

JESUS: FALLEN?

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*The Human Nature of Christ
Examined from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective*

Emmanuel Hatzidakis



Orthodox Witness

2013

By the same author:
The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy (2nd ed. 2010)

In memory of Eftichios Protopapadakis.

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*No one takes [My life] from Me,
but I lay it down on My own accord.
I have power to lay it down,
and I have power to take it again.*

JOHN 10:18



*You assumed, O Master, the entire Adam,
before His transgression, free from sin.*

*Ὅλον τὸν Ἀδάμ, τὸν πρὸ τῆς παραβάσεως,
τὸν ἁμαρτίας ἐλεύθερον, προσέλαβες Δέσποτα.*

ST. JOHN DAMASCENE

Homilia 1 in Dormitionem



*The investigation of these things exceeds
our reason and our capacity for proof;
it is only grasped by the faith of those
who reverence the mystery of
Christ with upright hearts.*

ST. MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR

Ambigua

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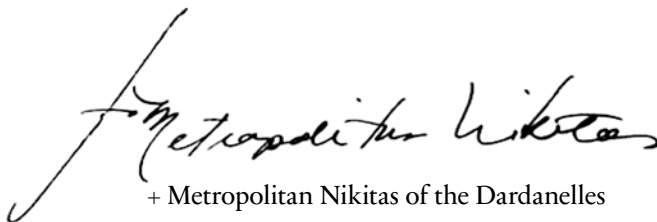
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FOREWORD

We find ourselves in times that remind me of the early days of Christianity, as we seem to be facing some of the same challenges. Those early centuries were filled with debates, many of which centered on the person of Jesus. While the Church addressed the important issues surrounding the Christological controversies through the Ecumenical Synods and the writings of the Fathers, there are many who are still trying to define and even redefine Christ as they would choose to understand Him, His natures, His wills, the hypostatic union, and many of the other difficult theological challenges that once plagued the Church. Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis has taken note of these new tensions and has been challenged by the position of theologians, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, who have commented on the person of Christ and His natures. As a good and faithful servant of the Lord, he has taken on the difficult task of searching the pages of historical documents, especially the writings of the Fathers of the Church and those of noted Orthodox teachers to help clarify this aspect of theological truth. While to many, these small details may seem insignificant, they are both necessary and critical, as we cannot and must not define Christ as we may personally want and understand. He is Christ as revealed, as defined by the Councils and as understood in the Church. It is with great joy that I invite the students of theology and those who search for Truth to read and drink from the refreshing waters he offers us. My gratitude to Fr. Emmanuel for his tireless efforts to defend Truth.



+ Metropolitan Nikitas of the Dardanelles

PREFACE

In this book we examine a recently advanced teaching that Christ's human nature bears *all* the signs of our *fallen* existence, marred by sin and its consequences as we all experience them, an existence necessarily sinful, corrupt and mortal. A widely held belief among scholars today is that Christ had a fallen human nature the same as ours, subject to the same human frailties as that of all human beings. Books and papers are written on the subject, lectures are given and blogs debate it. Personally, I'm not disturbed by descriptions of Christ's humanity wrapped in weakness — a human nature vulnerable to the miseries of life to which we are all subject. Christ did lower Himself to embrace our humanity in its fullness — an undignified, humiliated human existence, subject to suffering, corruption and death. Surely it would be erroneous to minimize Christ's humanity. It would however be equally erroneous to contemplate only upon Christ's humanity as if it were detached from His divinity, having an independent existence.

Specifically, the issue we address is: Did Christ have a fallen human nature like ours? In the course of the study this and other similar questions are explored, such as, how could Christ be truly human if He did not experience our temptations, if He did not really suffer the same way we do? In what sense would He be human if His nature were not identical with ours in every respect? Did He assume all the limitations of fallen humanity or only the natural ones, like hunger, thirst, suffering and death? But then, how can such inherent weaknesses be reconciled with Christ's perfect humanity? What *kind* of humanity did He possess? Another, critical, question addressed is, *how* did the Son of God assume His humanity with all its frailties? Was He born with our identical humanity, moved inexorably from birth to death, or did He assume certain of our human frailties voluntarily by the power of His will? Did He exercise control over His passions, emotions, suffering, sickness and death or was He under their control, as we fallen human beings are? How are we to understand that He was sinless? What is our understanding of the extent of His holiness on one hand and of His imputed fallenness on the other?

The biblical record presents to us a Christ that hungered, thirsted, got tired and sleepy, became saddened and was moved to tears, experienced unkindness, ridicule, betrayal and abandonment (even by His hand-picked disciples), got angry, was tempted, experienced emotional and physical pain, bled and finally died. He seemed to be one of us in every respect. However, the gospels also give us an account of a superhuman being that restores sick people to wellness, brings the dead back to life, commands the elements of nature, knows what's in one's mind and heart, and dies, yet He comes back to life. How are the two

aspects of His existence reconciled? To this day new views about Him arise. Many answers are given, at variance with the traditional teaching of the historic Church.

