

THE NARTHEX

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2021
'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

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Heart and Mind

One of the perennial questions faced by all who teach, is whether one's students have taken in and understood what has been presented to them in a lesson or lecture? When it comes to our grasp of the Orthodox Christian ideas and concepts that we have been taught we can be at a similar disadvantage. Despite all our best efforts, time, history and culture can interfere in the gap between founders and followers; between those who present an idea and those who take it up.

Despite the integrity of Holy Tradition, we in the western world, who live two millennia after the Apostles and the Fathers, are faced with the task of what I might call, 're-appreciation.' Western Christians, especially, cannot but be the inheritors of a long history: the aftereffects of the Reformation (sixteenth century) and the Enlightenment (eighteenth century). The whole way we think about the primary ideas and beliefs in our religion often require a thorough overhaul, if, in the Pauline phrase, we are to 'Comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.' [Eph.3:18-19]

If we examine many of the words used in the Holy Scriptures and the Liturgy, the paradigms that we hold in our heads (what we think they mean) can often be at odds with what the writers had in their minds. For example, the word, *Salvation*, used without reference to Holy Tradition, might be debased, meaning merely, going to heaven when you die. That might be fine at a simplistic level but is that all it means? The Fathers had a much more dynamic interpretation.

In particular, what is meant in Orthodoxy by the terms *mind* and *heart* are of particular importance when it comes both to proclaiming and grasping what Christianity is. Political campaigns and interventions often use the idea of winning hearts and minds, that is, getting people to think like you do, and to encourage them to like you. Here, the idea of the heart is reduced to the metaphorical seat of the emotions. We know what the heart is as a functioning organ within the physical body, but the modern mind, in reality, separates

the functioning of the bodily organ from any actual emotional experience, acknowledging that the term, *heart and mind*, is only a metaphor. But this is far from the biblical, Patristic and, indeed, Orthodox understanding of the terms, heart and mind.

The Fathers of the Church, commenting in their writings upon the Tradition of the Apostles, use the word, *heart*, as referring to the centre of our own self-awareness. This is not just the phenomenon of our consciousness, brought about by a mass of electrical impulses within the brain, but the awareness and recognition of our own specific individuality (as opposed to someone else's); our unique personhood (Greek: *hypostasis*). To get an inkling of this, try asking yourself the question as to why you can only experience your own selfhood and no one else's, no matter how empathetic you might be? And why *you* appeared at *this* particular time and in *these* particular circumstances, and not in some other era? This energy, this awareness of the mind within the heart, the Fathers called the Noetic Faculty (Greek: *Nous*, mind)

For the Fathers, however, they perceived the mind (*nous*) as properly operating within the heart (as defined above) if we are to come to a knowledge of God. This is why the writers of *The Philokalia* teach that, in using the *Prayer of the Heart* (the Jesus Prayer) the final aim is for the mind to descend and remain in the heart. It is, after all, the very separation of mind and heart that constitutes the reality of our Fall.

Within the Orthodox tradition, therefore, *mind* does not refer to our own cogitations or our intellectual capacity - a model of reality that we have set out from the store of memory - but, rather, our inner perception, a comprehension of what has been received into the heart.

Historically, however, there has been the development of two approaches, the beginnings of the schism between the Latin West and the Greek East, and which led to some very different understandings of how and what we can know of God. The Scholastic (mediaeval philosophical schools) methods of the West focused on

the use of logic and reason, striving to work out and construct, by argument, a knowledge of God.

This method uses information from outside in order to build a model of reality within the mind. This is, after all, how our brains normally perceive the world around us, as when we receive visual images, enabling us to walk around a building without crashing into objects.

But pure reason has limits. We might say that the mind is the faculty by which we are aware of the presence of God, but it is not something that can just be analysed from facts or worked out by using Aristotelian syllogisms, e.g. God is in all places. I am in this place, therefore, God is with me, here, in this place. The syllogism might be true, but it is an intellectual analysis, *it is not a direct experience of God Himself*.

You may recall that episode in St Luke's gospel after the resurrection, when Our Lord opens the minds of his apostles in order that they might understand the scriptures (Lk.24:45). It is one thing to read the prophets and psalms of the Old Testament and speculate as to what they might be about. But here, the apostles experience the opening of the doors of perception, realising that the divine purpose of these scriptures was fulfilled in Christ. This knowledge is not the result of theological speculation but a participation in a revelation from God.

