

extract

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Modern Orthodox Theology: Past—Present—Future

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This lecture and the occasion of its delivery are due to Tibor Görföl's translation into Magyar of two of my books—my first and my latest, *primus et novissimus*—*The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: from Plato to Denys* (1981, republished with an Afterword, 2006), and *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: from the Philokalia to the Present* (2015). I first want to express my gratitude—and wonder—at Dr Görföl's taking on this task. I have done some translating myself, and it is a gruelling business. I hope very much that Tibor did not too often say to himself—why am I doing this?

Tibor asked me to talk in this lecture about how I see Orthodox theology now, eight years on from my book, and I shall do that, but first let me say a little about myself. Thinking about what to say to you, I was struck by certain parallels between the two books. First of all—and most obviously—the fact that both books trace a theme by discussing a series of thinkers in something like chronological order: in the first case starting in the fourth century BC and ending up in the sixth century AD (though in its penultimate chapter, leaping forward to the sixteenth century and discussing the themes of darkness in St John of the Cross, for me, then at least, the archetypal mystic of Western Christian mysticism), in the second case beginning with the publication of the *Philokalia* in 1782 at the end of the eighteenth century and then tracing a line, or several lines, from that moment in Ottoman Greece (where it was compiled; the place of publication was Venice) through contemporary movements in Russia, which I followed through the nineteenth century, through the intellectuals exiled from

Bolshevik Russia by Lenin in a decree of 1922—the thinkers of what is often referred to as the ‘Philosophers’ Steamer’ (though there were several)—their presence, and the impact of their presence in the West, principally Paris, and then following the rays that spread during the period *entre deux guerres* continuing to illuminate Paris, spreading further afield through other European countries, mostly England and Greece, as well as Serbia and Romania, and across the Ocean to America. That sounds straightforward, but in fact involves settling various questions, even if only *ambulando*, as I walked, so to speak. The central question in the first book was: what is mystical theology? which I interpreted as closely bound up with the influence on Plato on the succeeding centuries. I knew then, and would recognize more readily now, that there are other strands of what one might call mystical theology, altogether more innocent of the influence of Plato, not least the Syrian tradition, with its origins in such as Ephrem the Syrian, and his successors, including great men of prayer, such as Philoxenos of Mabbug, Isaac the Syrian, Joseph Abdisho, and John of Dalyatha. In explanation of my bias—not in defence of it—I would say that this world has been opened up only in my lifetime, principally by Dr Sebastian Brock, a lifelong friend from whom I have learnt very much, but who is, in fact, only a few years older than me. With the second book, I suppose the crucial question was: what *is* Orthodox theology? I simplified that question by the decision—barely a decision, more rising from a settled conviction—to talk, as I had in my first book, about people, about ‘thinkers’, as my title had it, because it *is* my conviction that thinking comes first, ideas thereafter. Ideas do not float in some noetic ether and combine and oppose, separate and develop, on their own: they are thought, and what they mean is what thinkers meant by them. That may sound obvious, but there are influential currents of thought in intellectual history that subordinate the thinker to the thought. I don’t mean by that that one should not—or even cannot—study Orthodox theology—or anything else—in terms of ideas,

doctrines, and so on. That is certainly legitimate, and a fine example of just that is to be found in a book, even bigger than mine, by another friend of mine, Paul Ladouceur, called *Modern Orthodox Theology—“Behold, I make all Things New”*, published just four years after mine (2019). Dr Ladouceur’s book is arranged chronologically, starting further back than mine, in fifteenth-century Russia, tracing a story through Russia, the émigrés—distinguishing more sharply between those who belonged to the ‘Russian Religious Renaissance’ and those who adhered to the Neopatristic synthesis—to Greece and Romania, before embarking on a thematic study of Orthodox theology—God and Creation, Divine Humanity, the Church, Ecumenical Theology, the Christification of Life, Social and Political Theology, the Name of God controversy, the question of the Ordination of Women, followed finally by two chapters of ‘assessment’.

