
THE NARTHEX

The disciples were first called Christian in Antioch (Acts.11:26)

The Newsletter of St Dunstan's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Poole BH14 9JG. The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Great Britain and Ireland. Metropolitan Silouan. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch John X.

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THEOLOGY

One of my favourite theologians is Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) who spent his academic career in France, being one of the Russian diaspora in Paris. Significantly, he was part of the neo-patristic revival, returning to the roots of Orthodoxy in the appreciation of the teachings of the Fathers. His most famous work is probably *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, a work I would recommend to any intelligent reader.

Lossky was very clear that his subject, Theology, could not be regarded as just another academic subject alongside other disciplines studied at university. At one level, of course, it is, if examined objectively, comparing the writings of theologians themselves. However, for Lossky, Theology is found more in its practice rather than in theory; the theologian is one *in conversation* with God; it is found in an I-Thou relationship. He, therefore, points out that gnosis, that is, any knowledge *of* God (rather than just *about* God) comes to the theologian through a relationship of prayer, and being something innate in all baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity.



Lossky cites the first epistle of St John to show the unique quality of our relationship to God: *'But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you.'* [1Jn.2:27a] He goes on to make the point that our theology is revealed by God Himself, whether it be cataphatic (what has been given to us to know and understand) or apophatic (what remains unknown, the Divine 'darkness', aware only of what God is not). Supremely, the revelation of God is to be found in the incarnation of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity. In as much as we abide in Him, as St John has said, that knowledge is ours. *'The same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.'* [1Jn.2:27b]

In these days of global amalgamation and the general view that 'all religions are the same, really' (no, they are not!) Lossky highlights the essential difference in the Orthodox Christian understanding of God. In the Old Testament God is both absolute and personal at the same time but He is not fully revealed even to His old people the Jews. God is known in His authority, yet even His name cannot be pronounced. Indeed, no one can see God and live; an inaccessible light remains between The LORD and the believer. It is only when the WORD is revealed in Christ that the abiding relationship can be fully formed. In other religions, whenever the adherent approaches the mystery of the Deity any assumed relationship evaporates. For the followers of Mohammad, God is merely a reversion the Old Testament understanding. In religions like Hinduism where the gods are avatars of the one essential Deity, salvation (Moksa) is conceived of as being the person re-absorbed, back into the point of origin. In contrast, Christianity never proposes that there is any final equivalence between God and the faithful worshipper; although we can participate in the Divine Nature through the energies of God (see: 2 Pet.1:4) the mystery of the Divine Essence can never finally

be comprehended by the creature; the relationship always remains objective between persons: I-Thou. As for the ancient Greeks, the impersonal absolute *Theos* of Plotinus or Plato cannot become incarnate as a person; for them the Eternal always remain just that, never imminent, always transcendent.

God is described in Orthodox Holy Tradition as a Trinity, a communion of three *hypostases*, or persons, each sharing the same Divine Essence (*ousia*): the person of the Father being the fount of the Divine essence; the Son/Word only-begotten from Him eternally; and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father eternally, ever existing, uncreate in One Being or Godhead. This is the knowledge, the Theology, instilled into the apostles by the Holy Spirit Himself; this is the Word of God (*Theos-Logos*) of the Fathers whose monument is found in the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils.

We, as Orthodox Christians hold all this to be self-evident. If all men, politically, can be seen as self-evidently created equal, according to the man-made American Constitution, then certainly we know, theologically, through the anointing within us, that our salvation is self-evidently found in our communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When, therefore, we come to consider other Christians from the heterodox traditions, we can often be left wondering how much they still share with us in the common apostolic faith. It might be thought unfair to expect ordinary believers to participate in theology at such a level. But that was precisely Lossky's point: the life of any Christian is theology, a personal and communal engagement with God by the Spirit who prays within us (see: Rom.8:12-25). By contrast, I suspect that many in western Christianity have drifted back into the heresy of Arius. It is obvious, for example, in the sub-Christian heresy propounded by the Jehovah's Witnesses, but much might be uncovered, lying dormant in the minds of evangelical Protestants. Not long ago I read of an evangelical conference where two delegates were concerned over this and wanted to assess the members. They set up a opinion poll within the conference asking the simple question: *who thinks that Jesus Christ is God's greatest creation?* To their horror more than seventy percent of the delegates said, yes!

At the time of writing, the latest peculiarity to emerge from *the Church by Law Established* has been noised abroad. The Church of England is, apparently, going to debate the idea of a 'gender-neutral god.' Alongside the rest of its tangential journey into the kingdom of Woke, this just confirms that the old institution is now teetering on the edge of theological dementia.

The C of E has always maintained the outward appearance and structure of an episcopal church. The problem, however (as I realised when I left in the early 90's) was the absence of any essential substance under the form. It appeared, as I have often remarked, like the story of the *Emperor's New Clothes*, only this time the clothes are there: it's the emperor who is missing.

Of course, the Divine Essence (*ousia*) cannot be differentiated by sex. The confusion in the Anglican mind is the failure to distinguish between what is meant by nature and person (*ousia* and *hypostasis*) when using the word, *God*. The idea of a so-called gender-neutral god is akin to an absolute monad, or the One Ultimate (Brahman) of Hinduism. When the scriptures speak of *God the Father* they are talking about a person who is the origin of all, fatherhood being the active, creative principle. (see: Eph.3:14-19) to worship a mother goddess is an entirely different religion and theology; and a god thought of as gender-neutral is a depersonalised God; an anonymous *IT*. As Lossky would no doubt have noticed, this is not God as He has revealed Himself to us. The Episcopal (Anglican) Church of America has long gone down this very road. As a result of purported baptisms done in the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Spirit, former-Anglicans wishing to enter the Orthodox Church are now received by Baptism, rather than just Chrismation: their Anglican baptism being, clearly, invalid. It is entirely possible, therefore, that the same situation will arise in this country, eventually. However sadly we might regard all this, we cannot be surprised. A church that began tampering with the priesthood, so that it can no longer be an icon of Christ the Bridegroom, was bound eventually to try and remake God in its own image, having married the spirit of this gender-fluid age.

