

Explanation of the Orthodox Creed (One God)

Objective:

God is One: understand the attributes of God and the work of the Father.

References:

- Trinitarianism and Monotheism / a sermon delivered by his Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
- A simplified interpretation of the Orthodox Creed / Anba Gregorious.
- Our Holy Faith / Anba Youannis.
- Interpretation of the Orthodox Creed/ Sermons delivered by Anba Bemin.
- The Trinity we believe in / Mofid Kamel.
- Truly we believe / Fr. Moussa Wahba.
- We believe in One God / Fr. Moussa Wahba.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord our God is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Introduction:

The soldier who marches at the head of an army of fighters carries the flag and raises it to fix it at the highest spot. He may be wounded; he may die and become a martyr. In case this happens, another soldier succeeds in raising the flag and declaring victory. Similarly, our faith came to us through the saints’ struggle and the martyrs’ blood.

The main part of the Orthodox Creed was set by the Council of Nicene in AD 325. There were 318 Bishops who attended that Council and Pope Alexanderos, together with St. Athanasius the Apostolic (who was a deacon at the time), represented the Coptic Church. The Council was held to discuss the Arian heresy. Arius claimed that Christ was not the Everlasting Son of God, but that He was created as any other man. Pope Alexanderos did his best to bring Arius back to the correct faith but Arius would not be convinced

Emperor Constantine attended the first meeting of the Council. St. Athanasius defended the Godhead of Christ and succeeded in having the Council’s agreement to issue a creed to excommunicate Arius and dismiss him. Then he put the Orthodox Creed till the beginning of- “Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit”.

In AD 381, the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople was held because Macedonius denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, so the Council added the Second part of the Orthodox Creed.

So the Orthodox Creed was set by two Councils; the Council of Nicene in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

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Lesson Outline:

I. One God

God is one and has no partner. We do not believe in three gods but we say: In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. If there were two gods, who would be greater and who came before the other? If they were equal, each one would possess half the kingdom! How can a limited being be a god? God is one Essence. The statement “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” does not mean that they are three gods but they are three hypostases: One Essence and the Essence of God is Love.

A. An example

- Man is mind, body and soul; still one person not three persons.
- The sun is disc, ray and heat; still one sun.

B. Other evidence that God is one

There are countless number of clear verses that prove that God is One. These are some of the Scripture verses “The Lord our God is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

- “There is none holy like the Lord” “There is none besides thee” (1 Samuel 2:2).
- “For who is God but the Lord” (2 Samuel 22:32).
- “I am the First and I am the Last, besides Me there is no god” (Isaiah 44:6).
- “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (He is God), who formed the earth and made it. I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18).
- “There is none good but one, that is God” (Mathew 19:17).
- “Hear O Israel our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29).
- “It is One God” (Romans 3:30).
- “There is none other God but one... But to us there is but One God” (1 Corinthians 3:20).
- “God is One” (Galatians 3:20).
- “Thou believe that there is one God” (James 2:19).

God reveals Himself: The Lord spoke to Adam and gave him a commandment. Adam heard the Lord’s voice walking in the garden. The Lord spoke to Noah, saved him and rescued his family from certain death.

He revealed Himself to Abraham, tested him and blessed him... It is He who gave Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount of Sinai. The mountain was burning with fire and smoke.

The Divine voice was heard when Christ was baptized in the Jordan and said, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Mathew 3:17).

II. The Attributes of the Father

His Existence is a must. The Existence of God is a necessary obligation for understanding the universe. "For in Him we live, and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

He has no end. He is not confined in a certain place He has no end. He is boundless. "Thou art the same and thy years have no end" (Psalm 102:27).

He is a Simple Spirit. He has no flesh. He in Himself is a Spirit "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

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God does not change “Man changes but God does not change.” The Lord says, “For I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

God is everlasting and eternal. He has no beginning and has no end. The Lord says, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending” (Revelations 1:8).

God exists everywhere. He is present everywhere. No place can confine Him.

God knows everything “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).

God Almighty: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does in heaven and on earth in the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:6).

III. The Work of the Father

A. Fatherhood and choice

Fatherhood is one of the attributes of God the Father. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Father of humanity and that is why we call Him God the Father. He created us and He cares for us.

Sparrows are without number but one of them does not fall on earth without the will of God who art in Heaven. He also cares for plants... He clothes them in a way that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. But God cares more for man.

