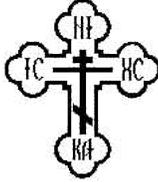


Orthodox Contact



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The Holy Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Reflections on the Asian Disaster

Some of what Fr Dimitri Baroudi said in his sermon
on January 1st, feast of the circumcision in the flesh of our Lord, and
of Saint Basil the Great

We have all seen the images of the natural disaster that has occurred in Asia. One cannot help but be moved and disturbed by them. In a flash, people lost everything: houses, possessions, food rations, family and loved ones. The only thing that is left is God's mercy.

Having lived through the Lebanese war, these images have brought to my mind the memory of burying young men in body bags. Sometimes, these young men, who were in the prime of their lives, were unidentifiable, even nameless. This taught me not to be attached to anything in this life. We must only be attached to our Saviour and God. Our money, property, knowledge, will all come to an end, but God is ever existing. This means that we have to be compassionate and caring towards everyone, because everyone bears His image.

Such tragedies compel us to learn a lesson. We must be ready to leave this earth at any time. We must repent and refrain from sin. This is not something we can accomplish through our own will power. Only God can give us the strength to refrain from sin. We must not be like the rich man who thought to himself "I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease." God said to this man: "Fool! *This night* your soul will be required of you." If we do not learn from the current events, then what could we hope to learn from? What will we wait for?

We are also compelled to show solidarity with those who have been struck by the disaster. After all, our own city could have been struck by tidal waves. If the earthquake had occurred in a different spot, the west coast of Australia could have experienced the same devastation. Instead, we have managed to keep our houses, we have continued to exchange gifts and to celebrate the coming of the new year. We must place ourselves in the same position as those people who have lost everything. Everyone of us can give. On the Sundays of January, our parish will collect donations for the Tsunami victims. Consider the cost of replacing an item of clothing, food rations, or any item you would need should you have to rebuild your life. Give meaningfully, generously. Give from all your heart, and God will bless you.

1.



You may notice on the back of this issue a new name appearing in regards to “Coordinating Contact”. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Clare Redhead and in what is a very humbling experience, Sister Virginia has asked me to assist with compiling Contact, with the view to relieving her from her amazing commitment in ensuring it continually gets ‘out there’. Sister will continue to have an overseeing role but this will mean that her greatly stretched time can be eased a little. I would personally like to thank Sister for her passion and commitment to Orthodox Contact as a means to sharing and spreading the great Treasure we have that is Orthodoxy.

My journey into this great Treasure is as a convert, and is a journey which I am continually thankful for. Orthodoxy has made alive and whole the Christian life for me. I am often envious of those for whom Orthodoxy has been a part of their life from birth, or the even the womb. However, being a convert, has made me have a great appreciation for what God has lead me into and what it is I have left behind.

In my later teens I was given a book by my father on the Desert Fathers and over twelve years of much searching, the penny finally dropped and I could see how all the threads were leading me to Orthodoxy! This included intentional searchings, and some unintentional - from investigating different forms of Christian spirituality, to a three year pilgrimage overseas to the lands of my forefathers (the North of Ireland), Celtic Christianity, different Christian communities, ‘The Way of the Pilgrim’ and finally a life changing book on Romanian Hesychasm (for ‘Romania’ kept following me around everywhere I went overseas).

When it came time for me to return to Australia, I became guilty of settling back into the ‘normality’ and ‘routine’ of life. But God in His wisdom, of course, doesn’t leave some things alone and as I picked up my Theological Studies back in Queensland, Orthodox Theology wouldn’t leave *me* alone! I began to realise that on a theological level I wasn’t a Western Christian at all, and that I had a natural intuition and understanding for that which was Orthodox.

At this time I also met Antonio, who was on a similar journey and also studying Theology. Together the Orthodox ‘light’ became so illumined that we couldn’t ignore it any longer, or simply read it in a book. We had to experience it. We got in contact with Father John Abdil-Karim of St Paul’s in Brisbane and began our Orthodox catechism and never looked back. In fact, God works in such mysterious ways - Fr John and his congregation, for many years until they built their own Church a couple of years ago, had used the Church building where I had worshipped with another community when I returned from overseas. At the time I felt led to that Church for certain reasons—in retrospect I wonder if I wasn’t far off track but didn’t quite get it right! However it doesn’t matter now, because the Lord has continued to lead us onto the right path. We now feel like we are home and we are also getting married in May this year .

