

THE NARTHEX

November-December 2020
'And the disciples were first called
Christians in Antioch' (Acts 11:26)

The Orthodox Church of St Dunstan of Canterbury, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9JG

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland. Archbishop: Metropolitan Silouan

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch: His Beatitude, John X

Parish Priest: Fr. Chrysostom Tel. 01202-602628 email: fr.chrysostom@icloud.com

Asst Priest: Fr Filip Tel. 01308-868543 email: frfilipommaert@gmx.com

Subdeacon David Tel. 01209-217499

Parish web site: www.saint-dunstan.org Archdiocesan web site: www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk



THE LOGOS

According to my copy of *Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Λογος (Logos) is translated as word, statement, declaration, subject matter, command, reckoning, settlement. The use of the term has roots in ancient philosophical and theological thought, both in Jewish wisdom literature and in pagan writings. The most notable example is found in the writings of Philo (c.20BC – 50AD) an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher. Philo thought of God as beyond and outside the physical universe but as acting through intermediaries; the chief of these was the Logos, an immaterial image of God. He even sees the Logos as the firstborn son of God. We can see obvious connections with Christian doctrine here, suggesting that the revelation of divine truth is not always a singular encounter or theophany, but can also be a gradual process. Philo differs from us, however, in that he describes the Logos as neither created nor uncreated, but somewhere in between. (This reminds me a bit of when I studied Hindu religious thought as part of my Theology degree, where in Hindu Philosophy a thing can be or not be, both be and not be, and can neither be nor not be... if you can get your head around that!)

Philo links biblical ideas with those of the Greek philosopher, Plato. The Logos is composed of divine thoughts that act as 'seals' impressed on the physical objects that we know in the world. For Philo it is as if the Logos was like the architect's design for building a city, and as the container of ideas, the Logos binds all things in union.

When St John wrote his Gospel, he presented the mystery of the incarnation of God as the Word (Logos) become flesh. Having encountered Christ, it is reasonable to assume that the apostle, in seeking to express and record the revelation in words, should make use of such current ideas and philosophical concepts such as the Logos, without, however, allowing the philosophy to outweigh the revelation: for St John, the Word become flesh was definitely uncreated and divine. In his first epistle, John tells us, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning

the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.' [1 Jn:1-2] This is the revelation of God that the apostle had received, and to both the Greek and Jewish worlds it was a σκανδαλον (scandalon), a scandal, a stumbling block, as the word scandal means, as prefigured in Psalm 117(118):22, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.' (See also, Matt. 21:42-43) The very idea that the Divine Word might enter His creation was unthinkable. It was true that the Greeks had myths in their religion depicting the gods appearing and coming to earth in various forms, but these gods were clearly seen as contingent beings, part of the world itself. The philosophers, however, conceived of God (Ο Θεος) as transcendent (Plato) or as not existing at all (Epicurus). St Paul too was aware that the Christian revelation, not just of the incarnation, but especially the scandal of God crucified in the flesh, was too much for unbelievers: 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.' [1 Cor.1:21-23]

In the very start of his Gospel St John echoes the opening words of the book of Genesis and takes us back to the beginning of creation. Whereas Philo relied on what had been revealed under the Old Covenant together with the philosophical ideas of his own day, the apostle John was able to receive the revelation of the Truth incarnate from the very source; as his Troparion says, *speaker of divinity, the beloved of Christ God, hasten and deliver thy people powerless in argument; for He on Whose bosom thou didst lean accepteth thee as an intercessor.* Our own faith is founded upon the idea of the direct experience and memory of the apostles; indeed, to be an apostle, whether of the twelve or the seventy, one had to have been a witness and to have seen the risen Christ. This is why St John includes the episode concerning so-called *doubting*

Thomas: to be a witness to the resurrection, St Thomas had to have seen Christ risen from the dead, in order that we might believe.

In starting his gospel with the same words as the book of Genesis, St John bears witness to a completed revelation concerning the Creation: not only is the world 'spoken' by the Lord (*And God said, 'let there be light...'*) as in Genesis, but we are brought to understand that it is the Logos of God through whom all things were made. *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 nothing was made that was made.* [Jn.1:1-3]

The Orthodox doctrine of Creation teaches that all that exists was made *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by God. This implies that God is not subject to the logic that orders this universe, although that logic (and there is but one logic in this universe) itself must originate in the mind of God. That order and reason connects our knowledge of the universe with the divine Logos; we might think of the everything around us in the material world as infused with that 'logic' of God. This does not mean that God is 'in' his creation through His Divine Being or Essence (that would be Pantheism, where all things are God). Rather, He is present through His Divine Energies, so that, as the psalmist says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."* [Ps.18(19):1-2]

St Paul also knew that God could, in part, be understood through His works: *What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.* [Rom.1:19-20]

The Orthodox Christian way of perceiving the creation has always been mystical, seeing all things as

symbolic in a very particular way. In other words, all things, being imbued with the divine energy, manifest something of God, so as to turn us to worship Him as the Creator. This has further implications for our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God, and of what becomes of the bread and wine, offered and consecrated in the Divine Liturgy, but we shall leave that for another time.