B. Why does God let his children suffer?

God created man on the sixth day after He had provided him with all his needs. He also gave him a perfect, accurate, good-looking and beautiful body. He gave him an eternal soul, mind, intelligence,

Sufferings in our life are due to our sensitive advanced nature. Our feeling of pain distinguishes us from inanimate things. Sufferings make us escape to a better life. Some sufferings are the outcome of our behavioral mistakes and others are due to God’s purpose, which we do not know (The man who was born blind).

C. Choice

Because God is a Father, He chooses His beloved. This choice is according to man’s heart’s preparedness and response to the Divine Will. He chose us to be His children and this was a special call to us, as we believed in Him. The scripture says:

i) Pre-destination:

- “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

ii) The Call:

- “And those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called He also justified-, and those whom He justified He also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

iii) Our choices:

- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:3,4).

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IV. The Almighty God

God is our supporter. He opens and no one shuts. He shuts and no one opens. The sun rises in its appointed time. Stars do not sleep. Planets do not collide. There are laws, which control the universe. These Laws are so accurately set by the Lord that scientists find it difficult to discover their details. The Lord controls the universe.

“The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore” (Psalm 121:5-8).

“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

The Lord also protects our life from dangers, lusts and deviations.

V. He Created the Heaven and the Earth

There is the wonderful nature which we see and enjoy its beauty and when we see a lovely thing we utter the name of God. The existence of a thing indicates that someone has made it and if that thing is perfect, we say that its maker has a great ability and skill. There are also the invisible creatures, which we cannot see such as atoms and electrons, which run through wires, but we feel their effects. There are also the remote stars and the tiny microbes. The greatness and majesty of God are beyond our thoughts. There are also the spiritual invisible creatures such as angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim who are without number. Then thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands praising God but we do not see them. Those creatures help us. Man is a tiny drop in a big ocean but the Lord cares for him as if all that big universe had been made for man.

Applications:

Speak about the attributes of God.

Define the works of God the Father.

Week 2 - Explanation of the Orthodox Creed, The Godhead of the Son

Objective:

Understand the Godhead of Christ and His works.

References:

You are Christ, the Son of the Living God / Anba Gregory.

Titles and works of the Lord Christ / Anba Bemin.

Theology / Fr. Michael Mina

Memory Verse:

“Of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33).

Lesson Outline:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages.

There is a difference between sonship among people and the Sonship of Christ to God. The human father is older than his son and each one of them is separated from the other but Christ is Consubstantial with the Father everlasting and of the Same Essence. He said about himself, “I and the Father are One.”

The human language does not contain any words that can indicate the conformity and unity except “the Father and the Son”, that is why Christ is the “Son” but there is a big difference: “He is the only Begotten Son of the Father before all ages”.

There is another simile that can be used, i.e. the coming forth of the light out of a lamplight is generated but not through flesh.

I. Light Of Light; True God Of True God

He is of the same nature and essence of the Father. God is Love and we knew love through His Son. There is no difference in Essence.

II. Begotten Not Created

As water flows out of a spring and runs through a canal but the water is one, the same is true of the Son begotten of the Father before all ages.

III. In One Essence With The Father

The Scripture says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3)

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IV. Incarnation

We know that the Son is consubstantial with God. He is everlasting and not made but He took flesh of Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. So Christ has two births, the first is everlasting and of the heavenly Father, and the second is of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary. He has not come of a man through the natural way of birth like us and this proves His Godhead.

V. He Was Crucified For Us Of Whose Kingdom Shall Have No End

Now comes the role of redemption, which we confess that it was fulfilled for our salvation. We also confess the Second coming for judgment and kingdom.

The angel says to the Virgin: “Of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33). The following Schedule shows, Christ’s Tasks and brief:

Time	Place	Task (Post)	Quotation
1. Before all ages. 2. The beginning of life. 5000 years before Christ. 3. starting the new AD era. 4. Forty days after Resurrection. 5. Unknown	1. With God. 2. In heaven. 3. In the virgin’s womb. 4. From earth to heaven. 5. From heaven to earth.	1. Divine Sonship. 2. He took part with the Father in the process of creation. Christ is the word and when God said, “Let there be light the Son (the word) took part with the Father in creation. 3. He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. 4. Going up to the Bosom of the Father and sitting at the Right Hand after fulfilling redemption. He is the Living Lord who intercedes for us. 5. The Second Coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead and to reign for ever	1. Only Begotten Son. 2. The only begotten Son of the Father before all ages. Begotten not created. 3. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. 4. He ascended into the heavens and has sat at the right hand of his Father. 5. He shall also come back in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Applications:

When we say in the church that we believe in One God, the Almighty God. Does this mean that He controls our tendencies, emotions and instincts?