I am also a convert to the city of Melbourne from the city of Brisbane! Antonio and I have both moved to Melbourne and have become part of St Nicholas’ Parish. In some ways it was a scary decision to up and leave Brisbane and in other ways it just seemed

like the right thing to do—and we have been so blessed and affirmed in this decision. For example, I was offered a full time job very quickly in an area that makes use of all the skills and gifts I have been developing over the years, including many years of working with people with disabilities as a support worker. I now work with a community of women who live together, all of whom live with mental health issues, have experienced homelessness and alcoholism. It is a Christian based community and I am working as a community development worker and case manager with these women. Here I can live out in practice the theology which I have learnt and study (I will mention that in a moment) and more importantly, now participate in every Sunday in the Divine Liturgy—the true Treasure of Orthodoxy.

It is in the Divine Liturgy that we participate and partake in the Life and Grace of Christ, of the Trinity, of the Kingdom. It is here that we place our life in the hands of God, offering ourselves, in our broken humanity, to be filled and transformed by His Grace—through His Word and Sacrament. Filled and transformed I am then able to return to the world, hopefully sharing something of that Grace that has been offered me; something of that continual process we are all invited by the Holy Trinity to be a part of - Theosis or Divinisation. As St Athanasiaus says “God became man, so that we can become god like”.

Fr Dimitiri has said in his article—everyone bears the image of God, and we all have the potential to 'become like god'. This relates to my current studies in theology here in Melbourne. My Masters research looks at how Orthodox Trinitarian Theology and understanding of Human Anthropology (Person) interfaces with mental illness, disability and human suffering. While many people are effected by intense suffering such as illness, disability, mental illness, grief loss, or events such as the Tsunami, the war in Lebanon, or those in Kenya e.g. in Fr Themis' mission, Orthodox theology unites us by our common humanity - that which is exposed to sin and suffering since the Fall. However, each of us, no matter what our plight, are called to work towards growing into the **likeness** of God, into full and unique personhood (*hypostasis*—like each person of the Trinity), even though we are **all** created in His image. Prayer, fasting and participation in the Sacraments is our call in this. In doing so we honor the mystery of God which draws us in so as to make whole our suffering and transforms us, and all creation.

Please send contributions to Orthodox Contact about your own experience of Orthodoxy and how it interfaces with your day to day life.

Commentaries on the Prison Epistles, by Johannes Karavidopoulos (translation and comments by Ziad Baroudi)

Introduction:

A necessary word of caution: this may seem like an exercise in absurdity. It is a review of two books which are only accessible to speakers of Greek or Arabic. Nevertheless, by writing it, I sincerely hope to achieve two things:

1) give the reader a taste of the thought of this fine Orthodox scholar; and

2) manage to get a Greek Australian interested in translating his works into English.. This would be the first full commentary on the New Testament in the English language written by an Orthodox scholar.

One final caution is that all the quotes in this review are translated for this purpose only. They are not taken from an edition of the books, and are not the result of a professional translator's efforts. References have been skipped for ease of reading (and writing).

About the author:

Johannes Karavidopoulos is professor of New Testament at the University of Thessalonica, and one of the editors of the Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies. He has written an encyclopaedic commentary on the whole New Testament, and the University of Balamand, where he serves as a visiting professor, is currently translating the commentaries on the Prison Epistles into Arabic. So far, the commentaries on Ephesians and Philemon have been published.

Archimandrite Ephrem (Kyriakos), the translator of the commentary on Ephesians and a former student of Karavidopoulos', says of his work:

... The great achievement of the author lies in conveying the most difficult meanings in a language that is understood by the general public and the specialists alike. ... The greater achievement, however, of the Epistles' exegete is that he has given us here various contemporary critical explanations ... without neglecting the ancient patristic ones. The professor added his personal opinion each time, proving that it is possible to benefit from contemporary Biblical criticism without marginalising the patristic Biblical tradition. This possible and successful synthesis was arrived at by this exegete due, in my reckoning, to his vast erudition and genuine spirituality.