Blessed Augustine of Hippo said, *credo ut intelligam*, I believe in order to understand; it is not the other way round, so our faith in this revelation teaches us that the Logos of God (Christ) has imprinted the whole creation with the divine energies. In the last edition of the Narthex I wrote about the *backward thinking* of the physical sciences and *forward thinking* of religions. It has been tempting for many, especially in western Protestant Theology, to make the two ways dovetail into one another. Often, this seemingly unequal struggle has only resulted in a *god-of-the-gaps*, as if any spaces in our knowledge had to be filled with divine activity, to make up for the holes in our scientific knowledge: *we don't know that, so that's where God comes into it*. This is, of course, is a ridiculous idea, reducing the Almighty to a bit-part player in the drama of creation. In Orthodox Theology the Big Bang Theory is not the moment of Creation; that is not what we mean by Creation. Just because Science can know nothing about what comes before Time (movement) and Space (context) began, it certainly does not permit theologians to propose God as the filler of the gaps in our knowledge.

On the other hand, neither can scientists pronounce judgement on Theology. When Carl Sagan wrote his introduction to Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*, he noted that a model of a universe without edges or beginning had no place for God. But this paints the scientist into a corner: how could such a universe exist (stand out of non-being) at all? Although as Orthodox believers we do not have to buy into Aristotle's concept of the *Unmoved Prime Mover* (First-Cause), we can ask the scientifically embarrassing question as to why there is anything at all; why is there anything rather than nothing? Just replying that the universe had always been there (Hoyle's 'steady-state' universe) covers over the issue. Einstein remarked that the universe was comprehensible; that it could be understood through mathematics, but as to *why* it should be subject to mathematical analysis remained a mystery to him. To a certain extent, of course, the universe is comprehensible to those of a mathematical mind, but beyond that, this comprehensibility is a reflection of something more: as St Paul says, *[God's] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*. In other words, the creation that we know exists because God wills it to do so; that, although in His divine nature, God is

transcendent (beyond our comprehension), yet in His divine energies He is immanent, knowable in the rationality (logicality) of the universe.

To call God transcendent implies that He is not part of the universe like the dimensions, aspects, and particles of which it consists; He is *outside* and in no way contingent or dependent upon it. To call God immanent implies that, instead, the universe is dependent upon Him; as the Logos, God is the cause of its being at all. *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*. [Jn.1:3] However, calling God the "cause" is not the same as Aristotle's "first-cause", used to "prove" God's existence. That would be to use God as the filler-of-the-gap in our current scientific knowledge. Perhaps a better word than "cause" would be "reason" (logos!). Even God's eternity is not the same thing as infinity in Mathematics: God is infinite as Mind, Will to Love and omnipotent Power.

Passing along the line of thought, from Philo of Alexandria, we come to St Maximos the Confessor who saw *principles* in created things that match our conception of them, as, for example, when even young children might recognise that the Chihuahua and the Great Dane are both dogs, canine by nature. Maximos called these principles, *Logoi*, the plural of Logos or Word: *and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him*.

It could be thought that such arguments and discussions around these ideas might be inaccessible to those of simple faith in God; that none of this really matters to the life of an Orthodox parish community. In one sense, of course, that is perfectly true: any believer can still recite the Nicene Creed each morning with true confidence. But for those who handle Holy Things, those who deal in Theology, we have still the duty to proclaim and defend the Word, making plain that we are not dealing in irrationalities, but are contending for the Word of Truth and the gospel of salvation. Our faith is *logical* in the literal sense, not in terms of modern Scientism and atheistic philosophy, but as being the revelation of the Logos. As we approach once again the feast of His Nativity, we may, once again, ponder the meaning of that same Word, by whom *all things were made*, who was at last manifested and known in our flesh by His incarnation: one person, being both the divine Logos from all eternity, and also consubstantial with us as the Man of Nazareth, our Redeemer; that this, our human nature, though fallen from its God-intended state, is still imprinted with the very image of the Logos, and was yet re-created to find its fullest expression, its logical being, in the New Adam. As St Paul says, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*. [II Cor.5:17]

Fr Chrysostom

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 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

NOVEMBER

Sun 1st 21st after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 8th Synaxis of the Bodiless Powers Divine Liturgy 10.30am
 Before the Liturgy we have the Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial

Sun 15th 23rd after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am
Beginning of the Nativity Fast

Sat 21st Entry of the Theotokos

Sun 22nd 24th after Pentecost Sunday after the Entry Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 29th 25th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

DECEMBER

Sat 6th 26th after Pentecost St Nicholas the Wonderworker Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 13th 27th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 20th Sunday before Nativity St Ignatios of Antioch Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Fri 25th **The Nativity of Our Lord** Divine Liturgy 9.30am



Sun 27th Sunday after Nativity 29th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am