16. *De veritate* Q. 27, A. 3. [Lossky may be referring to the following passage in *De veritate* 27, 3: "The will of man is changed by grace, since it is grace which prepares the will of man to will good, according to Augustine."]

17. See the examples cited in the excellent little book of Father Plus, op. cit., 36–44.

18. See the "Conversation of Saint Seraphim with N. A. Motovilov" [in Lazarus Moore, *St Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography* (New Sarov Press, 1994). Internet: http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/wonderful.aspx.]

19. And yet this doctrine, borrowed from Latin doctors, may be found in some Orthodox theological manuals, for example in Peter Moghila's *Confession*.

20. Saint Symeon the New Theologian even asserts that every Christian must have this experience *in via* if he or she wishes to enjoy the divine Light *in patria*.

21. Saint Maximus, *Capita theologica et oeconomica, Centuria 1* (PG 90, 1209). [English translation from St Maximos the Confessor, "Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice," in *The Philokalia*, The Complete Text, Volume 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), First Century, 73: 180–81.]

Grace in the Orthodox Church

by Vladimir Lossky
Introduction and translation by Paul Ladouceur

Lossky said, *"we are confessing, in our poor and always defective human language, the mode of existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one sole God who cannot but be Trinity, because He is the living God of Revelation, Who, though unknowable, has made Himself known, through the incarnation of the Son, to all who have received the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father and is sent into the world in the name of the incarnate Son."*
The Trinitarian processions in revelation thus produce the energies which human beings experience as grace and by which they are sanctified or "deified."

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Introduction

Vladimir Lossky (1903–58) delivered this paper at the Institut de théologie orthodoxe Saint-Denys in the early 1950s; the paper was published in the periodical *Présence orthodoxe* in 1979 and 2008. In the early 1950s Lossky was Dean and Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Church History at the Institut Saint-Denys, founded in 1944 by the Église Orthodoxe Catholique de France (ECOF). ECOF, under the leadership of Father Eugraph Kovalevsky, was a Western-rite Orthodox Church, then under the Patriarchate of Moscow. In 1953, ECOF

cut its ties with Moscow, and Lossky, deeply committed to the Moscow Patriarchate, resigned from the Institut Saint-Denys. He subsequently taught in the context of pastoral training organized by the Moscow Patriarchate in France and lectured in Catholic institutions in Paris.

Vladimir Lossky was engaged in ecumenical dialogues primarily in two contexts, within the institutional framework of the Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius, and, on a less structured basis, with Roman Catholic theologians and intellectuals in France. The Fellowship was founded in 1925 to promote ties between Orthodox and Anglicans and was very active in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Fathers Sergius Bulgakov, Georges Florovsky, Lev Gillet, and Sergius Chetverikov were the principal Orthodox participants in the Fellowship in the pre-war period. Lossky was active in the Fellowship beginning in 1947, participating frequently in the Fellowship's annual summer meetings, together with other Orthodox theologians such as Georges Florovsky (until his departure for the United States), Lev Gillet, and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel.

Beginning in the 1930s, Lossky had frequent contacts with Catholic theologians and philosophers in Paris who turned to the study of the early Fathers of the Church, the ressourcement movement which was at the source of the nouvelle théologie within the Catholic Church. Through these contacts, after the war Lossky became associated with the new ecumenical periodical *Dieu vivant*, which published several of his important essays. He also participated in the Collège philosophique under the direction of the renowned philosopher Jean Wahl.

Lossky's essay on the doctrine of grace in the Orthodox Church is thus set in an ecumenical context: the main thrust of the essay is to express Orthodox theology of grace in contrast to Western theologies of grace. Lossky, who studied medieval history and thought at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, was very conversant with Western philosophy and theology, especially

5. [Gottschalk of Orbais (c. 808–867) was a Saxon theologian, monk and poet. He was an early advocate of the doctrine of double predestination and his writings were later invoked by the Jansenists. Johannes Scotus Eriugena (c. 815–c. 877) was an Irish theologian, Neoplatonist philosopher, and poet, known in particular for having translated into Latin and made commentaries on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.]

6. [Jansenism, named aft er the Dutch theologian and bishop Cornelius Otto Jansen (1585–1638), emphasized original sin, human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and predestination, major themes of the Reformation, especially Calvinism. Molinism, named for Luis de Molina (1535–1600), a Spanish Jesuit, attempts to reconcile divine providence with human free will.]