When we confess that He created heaven and earth, do we offer worship to Him in awe feeling that our life is of Him and to Him?

When we confess that Christ is light out of light and True God out of True God, do we ourselves live in light and walk in truth, as we are the children of God who is light of light and truth of truth?

When we confess that the Lord Jesus came from heaven and incarnated for our salvation and suffered to redeem us, aren't we ashamed of ourselves when we ignore and neglect such salvation? When we recite the Orthodox Creed, do we have real and practical faith in what we say?

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The students are to be divided into 3 groups:

1. The first group proves the Godhead of Christ in His nativity.
2. The Second group proves the Godhead of Christ in His miraculous deeds and teachings.
3. The third group proves the Godhead of Christ in His crucifixion and His resurrection.

Quote the verses that prove this and you can make a wall chart.

Invite a priest or a minister who has a deep knowledge of theology and let the students ask questions about the difficulties they face in understanding the Godhead of Christ. Evidence should be given from Logic, reason, the Gospel and from different references.

Week 3 - Explanation of the Orthodox Creed

Objective:

To understand the Godhead of the Holy Spirit.

To learn about the unity of church and her tasks.

References:

The Holy Spirit / St. Cyril the Great, Translated by Dr. George Habib.

Memory Verse:

“Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21).

Lesson Outline:

I. Truly We Believe In The Holy Spirit

This past was put by the Council of Constantinople, which was held to refute the heresy of Macedonius who denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit is one of the creatures and hence the church excommunicated him.

We believe in the Holy Spirit and call Him “The Giver of Life.” When Ananias and Sapphira lied to St. Peter. St. Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3,4).

II. The Divine Tasks Of The Holy Spirit

He is called the Spirit of Life or God the Giver of Life. “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

He is the creator; He was not made; “The Spirit of God has made me” (Job 33:4).

“By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

Through the Inspiration of the Scripture and prophecy: “Who was spoken of by the prophets.”

“Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21).

It is He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and it is He that raises us up from any sin and purges us.

“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

He makes of us a new creation - created in the image of Christ.

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The Lord breathed in the face of His disciples as He breathed a breath of life in the dust. If the image of Adam was corrupted, the Holy Spirit gave us a new nature through baptism so that we may be in the image of God once more.

Coming forth: As a ray of light comes from the sun, and as water flows out of a spring to pour into a lake, the same is true of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and dwells in the Son. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that comes forth from the Father to the Son. In the Jordan River the Father said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." "And behold the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Christ."

As the water in the well, or in the canal or in a lake is the same water that we drink, the same is true of the Holy Spirit that is consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

III. One Church

All believers had one heart and one Spirit. The unity of the church is what Christ desires. In His final prayer of intercession He said, "that they may all be one, even as You Father, art in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).

IV. Universal Church

She gathers all believers of every nation, language and tribe.

She gathers all the orders of priesthood of bishops, priests, deacons and also the laity.

She gathers men, women and children in one unity, which is the unity of the universal mission.

V. Apostolic Church

As she is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

The Life of her members is an apostolic life based on abstention and Evangelic poverty.

It is impossible to recognize and confess the priesthood of anyone if the hands of legal heads are not set on him.

VI. A Holy Church

She is holy because Christ is her head.

The spring of holiness is the Holy Spirit working in her.

The life history of her members is pure and holy (the story of Ananias and Sapphira proves that the church rejects every corrupted and bad member).

VII. We Confess One Baptism For The Remission Of Sins

Christ said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, One cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is not repeated because it is like the death, burial and resurrection of Christ which happened only once: “You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

VIII. We Look For The Resurrection Of The Dead And The Life Of The Age To Come. Amen

We believe that our souls are eternal and will not die. When the body dies, the soul goes up to Paradise or goes down to the Hades.

On the Day of Judgment the Lord will come in awe and glory and will reward every one according to his deeds.

The evildoers will be sent to Hell where they suffer eternal torment and the righteous are sent to the kingdom of Heavens and the glorified eternal life.

Our bodies will be glorified and they will take the image of the body of the raised Son of God, to enter the kingdom as blood and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom.

Let us live on the hope of resurrection waiting for the coming of the Lord. Amen.

Applications:

Make a wall magazine about the attributes of the church (One - Holy - Universal - Apostolic).