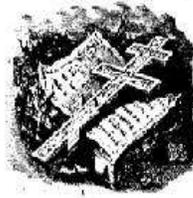
The author has provided a special introduction to the Arabic edition, in which he tells us of the origin of the Prison Epistles:

[these epistles] were not composed in the comfortable settings available in today's public libraries, but are pastoral texts written to answer the questions of the first Christian communities.

Since he did not listen to any worldly authority that wanted him to stop this missionary work of his, he passed not a little time of his life in prison. However, he did not refrain from his missionary work. Hence, some of the letters he has written, the most beautiful of them, such as Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians and Philemon were penned in prison, and this is how they became known as the prison Epistles.*

The principal concern that the Apostle Paul had in writing these four letters was to emphasise that the Church is Christ's body; in other words, to emphasise the teaching that the Church constitutes one body whose head is Jesus Christ and whose members are all the believers. Every division of this unity is an

affront to Jesus Christ and all the members of the body.



Each Epistle is introduced with a thorough look at its context and message, as well as a discussion of its authorship. The author believes, for instance, that Ephesians was written by a disciple of St Paul's, possibly Tichicus, to whom the Apostle had dictated a 'summary of the thoughts' which he wanted him to convey.

convey.

convey.

Samples from the commentaries:

One feature of these commentaries is the author's rejection of pure speculation. He presents the points of view of many scholars, but takes issue with extreme views that are not backed up by evidence. The following verse provides an example:

Ephesians 1:13: In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**.
... *"the word of truth" is clarified by the expression "the gospel of your salvation", the gospel in which they believed and were saved -since the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16) – and thus they were sealed with the Holy Spirit. We have no need to resort to Dibelius and his thesis that, in the secret religions, the catechumen (o mystes) receives a distinctive sign to indicate the dwelling of the deities and their protection.*

At this point, Karavidopoulos presents us with a lengthy list of references from both Testaments as well as Rabbinic sources. He then concludes in a statement that also illustrates his willingness to quote the patristic tradition:

It is clear that the Apostle here is alluding to the baptism of the Christians who are the intended recipients of the letter because the word "seal" and the verb "you were sealed" are expressions used in the early Church and linked to baptism. The Holy Spirit which is given at baptism "seals" the Christians, and this seal marks the fact that they belong to God as his property ...The phrase "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" which is used in the service of the Orthodox sacrament of Chrismation reminds us of (2 Cor 1:22) and of this verse. In this verse, the Holy Spirit is described as the "Spirit of promise" not because it was given after God's promise to humanity, but because it guarantees the fulfilment of God's future promise and assures, according to Theophylact, "the promise of the good things to come".

The commentator's analysis of the language of the Epistles is another delight to the reader of these books. Here, it helps if you can read the Greek words which will have to remain even in a translated edition. Take this sample from the commentary on Philemon, where the Apostle asks the recipient of his letter to receive his escaped slave, Onesimus, whom the Apostle had met and instructed in the way of Christ:

Philemon 11: *Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and*

to me.

... It is possible to write the pair of words *Achrestos – Evchrestos* (useful – useless) in a different way without them sounding any different to the listener ***.By replacing the letter η (e) with the letter ι (i) we get the pair *Achristos – Evchristos*. The latter pair of words is derived in structure and meaning from the word “Christos”, that is Christ. The meaning then becomes as follows: with Christ after his conversion – without Christ before his conversion. ... Regardless of this linguistic context, the transformation of Onesimus from a useless person to a useful one goes principally to the person of Christ in whom he has now become a believer thanks to Paul. In all cases, the past cannot be vested with more weight than the present which is filled, before all else, with hope, and is open to the future which comes after it (verse 15: that you might have him back forever). Paul's theological optimism for man, as can be seen in his greater epistles, is based on the importance of the future resurrectional event, not the past of sin and death (see for example the fifth chapter of the letter to the Romans). And this is what we perceive here in the case of a particular person. Paul's theology would not have been of value if one could not perceive its application in detailed situations, and specific persons. Despite the fact that this short letter to Philemon addresses a special case, it is nevertheless an embodiment of a theological view of the human person, even a Christological one. For the power that transforms a personal existence – a transformation whereby one who was “useless” becomes “useful” - is a gift from Christ whom Paul preaches and in whom he believes, as does the letter's recipient and the members of his family. It would be illogical for Philemon to believe, on the one hand, in the possibility of people's transformation in Christ, and not to want, on the other hand, to see this transformation in a specific case, that is in that of Onesimus.