7. See on this subject the excellent article by Mme Lot-Borodine, *"La doctrine de la grâce et de la liberté dans l'orthodoxie gréco-orientale"* (Besançon, 1939) [reprinted in Myrra Lot-Borodine, *La Déification de l'homme* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1970)].

8. Saint John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 4 (PG 94, 800). See also Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 38 in Theoph.* (PG 36, 317).

9. *Ad Amphilochius* (PG 32, 869).

10. Saint Dionysius the Aeropagite, *De div. nom.* 9, 1 (PG 3, 909).

11. *Capit. Phys.* 68–69 (PG 150, 1169).

12. Saint Photius, *Mystagogia Spiritus Sancti* 20 (PG 3, 909)

13. [Denis Pétau (1583–1652), also known as Dionysius Petavius, was a French Jesuit theologian.]

14. The primary and unique source of all these subsequent misunderstandings lies in the dogma of the procession of the Holy Spirit *ab utroque* [lit. "from both"— the filioque], confessed by the Church of Rome. The doctrine of grace specific to Western Christianity is intimately tied to this dogma. But this complex question should be the subject of a more specific study.

15. Raoul Plus, SJ, *Dieu en nous* (Toulouse, 1931): 142. [Cornelius Cornelii a Lapide (1567–1637) was a Flemish Jesuit and Biblical scholar.]

> The Holy Spirit is present unconditionally in all things, in that he embraces all things, provides for all, and vivifies the natural seeds within them. He is present in a specific way in all who are under the Law, in that he shows them where they have broken the commandments and enlightens them about the promise given concerning Christ. In all who are Christians he is present also in yet another way in that he makes them sons of God. But in none is he fully present as the author of wisdom except in those who have understanding, and who by their holy way of life have made themselves fit to receive his indwelling and deifying presence.[21]

Endnotes:

1. Published posthumously as *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (J. Vrin, 1960; 1973; 1998). Foreword by Maurice de Gandillac (who translated the complete works of Pseudo-Dionysius into French); Preface by Étienne Gilson (well-known Catholic medievalist, under whom Lossky studied at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France).

2. Karl Barth, "L'Église et les Églises," *Oecumenica* 3.2 (1936)

3. Khomiakov's thesis (see especially his *Église latine et protestante*) is taken up by Basil Zenkovsky. [Lossky may have in mind a collection of Khomiakov's articles in French fi rst published in Lausanne in 1872 under the title *L'Église latine et le protestantisme au point de vue de l'Église d'Orient*. The reference to Zenkovsky may be to his History of Russian Philosophy (in Russian in 1948; English tr., Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953).]

4. Even in [Aquinas'] *Summa theol*. I–II, quest. 110, despite the promising title *"De gratia Dei quam ad ejus essentiam"* [Of the Grace of God as regards its Essence], the question of the very nature of grace is not considered; Saint Thomas limits himself to considerations about the relationships of grace with the human soul.

scholasticism. He was particularly interested in Western mysticism and he wrote a profound study on apophatic theology and knowledge of God in Meister Ekhart.[1]

In this essay on grace, as in fact in much of Lossky's writings, including his masterpiece, *The Mystical Theology of the Orthodox Church* (1944), Lossky sees his task as bearing witness to Orthodox Christianity within the very heart of Western thought. The notion of grace has always been much more important— and controversial— in Western Christianity than in Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy was largely spared the inflammatory controversies over free will and grace which shook Western Christianity over the centuries, especially at the time of the Pelagian heresy in the fifth century and following the Protestant Reformation. Similarly, the doctrine of predestination, which arose from the writings of Saint Augustine on grace and free will, never had a significant impact on Orthodoxy.

The main concern of Orthodoxy has been rather to assert and to defend human freedom against all opponents, ancient and modern: free will, the ability to discern right from wrong and to choose right rather than wrong, to act in accordance with divine will rather than against it, is one of the principal characteristics of humans, a key aspect of the divine image in humans, according to many of the ancient fathers and modern Orthodox theologians and philosophers. The main issue during the Palamite controversies of the fourteenth century — to which Lossky alludes — was the possibility for humans to have real experiential knowledge of God, denied by Palamas' humanist-inspired opponents. It was as a result of this controversy and the doctrinal pronouncements of the Constantinople Councils of 1341 and 1351 that the Orthodox theology of grace was firmly grounded in the crucial distinction between divine essence and divine energies. The divine energies, and not the apparent conflict between divine grace and human free will, are thus the key to an Orthodox understanding of grace, as Lossky ably demonstrates in this essay.