Indicative of the deep divide among scholars was a first page headline of the lead article of *Orthodoxos Typos*, a weekly paper published by the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union: “Bishop Preaches Heresy.”¹ What was it about? The article was a scathing critique of a lecture² given by Metropolitan (then Bishop) Kallistos (Ware), in which he seems to have adapted the Nestorian teaching that Christ’s humanity was fallen like ours. The strong tone of the paper (known for its traditionalist bent) was not surprising. The topic remained in the background for me until April 4, 2003, when another Orthodox theologian, Valerie Karras,³ lecturing on the subject took the same position, viz. the Son of God assumed a corruptible, passionate and mortal human nature. Her comments gave me the impetus to research the subject and write this present study.

My original intent was to engage only those few Eastern Orthodox theologians who have followed in the footsteps of their Western colleagues, accepting a fallen Christ. However, realizing that this subject is of intense interest and is debated within many Christian bodies, and in view of the fact that the prevalent Eastern Orthodox position has not been heard in the West, I modified the present study to address all interested parties.

I have been researching this subject for four years, approaching it with great trepidation. The words of St. Gregory the Theologian have been ringing in my ears, “Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to philosophize⁴ about God: not to everyone ... It is permitted only to those who have been examined, and are past masters in meditation, and who have been previously purified in soul and body, or at the very least are being purified.”⁵ And more so, should I be mortified by these other words of his that should have dissuaded me altogether from undertaking this study: “We ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath.”⁶ Why then should I undertake the imprudent feat? Because I do not bring my own words, but those of the illumined and deified Fathers, not daring to go beyond the boundaries they have established, as it is written, “Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” (Prov. 22:28). To have the correct view about Jesus Christ, whether in His divinity or His humanity, is indispensable, because our eternal life depends on it: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

So, I’ve undertaken this study intent on not deviating from the established teaching of the Church, “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), and certainly not in order to enter into idle scholarly debates about “words and names” (Acts 18:15), but rather so that “by the open statement of the truth to commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2). If I appear polemic in places in refuting those whose explanations I found not to be in line with the teachings of the historic and true Church of Christ it is not because I am uncharitable. In the spirit of the Fathers I have followed, I lay open the wound for everyone to see and the danger it entails if it remains untreated. I then proceed to apply the healing ointment of the Holy Scripture and of the writings of the inspired Fathers who are accepted by the Church as expressing faithfully Her faith.

The subject is not treated in a stringently scholarly manner. I approach the subject ὀλιευτικῶς, οὐχ ἀριστοτελικῶς (in the manner of the fishermen, not in that of Aristotle),⁷ that is, experientially, not through intellectual arguments. Since I'm not a theologian, in content, development and style I follow the writings of the Fathers of the Church, relying upon their consensus as an evidentiary tour de force (at least from an Eastern Orthodox perspective) and build upon them, without distancing myself from their inspired writings. I draw copiously from the Holy Scripture and I enrich it with the hymnography of the Church. I also bring in the voices of contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologians, who faithfully express the faith of the Church. All together they “harmonize with each other to produce the melody of theology.”⁸ Other deviant voices are addressed mainly in the introduction.

For the sake of all Christians who want to know what the Orthodox Church has taught about this crucial subject, I present to them the truths of our faith in a manner accessible to them. I ask for the indulgence of the reader if the text may be verbose and repetitious in places. For the benefit of a broader readership, terms have been explained in the text and in notes. Names of Greek authors are rendered with their Greek, rather than the more familiar Latinized endings. Part One of the book (chs. I-V) is introductory and explanatory. Those familiar with the terms and the historical background could conceivably make a giant leap and go directly to the substance of it in Part Two (chs. VI-X).

I began to write these words on the third Wednesday of the Great Lent, March the 3rd of the year of salvation 2010, but I finished them on Friday, Sept. 7, 2012, Vigil of the Nativity of the *Theotokos*. – E.H.

Notes

(Any and all emphases of quotations from Holy Scripture, Fathers, and hymnology are added)

- 1 Athens, Greece, issue of Jan. 30, 1987.
- 2 Later published as a pamphlet, *The Humanity of Christ*, The Fourth Constantinople Lecture, 29/30 November 1984 (London: The Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, 1985), 12pp.
- 3 Then Assistant Professor of Greek Patristics in the Department of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University (1998-2003) and formerly assistant professor at Holy Cross School of Theology and Hellenic College in Brookline, MS (1994-1996). As of this writing she is Assistant Professor of Church History at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.
- 4 In this context and in the patristic language the word is equivalent to theologize.
- 5 *Orat. 27 (The First Theological Oration)* 3. 26. Edward R. Hardy ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), *The Library of Christian Classics*, John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, eds., p. 129.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 The expression belongs to St. Gregory the Theologian (*hom.* 23.12).
- 8 First *Doxastikon*, Vespers of the Holy Fathers, October *Menaion* (Athens: Fos, 1970), p. 113.