Similar deformed ideas have developed among various Protestant denominations. Although the ordinary Orthodox believer might not always be able to put his objections into words, through that anointing that is within, he feels, he knows, that this is wrong, heretical. The holy canons have always directed us away from active worship at heterodox services (this should not prevent us, of course, from attending such occasions as funerals etc). Increasingly, we must even wonder why official Orthodox bodies still engage in ecumenical dialogues. British Christians have been in contact with the Eastern Church since the Non-Jurors of the eighteenth century, and the Ecumenical Movement of the twentieth century has largely seen the Heterodox diverging further and further from Holy Tradition. The Orthodox Church remains yet largely unknown in this country. I remember, many years ago, an Orthodox friend telling me that being Orthodox in this country is a lonely plough to furrow. Although we might seem isolated, there are many more of us here now in Britain, and it is our faithful witness that defines, in very clear

terms, the boundaries of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church. Our doors, though, are open to all who wish to seek the truth.

Fr Chrysostom



The Lenten Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, meddling, lust of power and idle talk.

[prostration]

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.

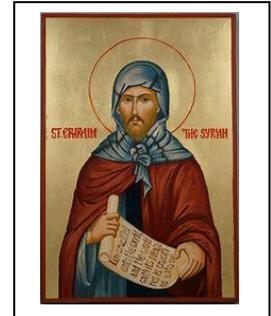
[prostration]

Yae, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, For Thou are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

[prostration]

Make twelve metanias, saying each time: God be gracious unto me, the sinner.

Repeat the whole prayer, straight through with only one prostration at the end.



THE RESURRECTION LIFE

After the resurrection, when our bodies will be reunited to our souls, they will be incorruptible; and the carnal passions which disturb us now will not be present in those bodies; we shall enjoy a peaceful equilibrium in which the prudence of the flesh will not make war upon the soul; and there will no longer be that internal warfare wherein sinful passions fight against the law of the mind, conquering the soul and taking it captive by sin. Our nature will then be purified of all these tendencies, and one spirit will be in both, I mean in the flesh and in the spirit, and every corporeal affection will be banished from our nature.

St Gregory of Nyssa



HOLY TRADITION

Holy Tradition is the Memory of the Church at Work. The fact that protestants, by and large, have travelled far from the faith and traditions of the Apostolic Church, is testament to what happens when one departs from the "memory" of the Church. This "memory" is kept alive through Holy Tradition, from which came the very Canon of the New Testament.

Deciding what the Early Church believed, and how they worshiped, without Holy Tradition as the guide, has resulted in more than 39,000 different denominations, all of which have departed, in various degrees, from the Church founded by Christ Himself.

"Rituals" are not important to Orthodox, for rituals are simply external forms of religion. What is important is that we follow the grace filled services and practices preserved from the time of the Ancient Church. We do not need to reinvent worship every few years, in a sad attempt to remain relevant to the culture around us. Rather, we attempt to resist the fallen culture around us, while infusing modern culture, devoid of Christian values and beliefs, with a culture infused with Orthodoxy.

We don't try to understand a particular scripture passage outside the Mind of the Church, for we know that the Church always decided teachings, worship practices, and the Canon of Scripture, itself, according to what was always taught, everywhere, and at all times.

We believe Christ's promise that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the Church, and that the Church is protected, as long as she sticks with her conciliar nature, which has guided her for over two thousand years.

The Orthodox Church one hundred years from now, provided the Lord has not returned before then, will be the same as she is today, in worship, doctrine, and faith. It doesn't, in the end, mean a thing about what I think, or how I might interpret a passage in the Bible. What matters is that I cultivate the Mind of the Church within myself.

Abbot Tryphon

SERVICES

Vespers is served on Saturday 5.00pm (Please enter by the side door). Fr Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. Fr Filip is available for Confession by appointment. Orthros is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am

MARCH

- Sun 5th First Sunday of Great Lent Sunday of Orthodoxy
Divine Liturgy and Procession of Icons 10.30am
- Sun 12th Second Sunday of Great Lent Commemoration of St Gregory Palamas
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
- Sun 19th Third Sunday of Great Lent Veneration of the Holy Cross
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
- Sat 25th Annunciation to the Holy Theotokos
- Sun 26th Fourth Sunday of Great Lent Commemoration of St John of the Ladder
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

APRIL

- Sun 2nd Fifth Sunday of Great Lent Commemoration of St Mary of Egypt
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
- Sat 8th Lazarus Saturday
- Sun 9th Entry of Our Lord in Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Holy and Great Week Passion Week

- 10th Great & Holy Monday
- 11th Great & Holy Tuesday
- 12th Great & Holy Wednesday
Anointing Service 7.00pm
- 13th Great & Holy Thursday
Vespers Divine Liturgy of the Mystical Supper 11.00am
Service of the Twelve Gospels 6.30pm
- 14th Great & Holy Friday
Vespers of the Shroud 4.00pm
Orthros (Lamentations Service) 6.30pm
- 15th Great & Holy Saturday
Midnight Office, Rush Procession & Orthros & Divine Liturgy 10.00pm
- 16th **Sunday of Holy Pascha**
Vespers of Love 2.30pm



- Sun 23rd Second Sunday of Pascha St Thomas Sunday St George the Victory-bearer
Divine Liturgy 10.30am
- Sun 30th Third Sunday of Pascha The Holy Myrrh-bearing Women
Divine Liturgy 10.30am