The essay opens with a brief — and rare — presentation of Lossky's own views on ecumenism, based on his ecumenical experiences with Anglicans and Roman Catholics in particular. Lossky, who is often unjustly accused of being "anti-Western" and especially "anti-Catholic," felt it necessary to elucidate his personal outlook on the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches as an introduction to his article on the controversial subject of grace. Lossky's commitment to inter-Church dialogue is unmistakable. At the same time he is fully committed to Orthodox tradition and accepts no compromise in the expression of essential theological doctrines, which have an inevitable impact on Christian spiritual life. For Lossky, the conflict of ideas is real, but in a context of respect and openness, a search for truth wherever truth is to be found.

We have added the material [in square brackets] in the text and notes.

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The Doctrine of Grace in the Orthodox Church

Union of the Churches & the witness of the Orthodox Church

Before we explore the doctrine of grace in the Orthodox Church, I would like to make some preliminary remarks in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings.

The absence of unity in the Christian world is a cruel reality, constantly present in the conscience of every Christian concerned with the common destiny of humanity. Who could say, especially in the times in which we live, that the destiny of disunited Christianity leaves us indifferent without incurring the terrible condemnation of Revelation: "Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16)?

The wound caused by these separations remains virulent and bleeding for all those who on the one hand do not allow

("*acedia*"), of despair, this condition is always seen as the supreme temptation which places the human being on the threshold of spiritual death. Those who emerge triumphant in the struggle have the continuous and ever stronger experience of deifying Light. Such was Saint Seraphim of Sarov in the nineteenth century, whose face shone with a light that was unbearable for human eyes.

3. Third consequence: The Orthodox Church makes no distinction between theology and mysticism. All mysticism is nothing other than the experience of dogma revealed to the Church, just as, on the other hand, all theological teaching is inseparable from mystical experience, given to all members of the Body of Christ, though in different degrees, proportionate to the individual ascent of each toward the state of perfect humanity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

* * *

These are, to the extent that it is possible to expose in a general presentation, the main points of the Orthodox doctrine of grace. If we wanted to make a diagram of the different degrees of the presence of grace in the created world, according to the increasing fullness of union, we would make four concentric circles, of which the center would represent the fullness of the teaching as well as of the experience of grace. The four circles would be the pagan or "lay" world; the world living in accordance with revealed Law or natural law; the Christian world in general; and finally, the mystical center of the universe where the saints can attain the fullness of grace, perfect union with God.

These four circles would correspond with those mentioned by Saint Maximus the Confessor, at a time when Christianity knew only one doctrine of grace:
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"sanctification" in the Roman Catholic sense), would be rather a means, and the acquisition of uncreated grace, transforming our nature, the end.[18]

Consequences of the Orthodox doctrine

Three consequences crucial for the spiritual life flow from this principle:

1. God's invisible presence in us, given by the descent of the Holy Spirit or the sacrament of Holy Chrismation, cannot be destroyed by current sins. The Orthodox Church does not recognize a distinction between venial sins and mortal sins, which would deprive us of this presence (the "state of grace" in Roman Catholic doctrine).[19] But any sin can render this presence ineffective and abstract, by darkening our nature, making it more or less impervious to the divine energies, to deifying grace. This is the constant struggle, the wavering back and forth between states of light and the dark thrusts of unpurified forces of our nature, the slow and laborious journey toward the Light of the eternal Day.

