 728C; St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition*, Bk. IV, ch. 2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. xciv, col. 1104BC.

²¹ “Order for the Consecration of a Bishop,” Second Profession of Faith, in *Εὐχολόγιον τὸ Μέγα*, pp. 172-173.

IX

“The Light is Visible and Comprehensible by Virtue of Itself”

1. The God-Man, before His saving Passion, spoke before the Sanhedrin about a new state of affairs, which would pertain to Himself and would prevail “hereafter”:

‘Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven’; ‘Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.’¹

2. “On the right hand of power” certainly does not signify “a bodily stance,” but “the glory that will be manifested from Heaven.” The Lord said about Himself, in human terms, that He Who will appear “in the greatest visible glory” “will be seen on the right hand.”²

3. The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen, also standing before the Sanhedrin, in a state of deification, “being full of the Holy Spirit,” beheld what the Lord had foretold: “he...saw the glory of God,...and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”³

4. According to Orthodox Patristic teaching,

‘The deification of man is his participation in the Energy of God’; in the experience of deification, man ‘comes to knowledge of God by means of God; the medium of knowledge is God Himself’; ‘he does not see anything resembling human things, apart from the glorified human nature of Christ, which is the center of this revelation. And when he sees Christ, then he sees also the Father in the Holy Spirit.’⁴

5. According to St. Gregory Palamas, the Uncreated Light is “visible and comprehensible by virtue of itself,”⁵ that is, it is not seen or comprehended by any activity of the human mind whatever; rather, in the experience of deification, the energy of the Light transforms the senses and the mind, so that they acquire properties which are by Grace

¹ St. Matthew 26:64 (=St. Mark 14:62); St. Luke 22:69.

² Viçtor of Antioch, in *Catena Græcorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, ed. J.A. Cramer (Oxford: at the University Press, 1840), Vol. 1, p. 430.

³ Acts 7:55-56.

⁴ Protopresbyter John S. Romanides, *Πατερική Θεολογία* [Patristic Theology] (Thessalonica: Ekdoseis “Parakatatheke,” 2004), pp. 166-168.

⁵ St. Gregory Palamas, *Discourse in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, Bk. 11, ch. 3, §56, in *Συγγράμματα* [Writings], ed. Panagiotēs Chrestou (Thessalonica: 1962), Vol. 1, p. 589 (ll. 25-26).

uncreated and Divine. In such a way, in this state that transcends sense perception and intellection, the senses do not perceive, nor does the mind comprehend, anything save this Light itself:

‘When the mind has transcended all intellectual activity and becomes preëminently sightless, it is filled with this supremely beautiful splendor, attaining to God by Grace and, through a union surpassing comprehension, ineffably having and beholding this very Light that is intrinsically visible by virtue of itself’;⁶ ‘for that Light is visible by virtue of itself, since it is inaccessible to any created cognitive faculty, and visible to those deemed worthy.’⁷

6. When, therefore, in the sacred Book of Acts it is written, in human terms, that St. Stephen saw the God-Man standing “on the right hand of God,” this means that the Protomartyr, participating in the experience of deification that transcends sense perception and intellection, beheld God by means of God, beheld Christ the Savior, in a manner befitting God, in the glory and dignity of the Godhead, and through Him beheld the Father in the Holy Spirit; that is, he beheld the Supraëssential and Most Regal Holy Trinity.

7. The phrases “at the right hand of God” and “glory of God” not only do not express distinct states, but are synonymous; they signify uncreated realities, which are apprehended solely in a manner befitting God, that is, when a man “becomes full of the Holy Spirit,” amid the Uncreated Light.

8. In the “Regeneration,”⁸ in the eschatological deification of man, “we shall be like Him [God]; for we shall see Him as He is,”⁹ that is, we shall see the Glory of God the Father in the Holy Spirit through our participation in the human nature of the Son, which is one with God, wholly God, united with God, and imbued with God, seated together with His Divine nature, and honored with equal glory, on the Throne of the Divine, Blessed, and All-Pure Trinity.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 589 (ll. 27-29)-p. 590 (l. 1).

⁷ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 2, §15, Vol. I, p. 669, ll. 4-6. • It should be noted, at this juncture, that St. Gregory’s treatment of the revelation of St. Stephen is very interesting: see *Discourse in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, Bk. I, ch. 3, §§30-31, in *Συγγράμματα* Vol. I, pp. 440-442; *Refutations of Akindynos*, Bk. II, ch. 16, §76, in *Συγγράμματα* ed. Panagiotes Chrestou (Thessalonica: 1970), Vol. III, pp. 138-139; *ibid.*, Bk. VI, ch. 10, §30.

⁸ St. Matthew 19:28.

⁹ 1 St. John 3:2.

9. From this Throne, “the throne of God and of the Lamb,” there eternally proceeds a “river of water of life,”¹⁰ that is, the inexhaustible gifts of the divinizing Spirit, or the common Energy of the Holy Trinity, to Whom belong glory and thanksgiving, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen!



¹⁰ Revelation 22:1.