

# The Gospel's Voice



**Orthodox Parish of the Holy Transfiguration**

**Number 20, July 2017**

## **The first six councils (325-681)**

The life of the Church at the beginning of the Byzantine period was dominated by the seven general councils. These Councils had the double task of clarifying and formulating the external organization of the Church, of fixing the place in the Church of the five great seats or patriarchates and, above all, of defining once and for all the teaching of the Church on the fundamental points of the Christian faith: the Trinity and the Incarnation. All Christians know that these mysteries go beyond human understanding; then, when the bishops gathered in council gave definitions, they never imagined having explained the mystery, but they limited themselves to excluding any false approach of thought and language. In order to prevent misunderstanding and heresy, they have simply protected these mysteries.

Today, these conciliar discussions may sometimes seem abstract and outdated, but they were then taken from an absolutely concrete point of view: the salvation of man. Man, according to the New Testament, is separated from God by sin, and can not, by his own efforts, overthrow the wall of separation which this sin has raised. It was therefore necessary that God should take the initiative: He became man, He was crucified, He rose from the dead, thus delivering mankind from the bondage of sin and death. Such is the message of the Christian faith, and it is this message of redemption which the councils had to safeguard. The heresies were dangerous and should be condemned because they distorted the teaching of the New Testament, restoring a barrier between man and God and thus again rendering man's salvation impossible.

Saint Paul expressed this message of redemption in terms of sharing. Christ shared our poverty so that we can share with Him the riches of His Divinity: “*You know the liberality of Our Lord Jesus Christ, how rich He became poor for you, to enrich you by his poverty*” (II Corinthians 8: 9). In a slightly different form, we find the same idea in St. John: by the participation that He has given them to His divine glory, the disciples must attain complete union with God. “*I have given them the glory that You have given Me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and You in Me, that they may be one perfectly.*” (John 17: 22-23).

It is in the literal sense that the Greek Fathers took these and similar texts when they dared to speak of the “*deification*” of humanity (in Greek, *theosis*). If man is called to share the glory of God, they say, if he is to be “*perfectly one*” with God, which in fact signifies his deification, man is called to become by grace what God is by nature. Thus St Athanasius was able to summarize the data of the Incarnation by saying: “*God became man so that we might become gods.*”

But for it to be possible to “*become god*”, to realize this theosis, Christ, the Savior, be at the same time true God and true man. Nobody, but only God, can save Man, so if Christ is to save us, He must be God. But it is only if He is perfectly human, like us, that we can participate in what He has done for us. The incarnate Christ is the bridge between God and men. “*Verily, verily I say unto you, ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*” (John 1, 51). This scale is not only for the angels, but also for the human race. Christ is fully God and fully man. One after the other, each heresy has attacked this vital affirmation, either by making Christ less than God (Arianism), or by separating His humanity from His divinity, so that He became two persons (nestorianism); or, finally, by not considering him as truly man (monophysism, monothelism). Each council had the task of protecting this vital affirmation. The first two, held in the fourth century, emphasized the full divinity of Christ and formulated the doctrine of the Trinity. The following four, in the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries, the humanity of Christ and to explain the union, in one person, of human nature and the divine nature. The Seventh Council, held for the defense of the holy Icons, seems at first sight to have a special place, but, like the first six, it dealt ultimately with the Incarnation and the Salvation of man.

From: Kallistos Ware, *L'orthodoxie, l'Église des sept conciles*, Le Cerf, 2002, pp 29-32. (free translation)

# Divine Liturgy

*Every Sunday at 9.30 a.m.*

**Sunday July the 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**The 9<sup>th</sup>**

**The 16<sup>th</sup>: Sunday of the Fathers of the six first ecumenical councils.**

**The 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**The 30<sup>th</sup>**

**Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of August: beginning of the fast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God.**

*Matins at 9.30 a.m. every week day.*

## The Orthodox Church of the Holy Transfiguration

Grande-Rivière N-O

Mauritius

(behind Garage BALA)

**Divine Liturgy every  
Sunday**

**at 9.30 a.m.**

*Matins at 9.30 a.m. every  
week day.*



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