2. Second consequence: Grace cannot be unknown, unfelt, only an object of faith. It must be an experience.[20] It is for this reason that the Orthodox Church does not know of "privileged souls" who, exceptionally, benefit from the experience of grace. Each Christian must enjoy, to the degree appropriate to him or her, the experience of grace. The acquisition of grace is not an unconscious process. This is also the reason that our ascetic writers never consider that the "mystical night," a "dryness of soul," is a normal state, a necessary step for those seeking union with God. The heroic attitude of the great saints of Western Christianity, subject to the suffering of tragic separation, is unknown in Orthodox spirituality. And yet if a number of our saints, in their striving for the divine Light, go through the agonizing state of sadness

themselves to become paralyzed in a stupor of self-sufficiency and self-contemplation, but who on the other hand can no longer bear witness to the truth that they confess in the context of activities aimed at the "union of the Churches." I would like to quote here some words of Karl Barth which clearly express my thinking:

> Super- or inter-ecclesial movements are either worthless, since they do not take seriously problems of the doctrine, the constitution and the life of the Church, or else they have some value. And if they view these problems seriously, they are forced to abandon neutrality and create a new Church or community in their own image. Hence if we wish that ecclesiastical work proceed, it must do so in its Christian center: in the Churches. If we truly wish to listen to Christ as He who is the Unity of the Church and in whom Unity is already accomplished, we must therefore recognize in a concrete fashion our particular ecclesiastical experience.

And he writes again:

> Only a powerful ecclesiastical reality can motivate a Church to forsake separation. It will not do so if this means abandoning a single dot on an "i" which it holds as truth in obedience to Jesus Christ. We do not make the union of the Churches, rather we discover it.[2]

And I would add to Barth: we discover this union of the Churches on condition that we go to the very end in the clear and sincere confession of the faith of our specific and historical Churches or communities, to which alone we are committed.

Hence in seeking to present aspects of the Orthodox doctrine of grace, we will certainly not seek to conceal or to downplay fundamental differences which exist on this subject with other Christian confessions. We do not wish to be polemical, since our aim is mutual understanding. If in this paper we are obliged on a

number of points to contrast the teaching of the Orthodox Church with that of other Christian confessions, we should not be accused of harboring thoughts of confessional hostility, even less of the slightest intention of hurting our separated brethren.

As I contrast the teaching of the Orthodox Church with that of other Christian confessions, I will carefully avoid going into the details of the controversies on grace which have created many currents of different opinions in the West. Indeed Khomiakov said almost a century ago that for us Orthodox, the divided West cannot be other than as one family, a relatively homogeneous group.[3] All the splits between Rome and the Reformation are for us but internal ruptures within Western Christianity. Our separation from Rome consummated in the eleventh century is of the same kind as that of the Protestants and all the communities which subsequently detached themselves from the Patriarchate of Rome. This is especially the case with respect to the doctrine of grace, because the separation of 1054, despite everything which was said and written on this subject by later polemicists, was based dogmatically on teachings concerning the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Grace. We are now ready to address our subject.

The question of grace in the West during the Middle Ages

We can assert in a very general fashion that the question of grace was most frequently an issue in the West in a functional context, the role of grace in the task of our salvation. Interest focused especially on the function of grace without always inquiring about the nature of grace. In the classical definition of theological manuals, grace is seen as "a supernatural gift of God accorded to a creature endowed with intelligence for the purpose of eternal salvation." The numerous distinctions of types of grace — sanctifying or justifying, *gratum faciens* or *gratis data*, habitual or actual — are aimed at revealing different functions of grace in the recipient subject.[4]

being the "likeness" of God. The human person, image of God, attached to the nature, pursued its fall and became engulfed in the darkness of sin with the nature. Instead of living in the light of the Face of God, the person (or the persons), after original sin, can live only according to its nature, a nature now profoundly tainted. While remaining the image of the God, the person no longer knows the Trinity because knowledge is a function of the nature and the nature is obscured. Even though always free, the person retains only freedom of choice, for will is an energy of the nature, torn by conflicting desires. Even though aspiring to great and divine goals, the person is almost blind and powerless, incapable of choosing well, often acting only according to the inclinations of the nature, subservient to sin.

Having assumed our fallen human nature, Christ, by his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, bestows to nature the possibility of becoming the "likeness" of God, to be pure nature, capable of receiving the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, descended upon the disciples and upon each member of the Church in the sacrament of Confirmation, confers his uncreated gifts to each human person, deifying grace which can transfigure nature. Thus the human person in the Church, despite all his or her sins, despite all his or her failings brought about by the rebellious nature, in the slow and painful ascent toward God, bears within himself or herself two natures, created and uncreated, and two wills, our will still blinded and feeble, and that of God. By following God's will, the person transforms nature by grace, "acquires" grace. The two wills, divine and human, are the two wings which carry us toward perfect union with God, says Maximus the Confessor.