* While Karavidopoulos addresses the authorship of each Epistle in detail, he accepts that all four are of Pauline origin, even when written in their final form by an intermediary.

** RSV except for “Spirit of promise” which is from the NKJV and the text used by the author.

***In contrast to the pronunciation taught in English-speaking colleges, Greeks pronounce the iota and eta identically.

Spiritual Pitfalls on the Internet

This article is a follow-up to “Playing with Fire”, which appeared in the last issue of *Orthodox Contact*.

by Naomi Chapman

The information following on the occult/new age influences especially via the internet has been derived from personal experience, the experience of other Orthodox Christians and can be readily verified online. However, it is suggested one should only investigate online if feeling strong in faith and called to do so. Any further issues or concerns

surrounding this topic should be discussed with a Spiritual Father.

*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.
(1 Timothy 4:1, KJV)*

Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:3, KJV)

*For all the gods of the nations are **demons**: but the LORD made the heavens. (Psalms 96:5, Septuagint)*

Demon's Methods

- Demons pose as benign, enlightened spiritual beings (sometimes called “ascended masters” or “spirit guides” by New Agers) to hide their true identity.
- Demons lure their subjects to probe deeper and ask questions relating to hidden (occult) spiritual knowledge. Seeking this kind of knowledge apart from God is condemned in the Bible (Lev 19:31).
- Demons pose as enlightened spiritual beings to develop the trust of their subjects and to foster a personal relationship, or bond, with them. By this means, they gradually draw their subjects away from God's saving truths and into great spiritual darkness.

Their Goals

- To gain entry through the invitation of their subject
- To propagate the spread of errors and to entice others to do the same
- To lead people away from sound doctrine
- To cause suffering



- Their ultimate goal: The damnation of souls.

Websites to avoid:

Spiritual “healing lists.” These sites often require you to provide your name and email address to the website owners so that you can be healed remotely by so-called “ascended masters.” Needless to say, actually sending your email address to these websites is extremely unwise. It can grant demons entry into your life because you have given them permission, consciously or otherwise, to contact you spiritually.

Those offering email contact with an “ascended master”, “spirit guide”, or some other supposedly benign spiritual being, who will answer your questions and give you helpful spiritual advice or knowledge. The creature you are contacting is in fact a demon-influenced or demon-controlled human being. And the true goal of that demon is your utter spiritual ruin.

Those featuring the New Age “Great Invocation.” This invocation contains Christian terminology designed to beguile the unwary, although in reality it is a demonic

incantation whose words have double meanings. Reading it (or, worse still, reciting it aloud) can thereby extend an invitation to demons to sneak around our free will and oppress us.

Those that encourage you to play sound files of New Agers “channelling” a spiritual entity.

In reality the entities being channelled are demons seeking our spiritual destruction. We should thus pay no heed to anything they have to say (1 Tim 4:1), as their aim is to deceive us and draw us away from Jesus Christ.

All occult websites, especially those featuring signs and symbols of occult spirituality.

For example be wary of: New Age, Astrology, Psychic Readings, Tarot, Reiki, Transcendental Meditation, Transmission Meditation, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Gaia/Earth Mother Spirituality, Hinduism, Celtic Spirituality, Druids, Native American Spirituality, Wicca, Jewish Kabbalah/Mysticism, Mystery Schools, Paganism, Freemasonry, Theosophy, Witchcraft, “Magick”, Satanism, and many more groups too numerous to mention.

