

OUR LIFE IS IN GOD

It's my life!" the assertive person insists. "I can do whatever I want." The timid are told to "get a life," meaning that they should pursue the goals of the age: financial security, independence, travel and all the things – and people – that it can buy. A "full life" is one that includes all these things and more.

In fact, "*Our years are as fragile as a spider's web*" (Psalm 89:9 LXX), able to be taken from us at a moment's notice. Even the longest earthly life is over in the blink of an eye. Trees outlive us; parrots outlive us – we are "mere scraps of life," in the words of theologian Olivier Clement. No matter how forcefully we may work at seizing life, we are doomed to fail.

"We live a 'dead life,' according to Gregory of Nyssa, in a world permeated by death, in which everything gravitates continually towards nothingness" (*The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 1995, p. 15).

The bit of life we have is merely a momentary share in the life of the only One who truly exists, who will never face death: God, the Source of all life.

When Moses encountered God in the mysterious burning bush he asked for God's name, and God replied "*I am the One Who Is*" (Exodus 3:14). This name – YHWH in the Hebrew (variously rendered as Jehovah, Yahweh or Yahwa) and *ὁ ὢν* (o ón) in the Greek Septuagint – expresses the unique character of God. He did not receive life from any other nor will His life come to an end; He simply Is, unto all ages.

This Existing One, the only One who truly is, has nevertheless shared His being in the incredible profusion of creation. From vast galaxies to the tiniest organisms, everything in creation exists because He does. They exist – not by the chance occurrences of impersonal forces but by the will of a Person whose existence overflows beyond Himself. He creates simply that others may exist. "*He fashioned all things that they might have being*" (Wisdom 1:14).

This outpouring of being which we call creation is the first hint we have that the One-Who-Is is also the One who loves. People of all cultures through the ages have found God in creation. Although they have often confused God with the most powerful forces of nature, such as the stars, people have found Something or Someone beyond themselves in the created world. As St Paul wrote, "*Ever since the creation of the world his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made*" (Romans 1:20).

Still, we see more of God in creation than awe-inspiring power and divinity. We see love – the love of God manifest in this drive to share existence with all sorts of creatures. As St. Maximos the Confessor expressed it, "When God who is absolute fullness, brought creatures into existence, it was not done to fulfill any need, but so that His creatures should be happy sharing His likeness, and so that He Himself might rejoice in the joy of His creatures as they draw inexhaustibly upon the Inexhaustible" (*Centuries on Charity* III, 46).

THE ONE WHO IS TRULY LOVE

In the New Testament we come across God the Existing One again, in a surprising way. We are told that "*No one has ever seen God. The Only-Begotten, the Existing One (ὁ ὢν) in the bosom of the Father – He has made Him known*" (John 1:18). The One who revealed Himself to Moses, to Elijah and the prophets was in fact the Word of God who would in time take on our human nature as Jesus of Nazareth.

Blessed is the Existing One, Christ our true God, at all times: now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

(The Great Dismissal)

St Hilary of Poitiers tells of how his journey to faith leapt forward when he encountered the Word in the Gospel:

"I became acquainted with the teaching of the Gospel and of the apostles... My intellect overstepped its limits at that point and I learned more about God than I had expected. I understood that my Creator was God born of God. I learned that the Word was God and was with Him from the beginning. I came to know the light of the world.... I understood that the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us... Those who welcomed him became children of God, by a birth not in the flesh but in faith. ... This gift of God is offered to everyone... We can receive it because of our freedom which was given us expressly for this purpose.

"But this very power given to each person to be a child of God was bogged down in weak and hesitant faith. Our own difficulties

make hope painful, our desire becomes infuriating and our faith grows weak. That is why the Word was made flesh: by means of the Word-made-flesh the flesh was enabled to raise itself up to the Word... Without surrendering His divinity God was made of our flesh... My soul joyfully received the revelation of this mystery. By means of my flesh I was drawing near to God; by means of my faith I was called to a new birth. I was able to receive this new birth from on high... I was assured that I could not be reduced to non-being." (*The Trinity 1*)

Christians, who have experienced Christ as the Lover of mankind and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, have learned to see God as love in the mystery of the Trinity. At the same time God exists as truly One but also in a communion of love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is love, first of all in the relationships of Father to Son and Holy Spirit, then in the outpouring of Himself in all creation and in the incarnation of His Word. To us He is love in another way. He not only shares being with us, but the potential for relationship with Him. The book of Genesis expresses this relationship as walking with God in the Garden; we might say that we are invited to "play in God's yard," to be drawn into the place where He dwells.

In our Tradition this is expressed in the icon of the angelic Trinity by St Andrei Rublev. Three angels, representing the Trinity are shown surrounding a table interacting with one another. But there is a fourth side of the table and we, the viewers, are drawn into this fourth side, as it were experiencing the Trinity from within.

This is the fullness of life to which we have been called. Our "life is communion with God," St Irenaeus writes, "and separation from God is death" (*Against Heresies V, 27, 2*). To truly "get a life," then, is strive for communion with the God who is completely beyond us and yet so loves us that He offers Himself to us so that we may be filled with His life.

OUR LIFE IS IN GOD



OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
MELKITE EPARCHY OF NEWTON
<http://melkite.org/>

Iconography © Convent of St. Elizabeth
the Grand Duchess of Russia
<http://www.conventofsaintelizabeth.org/>