The teaching on grace, which I have sketched out here in general terms, allows us to assert that for the Orthodox Church, contrary to other Christian confessions, grace is not only divine help, a means of our justification or sanctification, but the very goal of the Christian life. One can say with a certain boldness that for Orthodox theology the inhabitation of God in us (our adoption or

Between the two natures, that of God and that of creature, there lies an unbridgeable abyss, an infinite distance in the words of Saint John of Damascus. And yet the two natures have been united, without fusing, in the one Person of the Word incarnate. While remaining distinct, not mixed, they are the two natures of one Person, the divinity and the humanity of the one Jesus Christ. This is not all: united hypostatically, Christ's two natures remain separate one from the other as different essences, but the divine energies penetrate Christ's humanity; and it is these energies which illuminate his deified human nature, transfigured by the brilliance of uncreated light on Mount Tabor. This is the Kingdom of God come with power, in the words of the Gospel (Mk 9:1). And the Fathers testify that by his Transfiguration, the Lord showed his disciples the deified state to which all are called, every human person.

Christ is an uncreated divine Person who assumed created human nature. But, in the words of Saint Irenaeus, repeated by almost all the Fathers, "God became Man, in order that man might become God." Thus created human persons are also called to reunite in themselves the two natures, divine and human, and to possess by grace all that God possesses by nature proper to him. As a person, the deified human is a created being and remains such, even while participating in divine nature, even though the human nature is transfigured by the uncreated energies. Thus Christ, a divine Person, remains God even though he took on a created nature, even though he suffered and died on the Cross as a human being.

The distinction between person and nature in created being corresponds with that between the "image" and the "likeness" of which Revelation speaks (Gen 1:26–27). The image — a unique person for each human being, irreplaceable, indefinable because absolutely original — is tied to the common nature of all humans. It manifests itself in nature and by nature. The human person, called to live in communion with God, in the light of the Trinity, lost this treasure when our nature, tainted by sin, ceased

This notion of grace, seen especially as a relationship between God and the fallen creature, is inevitably linked to the question of human free will and to divine predestination. This crucial question resulted in endless theological disputes, starting at the time of Pelagius and Saint Augustine, transmitted by Gottschalt and Scotus Erigenus[5] during the great scholastic period, erupting again during the Reformation, and perpetuating itself later during the Jansenist and Molinist controversies of the seventeenth century.[6]

Faced with these different approaches, these irreconcilable affirmations, we can ask what would have been the doctrine of the Orthodox Church[7] — one more doctrine, one more attempt to harmonize these three elements—free will, grace, and predestination, where grace so often plays the role of an unknown quantity, an "x" in this rule of three. We must recognize one fact: the Christian East remained almost entirely uninvolved in the controversies on free will and grace. Even prior to the separation, the period of common life when there was no opposition between East and West, the Pelagian dispute was only a local conflict and, all things considered, secondary. The main question for the Church in the fifth century was that of Christ, the God-Man, uniting two natures and two wills, divine and human, in one Person.

After the confirmation of this dogma, Pelagianism collapsed together with Nestorianism, of which Pelagianism was but an anthropological corollary. When the controversies over free will and grace revived in the West in the ninth century, the life of the Church of Rome was already almost divorced from that of its sister Churches of the East.

And later, after the final split, this issue became prominent in the consciousness of the Eastern Church only in the seventeenth century, when it was raised, along with many other points of doctrine, by the special case of Patriarch Cyril Lukaris, the "Oriental Calvinist." And even then, this properly Western

problem never played a major role in the dogmatic life of the Orthodox Church because the doctrine of grace developed in a different manner in the East, originating from a completely different point of departure from that common to Western Christendom.

The nature of grace

If, as we have seen, in the West the question of grace is treated primarily in terms of function, the Orthodox Church, before inquiring about the role of grace in our salvation, seeks to know what is grace. Grace is considered here above all, not as a correlative of human free will, but rather, we can say, ontologically, in itself, as something whose nature must be defined. The dogmatic expression of the teaching on grace achieved its full expression in the fourteenth century, during the "Palamite" Council of Constantinople, so named for a Father of the Church, Saint Gregory Palamas, praised by the Orthodox Church as "the preacher of grace." This does not at all mean that this doctrine did not exist previously, well before the fourteenth century. We find this teaching, less well defined dogmatically, it is true, in most of the Fathers going back to the early centuries of the Church. It was this very tradition, preserved in the East, that suddenly manifested itself in the Councils of the fourteenth century — just as a hidden spring that we hear always flowing underground which suddenly emerges from the depths of the earth.