The Three Hierarchs: The Patron Saints of Letters and Learning

By Dr Christos Galiotos

President of MIOCS (Melbourne Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies)



The 30th January is the Feast of the Three Hierarchs. As the patron saints of Letters and Learning, it seemed fitting that the beginning of the Academic year for MIOCS was celebrated by Vespers with the festival troparion sung in English, Arabic, Greek, Slavic and Syriac, a sign of the jurisdictions involved in MIOCS. The Feast was also marked with a combined Parish Youth Liturgy at St Mary’s Williamstown, which was the first of a projected annual event.

The Three ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs are remembered and venerated both for their love of God and contribution to the creation of a Greek Christian literature. St John Chrysostom (354-407), St Basil the Great (330-379) and St Gregory the Theologian (329-390) are known as the three Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church. The inclusion of the Feast of “The Three Hierarchs” was a later insertion into the ecclesiastical calendar of the Byzantines; a political and pastoral move to discharge tension amongst Christian factions that were ascribed to or too closely affiliated with one particular Hierarch. The intimate affiliation with only one of the three Hierarchs meant that these Christian groups would be called either ‘Basilian,’ ‘Gregorian,’ or ‘Johannine.’ It was due to their creative and

copious contribution to Greek Letters and Christian doctrine that the Byzantines displayed such pious devotion to these ecclesiastical personalities.

The Three Hierarchs and ecumenical Teachers lived in the fourth and fifth centuries A. D. It was during this time that Christianity was recognised as the official religion of the State. The Christian Church begins to develop amongst a broader Roman, Hellenistic and Judaic context. There was a dynamic co-existence of other spiritual traditions and cultures with Christianity. The three Hierarchs were mostly trained under pagan (Hellenistic) teachers both in their secondary and tertiary education. They excelled in their rhetorical training, the art of persuasive speech. The philosophical and literary movement that gave rise to rhetorical education was called the Second Sophistic. This movement was a marriage between Platonic philosophy and Greek rhetoric. The outcome of the Second Sophistic movement amongst Hellenistic orators was the creation of a philosophical rhetoric, that is, a rhetorical mode of communication that sought to establish the first principles or primary assertions of a discourse. The Three Hierarchs were deeply influenced by the Second Sophistic. This is astutely reflected in their writings. As Hellenistic (pagan) orators were moving towards a philosophical rhetoric, Christian orators were moving towards a rhetorical theology; a theological discourse that assimilated Hellenistic literary forms for the linguistic expression of doctrinal Orthodoxy.

The voluminous theological texts of the Three Hierarchs flow from a spiritual life and asceticism. There was a great deficiency of Christian literature prior to the emergence of the fourth century A. D. The Three ecumenical Teachers devoted much of their time and energy to the creation of a Greek Christian literature. Their ecclesiastical, theological and poetic texts fulfilled a number of functions within the ascending Byzantine Church. First, their speeches were often re-written and published for greater circulation amongst the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Second, they explained the theological significance of Holy Scripture from a literary, moral and spiritual perspective. Third, they were radical reformers in the formulation of the Divine Liturgy (St John's and St Basil's) which are still used until today –a true testimony to a living Orthodox Tradition. St Gregory the Theologian also wrote a Divine Liturgy but this liturgical text is little known and still awaits translation for a more extensive usage. Fourth, they gave linguistic formulation to ecclesial dogmas and upheld the orthodox interpretation of controversial biblical passages. St Gregory's festive speeches composed in rhetorical prose and metrical in style; they were often taken verbatim by subsequent Byzantine hymnographers, like John of Damascus and Romanos the Melodist –both from Antioch- for the development of Byzantine hymnography. Hence, the reception of the Three Hierarchs' texts is an important aspect of the Orthodox Tradition.