St Paul saw that, through pious intelligence, the pagan Greek philosophers at Athens had realised that there was an Unknown God (Acts 17:22-23). But, of course, they had no experience of Him, which is precisely the purpose of Paul's mission. As St. Nikolai Velimirovic said, 'Our religion is founded on spiritual experience, seen and heard as surely as any physical fact in this world, not theory, not philosophy, not human emotions but experience.'

For this reason the Eastern Orthodox Church is not an institution governed by a teaching authority and contained within the bounds of Canon Law. Neither is it a loose association of

the like-minded, guided according to the interpretation of one part of Holy Tradition (the Scriptures) by certain personalities. In the Orthodox mind (nous), we perceive the Church to be, firstly, a mystical body, the sacrament and manifestation on earth of the life of the kingdom of God. This is why St John Chrysostom could describe the Church as a hospital where the soul finds its cure. Here, our ultimate goal is salvation, meaning, union with God (theosis); partaking of the divine nature through participation in the divine energies. (see: 2 Pet.1:2-4) a far cry from just going to heaven when you die!

Through this perception of the heart we can see the Fall of our human nature as a kind of mishandling of the memory of God. In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve 'forget' the commandment and fix their attention instead on what is offered by worldly possibilities ('So when the woman saw the tree was good for food...' Gen.3:6) Here, knowledge about Good and Evil are analysed by the mind as worthy of possession apart from God, and the expulsion from paradise is the final confirmation that the mind has abandoned the heart. When Our Lord taught that whoever loses his life will save it, He was not only referring to those called to martyrdom, but also to the loss of the worldly mind through ascetic practice, where the heart is cleansed of its former delusions. This is why He expressed amazement at those who could analyse natural signs and predict the weather, but could not perceive the meaning of the times they lived in (Lk.12:5-56).

So our liturgical life together in Christ, in the Church, is not merely the recalling of some memorable things from an historic past, but the awakening of a knowledge that has always been there; the discovery that we are, after all, made in the image and likeness of God. This dynamic remembrance of God (literally, a re-remembrance, putting the members back together again) is engendered not by logic or reason (important though they be in dealing with the physical world) but through the reunion of our members, the mind and the heart. And this reunification, this healing, is brought about through participation in the holy mysteries, through repentance, through Baptism, through Chrismation, through Confession and Communion. This is why, with reference to the eucharistic change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Orthodox Church rejects the western doctrine of Transubstantiation, arrived at through a cognitive process. We also reject the Protestant notion of an absence of any change and the doctrine of Receptionism, whereby communion is only received by the faith of the worthy believer himself. For us the mystical change is reality, ultimately unexplainable by the intellect but perceived by the mind

in the heart. That is why we give the sacraments to babes-in-arms who, as yet, have little intellectual capacity.

Furthermore, our emersion in the Liturgy, our ascetic struggle, the conversation in prayer and the self-emptying of charity, are the very processes that lead us towards theosis. Once we are healed in this way, with the reintegration of mind in the heart, once we have acquired the mind of Christ, our true nature is revealed to and in us. Our logic and reasoning can then be restored to their proper use and, in the light of the heart, the perceptive eye of the soul, we shall come to understand the cosmos, and our place in it.

Fr Chrysostom



Saturday 6th November

**Pilgrimage to
Whitchurch Canonicorum**

**Visiting the Shrine
of**

St Wite the Martyr, Patroness of Dorset

(By kind permission of the church wardens)

Gathering at the Parish Church

At 11.00am for a
Molieben

(Prayer Service)
at 12.00 noon

At St Wite's shrine,
asking for her holy prayers



Followed by a picnic lunch
(Please ring your own food)

Please arrange your own transport and offer lifts
to others where possible

*(NB There will be no service of Vespers at St
Dunstan's in the evening)*



**The Holy Nativity of Our Lord and God and
Saviour Jesus Christ**

Christmas Eve 24th December

Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St Basil 3.00pm
Children's Party 5.30pm

Christmas Day 25th December

Orthros (chanted simply) 9.00am
(Church open 9.00am – 10.30am)

Sunday 26th December

Divine Liturgy 11.00am



SERVICES

*Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at
5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm.*

(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

Sat 6th Pilgrimage to Whitchurch
Canonicorum (NB No Vespers at St
Dunstan's)

Sun 7th 20th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 14th 21st after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Mon 15th Beginning of the Nativity
Fast



Sun 21st Entry of the Theotokos
Visit of Metropolitan Silouan
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 28th 23rd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

December

Sun 5th 24th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 12th Sunday of the Holy
Forefathers
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 19th Sunday before Nativity
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 24th Eve of the Feast of the
Holy Nativity
Vesperal Divine Liturgy 3.00pm

Sun 26th Sunday after Nativity
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