For the Orthodox Church, the doctrinal foundation of grace is rooted in more general notions, specifically in the nature of God.

Alongside the three Persons (*hypostases*) and the one nature (*physis*), patristic thinking distinguishes in God, in the very nature common to the Persons of the Trinity, essence (*ousia*) or nature strictly speaking, unknowable and inaccessible — and "that which is next to nature,"[8] the divine operations or energies, "what can be known about God," in the words of Saint Paul: "his

Bethlehem which received the Child Jesus. A person in a state of grace is a "God-bearer."[17] What strikes one the most in these comparisons is their inert and static nature: the creature remains what it was and does not acquire anything divine; there is no penetration of the created by the Uncreated. And the somewhat harsh words of Saint Bernard are especially significant in this context: a donkey always remains a donkey, even if it carries Christ on its back.

By way of contrast, the descriptions of the person possessing grace are completely different in Orthodox authors. Human nature penetrated by grace is most frequently compared to iron made red-hot by fire and which itself becomes fire without ceasing to be iron; to the air flooded by the light that it receives, etc. These analogies highlight in particular a dynamic relationship between grace and human nature, the penetration of created being by the divinity, a veritable deification of the person by grace. In Orthodox doctrine, what the Latin theologians call "sanctifying grace," the effect of the presence of the Trinity, is seen as uncreated grace, simply grace, the Gift or Gifts of the Holy Spirit, truly given, ceded and truly received, acquired, appropriated by the person.

The union of the two natures in the person of the Word

One question arises spontaneously: how does this Orthodox doctrine envisage the possibility for created being to participate in the divinity, if we wish to avoid both Platonizing pantheism and annihilation of the creature in the Divine Being?

We must not forget a fundamental distinction between nature and person — a doctrine common to all Christians who confess the dogma of the Holy Trinity and that of the Incarnation. Just as in God we distinguish between the Persons and their common nature, we must distinguish in human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, the person — image of the divine hypostasis — and the nature in and by which the created person lives.

very Person of the Holy Spirit, the giver of grace, whereas the "created element," which confers the supernatural faculties upon us, corresponds exactly with what Orthodox theology designates by the word "grace" itself or divine energy. The divine energies do not feature in Western theology, hence the unavoidable consequence: that which is given is not identical to that which humans receive. It is the paradox of sanctifying grace: by his infinite love God gives himself supernaturally to humans, but all that humans can seize, can receive of this divine presence in the soul, is but a created effect. Sanctifying grace is a divine action on the soul, an act which can be compared with creation, although it is not at all creation *ex nihilo*: sanctifying grace has for its material the human soul, or to be more precise, the "obediential faculties," according to Saint Thomas Aquinas,[16] faculties which become capable of carrying out supernatural meritorious acts which lead us to salvation.

It is a means of salvation, a help that God produces in us with a view to eternal salvation. Nonetheless, according to Catholic doctrine, the habitation of the Trinity in our soul remains hidden, insensible, and unknowable. It can only be an object of faith — except for a few "privileged souls" to whom the mystical experience of divine inhabitation is occasionally conceded in a state of ecstasy. But normally, until the hour of death, the just possess grace as an unknown inheritance, which they will enjoy only after death, when grace will be reinforced by the "light of glory," *lumen gloriae*, which instills the vision of God present in their soul. Nevertheless, similar to grace, this light of glory is also created; it allows one to see God, to rejoice in his presence, but does not truly transform the just into "gods by grace," into "deified beings," into "co-inheritors of the divine nature," according to the words of Saint Peter [cf. 2 Pet 1:4].

The writings of the mystics of the Roman Church on the presence of God in the soul are very characteristic in this sense. Souls sanctified by grace are compared with heaven, with paradise, the place of divine habitation, with the chalice of

eternal power and deity … clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19–20). Because, "if the energies come down to us, the essence remains absolutely inaccessible," says Saint Basil.[9]

Nevertheless these operations are not external acts, works of the divine will, which, as such, would be as it were foreign to the divine essence, as are for example the act of the creation of the world, acts of Divine Providence, as well as other acts in which God is present only as Cause. The operations or energies are not acts, but rather "processions," "overflowings" we could say, of the divine nature, by which God exists outside of his essence. The energies are not acts, but a mode of existence of God, by virtue of which he exists simultaneously in his inaccessible essence and, outside of the essence, "the Same and the Other."[10] For if the God of the philosophers can be but an essence, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ is more than an essence.