The writings of the Three Hierarchs were almost immediately published for greater circulation and readership. The wide-spread publication of heretical works possibly facilitated this process. The reception of the Three Hierarchs' texts into the surrounding Christian communities was almost instantaneous. Their texts were translated into Aramaic, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Syriac and Latin very early on. Indeed, the Three Hierarchs became a patristic paradigm for these ancient Christian communities. The work of translation was an intense and laborious exercise that required and still requires supreme linguistic skills. The reception and translation of their texts into other

non-Greek speaking Christian communities bears an infallible witness to another truth of the early Church; the Church has always encouraged and blessed the work of translation into the language of the land. It often escapes a modern Christian reader how devoted the fathers of the Church were to translating patristic, biblical and liturgical texts into their native tongue. Consequently, the extensive reception of these texts affirms the fact that Orthodoxy transcends national and racial borders.

The Three Hierarchs wrote extensively on complex theological questions of their day. They took a bold and creative stance against the falsification of the biblical and baptismal faith. They achieved a creative synthesis between classical Greek culture and Christian faith (i.e. *pistis*). They also created prose and poetry that was composed for the provision of a Christian education and assimilated into an emerging Christian curriculum. One is amazed and simultaneously allured by the inventiveness of the Three Hierarchs; an open invitation for us today to live and experience the ecumenicity of Orthodoxy located at the epicentre of social activities and theological deliberations.

Spirituality and Theology in "The Three Hierarchs" cont.

The Three ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs lived during a creative conjunction of classical Greek culture and Christianity. They enfolded the biblical message of sanctity and salvation through Christ in all of its existential dimensions. The Three Hierarchs lived, wrote and administered the Church during a period of great transition. They were able to use the cultural achievements of their age for a creative expression of the Christian faith. They assimilated the art of persuasive speech, namely, the art of rhetoric, to elevate the Sunday homily into Christian oratory. They lived in an age that gave great emphasis on the usage of the spoken and written word. The ability to speak eloquently and convincingly was part of a young man's initiation into manhood. They were great teachers and ascetics of the faith who showed the inestimable possibilities and prospects of the human person to live the biblical ideal. An ideal that is focused on the saving grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that leads to a radical change in a person's mode of life and thinking; a change that becomes a transfiguration in God's glory and ultimately lead to metamorphosis.

St John Chrysostom devoted much of his life and writings to the moral teachings that are encompassed within the biblical texts. He believed that a Christian's inner prayer is ongoing even when he is out shopping. Chrysostom excelled in his oratorical skills by using rhetorical devices to entice the interest of his audience for God's glorification and the people's salvation. The title ascribed to him by the Church "Golden-mouthed" attests to his communicative skills within a liturgical context. St Basil the Great was a great organiser of the Church. He established a monastic Rule to be used as pastoral guidelines for the organisation of communal monasticism. St Basil showed great pastoral sensitivity in his theological writings. He wanted to win back those Christians who had fallen into heresy by providing broader and more flexible formulations of Christian doctrine. He had a gift *to listen* through what people were saying and get to the problem. St Gregory the Theologian was an eloquent ecclesiastical orator and an accomplished Christian poet. He loved to live a life of prayer and solitude but was often called to Higher Office

as a Bishop to govern the Church. He strongly emphasised the importance both of purity of life and faith (doctrine). He spent time polishing his sermons for subsequent publication and created a corpus of Christian speeches/discourses. St Gregory is one of three Church Fathers who has received the title of “the Theologian,” along with St John the Evangelist and Theologian and St Symeon the New Theologian. The Three Hierarchs devoted much of their efforts to a radical reformation of monasticism, liturgy, philanthropic institutions and a Greek Christian literature.

Their speeches have inspired innumerable generations of Christian readers and bear the seal of an authentic spiritual life. It is this authenticity of life that remains as a source of inspiration for us today. Their writings and teachings flow from a deep spiritual life. Indeed, in the Orthodox Church, one talks about an ascetic consciousness. They gave great emphasis to asceticism. The spiritual life begins with obedience to God’s will and self-discipline. This is why one perceives an unbroken connection between their spiritual life and theological works; a seamless tapestry of theology and spirituality.

The Three Hierarchs are still alive and with us today in the Church. Within sacramental life and liturgical time, the Three Hierarchs continue to live and act. They still intercede for our salvation, growth and protection. They continue to inspire us to lead a life of continuous renewal in God’s salvific grace from purification to purification, from repentance to repentance and from glory to glory. Their bold stance on matters of faith and literary achievements remain a source of inspiration for our transitory world today.

The Person in the Orthodox Tradition’.
By Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktos.

A Review by Antonio Cagnoni of St Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church.

The Author in his introduction describes the human person and freedom as two of the greatest concerns of modern man; such an affirmation is hard to dispute. He goes on to add that in our modern society “we have ceased to be seen as persons, and therefore have no true or real freedom”. He writes that the “Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church were genuinely concerned with this problem, not as a mere philosophical quest but from real existential problems which arose mainly as a part of their effort to safeguard the right way of life which had been revealed and which leads the human person to salvation”. He ends his introduction by saying that what the philosophers of the ancient world offered and what their adherents are offering humanity today is the same. That is to say “when they speak of the human person and freedom, they mean something abstract which has no ontological content, and to the free choice between two things”.

The author then goes on in quite amazing detail to describe how the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church gave broader dimensions to these two subjects. He entitles his first chapter; “The Holy Fathers and Philosophy”, an important chapter to read especially if you find yourself being told that the Fathers, simply employed Greek philosophy to understand God, consequently dismissing them to have no authority in ‘today’s’ church, or value for modern man. Here the author makes very clear that whilst the philosophers engaged in speculative and imaginative thought, the Fathers were responding to the

Revelation of God being lived out in their own lives through deep repentance and unceasing prayer, the former being speculative the latter experiential.

Quoting St Gregory the Theologian who writes; “It is impossible to express God...and yet more impossible to conceive Him” the author makes the crucial point which he then goes on to tease out in the proceeding chapters that it is impossible to understand God through “reasoning and conjecture”. This he states is a “fundamental Orthodox theological argument and thought”. The inability to understand and respect this has lead he argues to “all of the heresies that have beset the Church”. He ends this awesome chapter by quoting St John of Damascus’ sixth definition of philosophy; “Philosophy is a love of wisdom, but true wisdom is God. Therefore, the love of God is true philosophy”. In doing so he demonstrates the triumph of Orthodoxy, and the fulfilment of philosophy through Orthodox theology. In this opening part of the book the author makes it clear that true theology is not just a bunch of head knowledge about God. He writes; “Theology is the practical life and true wisdom (philosophy), as it helps us to face realistically and soundly all the autonomisings and idolatries of life, and therefore it is liberating, sanctifying and integrating.

The chapter ends with the prophetic words’ “Today when we are receiving the impact of so many different currents, this teaching and life of the Holy Fathers is necessary”. Remaining faithful to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the author focuses the rest of this work on the theme of the book; the human person. He writes with a passion for the dignity of the human person made in the Image of God with the potential to grow into the likeness of Christ through ascetic struggle and the grace given by the sacraments of the Church.

His response to the secular concept of freedom as autonomy (self -rule), he exposes as nothing more than a “temptation” stating that “perfect human freedom lies in our turning naturally towards our archetype (Jesus Christ)”. None of this comes easily, as the author makes clear in the final part of this amazing book. He emphasises the need for all Orthodox to be prayerful and through confession, repentance and participation in the sacraments to liberate their hearts and minds from things which are transient to that which is eternal, only then will they experience the freedom for which they were created by God.

He writes, “God cannot help the person as long as that person does not rely exclusively on God”. The author clearly has written this book in the same spirit of ascetic struggle as the Holy Fathers he consistently refers to, he is mindful of the seriousness of the spiritual struggle and of the resistance that all faithful Orthodox who try to live in this way will experience. He ends his book with the prophetic words; “Thus the whole Christian life, the new life which Christ brought to the world is folly to our modern society...let us not interest ourselves in what opinion the world has, but in God’s opinion”.

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send to Riasaphor Virginia. 14 Mihil St Preston Vic.. 3072.
Tel. & Fax. 03 9484 2238 or Clare Redhead, P.O. Box 650 Northcote Vic. 3070.
or e-mail: virginiahutchinson@bigpond.com or clareredhead@hotmail.com

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