Essence and energy

Despite the real distinction between essence and energies, these must not be separated from the essence, of which they are "natural processions" — since distinction does not mean separation or fragmentation. The sun's rays are different from the solar disk, but they are inseparable from it, since they are the natural energies of this luminous disk. But any comparison will necessarily be imperfect: the distinction between essence and energies is more radical, and at the same time their unity is infinitely greater, even to the point of identity. The same inaccessible God — *Deus absconditus* — in his essence becomes knowable and accessible, allowing us to participate in his perfection by giving himself to us in his energies.

Thus the doctrine of grace necessarily derives from the broader dogma of the energies. "Grace or deifying illumination is not the essence, but rather divine energy," says Saint Gregory Palamas[11] — energy which unites us to God, which accomplishes our

"deification." It is for this reason that deifying energy is often called simply "divinity" in Orthodox theology.

Since the energies are natural processions of God, common to the three Persons of the Trinity, as the essence is common to all, we must conclude in the same light that grace, which is an energy given to humans, must be common to the three Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — yet communicated to us by the Person of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason that Christ, announcing the descent of the Holy Spirit, says to his disciples: "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:14). "What is mine," according to the interpretation of the Fathers,[12] is the nature common to the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit, nature in which we are called to participate, in the energies, or, to say the same thing, by grace, according to words of Saint Peter — *divinae consortes naturae* [partakers of the divine nature] (2 Pet 1:4).

An additional conclusion is necessary: the Person of the Holy Spirit, who gives his grace, the deifying Gift, is distinct from this Gift, as the Persons of the Holy Trinity are distinct from their nature and the energies proper to this nature.

Medieval ontology

This is, in a few brief sentences, the nature of grace in the Orthodox tradition. It was vehemently attacked in the seventeenth century by Denis Pétau (or Petavius),[13] who showed a complete lack of understanding of the doctrine on essence and energies. But Pétau was not the only one in the West who failed to grasp the very foundation of the tradition of the Orthodox East. Not to venture too far into the realm of the history of theological ideas,[14] I will simply say that this incomprehension was the heritage of the great scholastic centuries, which, in their remarkable synthesis, forged a rather philosophical conception of the divine essence. In fact, the Thomist notion of God as "pure act" does not admit that anything divine can exist outside of the essence, which would not be God — Lord, Wisdom, Life, Truth,

are related analogically to the essence, as its abstract attributes. They do not designate real powers or energies in which God makes himself known as Wisdom, Life, etc. God finds himself, so to speak, limited by his essence. All that is external to the essence is external to God, and is consigned to the domain of created being. Operations can only be considered, according to this line of thought, as external acts, outside the essence. Orthodox teaching seemed to be an absurdity, a "folly," to the theologians of the Roman Church, disciples of Aristotle. The consequence of this doctrine for the question of grace is clear: grace would be, for Latin theology, either the divine essence itself, incommunicable by definition — or else a created effect that God produces in our soul. In neither case is there real participation in the divine nature, no real union between God and humans. The gap remains wide open and unbridgeable. And this is true for the theology of the Church of Rome, as well as for those of the Reformation (see for example Barthianism, which is very categorical on this issue).

The Thomist doctrine of created grace

The fundamental difference in the doctrine on grace is that for the Orthodox Church grace is uncreated, whereas for the Church of Rome and the other Christian confessions which separated from Rome, grace is created. It is nonetheless necessary to be more precise on this point in order to avoid possible misunderstandings. The theological manuals of the Roman Church distinguish between created grace and uncreated grace. I cite at random the book of Father Plus, *Dieu en nous*:

> That there is a created element in grace, the supernatural faculties which permit us to accomplish supernatural acts, is not in doubt; but the Church affirms nothing more energetically than that the Holy Spirit, *ipsissima persona Spiritus Santi* [the very person of the Holy Spirit] (Cornelius a Lapide) accompanies this created gift.[15]

Hence what is meant here by the term "uncreated grace" is the