My own approach raised a different kind of questions, and indeed solved them, at least provisionally, by making the publication of the *Philokalia* a turning-point, or watershed, in the history of Orthodox theology, which entailed ignoring the waters that continued to flow in their own way, by-passing the watershed: in other words, the traditional Orthodox ways of theology that had emerged in eighteenth-century Russia and in the newly independent Orthodox countries that had thrown off the ‘Ottoman’ yoke. Seeing the publication of the *Philokalia* in 1782 (the year after Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, something I have commented on elsewhere) as a watershed in Orthodox theology is to make a value judgment—something I found easy, as it followed directly enough from what had led me to write my first book: a conviction that God is encountered in prayer, first and foremost, a conviction that had, it seemed to me in my formative years, been largely ignored, but which still seems to me too obvious to ignore. You will not be surprised to learn that the first theological book to make a deep and lasting impression on me was Rudolf Otto’s *Das Heilige* (in English: “The Idea of the Holy”), which I must have read when I was seventeen.

So let us embark on considering my subject, “Orthodox Theology: past–present–and future”. Again, at the present moment, I cannot consider this in the abstract. First of all, in the last year, we have seen the death of two great Orthodox theologians, whose influence in the Orthodox world was, and is, huge, and whose death leaves a palpable sense of loss among many, not only among the Orthodox. These two Orthodox theologians are, of course, Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) who died on 24 August last year, just a few days short of his 88th birthday, and Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) who died on 2 February this year a few weeks after his 92nd birthday. They were both scholars and theologians of world renown, and both metropolitans of the Œcumenical Patriarchate. Their differences are significant: whereas Met. Kallistos was an archetypal English gentleman with a superb education in the Greek and Roman Literature, Ancient History and Classical Philosophy at Oxford University, where he was later to hold the position of Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies from 1966 until his retirement in 2001, Met. John studied in the universities of Thessaloniki and Athens, then abroad at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, following that by some years in the United States, with Fr Georges Florovsky at Princeton (where Met. Kallistos had also spent a year), before pursuing a stellar international university career, with posts at Athens (from which he had his doctorate), then Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland, and later London, finally becoming a professor at Athens, when he returned to Greece as a metropolitan. Though both professional academics, they were rather different. Met. Kallistos’ published work included few books—one, his first book, *The Orthodox Church*, written as a very new convert and published in 1963, which has never been out-of-print and been updated a couple of times as well as being translated into several languages, has been a best seller, the influence of which has been enormous; in the following year there appeared a book with a much more restricted readership, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of Greek Church under Turkish*

Rule, which focused on a little-known eighteenth-century Greek lay theologian, bringing clarity to a subject then hardly discussed; both these books were written while he was engaged in research at Oxford, leading to the award of a doctorate (D.Phil.); somewhat later, in 1979, he published *The Orthodox Way*, about the Orthodox approach to God, practical rather than speculative. Besides these books his publications took the form of articles, less on academic topics (though based on thorough research), than on pastoral and spiritual themes. Met. John's publications were rather different: his one monograph was his doctoral thesis, published in English translation as *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (2001); the rest of his publications took the form of lectures and articles directed to an academic, or at least, intellectual audience, later gathered together in several books. Although they both became metropolitans of the Œcumenical Throne, Met. Kallistos was a monk of Patmos, and had in Oxford been parish priest of the Greek Orthodox Community there for more than forty years before becoming Metropolitan Kallistos in 2007, whereas Metropolitan John had been a lay academic theologian before his elevation as Metropolitan in 1986. Furthermore, though Met. Kallistos had many research students, who did not, alas, include me, he saw his theological mentorship as helping his students to find themselves, think their own thoughts—he left behind him no 'school of theology'—whereas I think one can speak of a Zizioulan 'school of theology'—which has found unofficial institutional status at the Ecclesiastical Academy in Volos, and which has its adherents, as well as opponents, though, surprisingly, Met. John had very few doctoral students, maybe only one, Fr Nicholas Loudovikos, who has become one of the most penetrating critics of his *Doktorvater*. The comparison of the two departed metropolitans could be continued. They were both deeply committed to the Ecumenical Movement, taking part in conversations, official and unofficial, with other Christians, not

least Catholics and Anglicans; with Met. John playing a significant role in the World Council of Churches. Finally, though both Greek metropolitan bishops, Met. Kallistos came to Orthodoxy through the Russians and retained a love and sympathy for the Russian Orthodox Church throughout his life, Met. John's attitude to the Russians was, let us say, more guarded.

This leads me to the other issue that I cannot ignore at this present moment. We are now living in a world where the unity of Orthodoxy, founded on *sobornost'*—an all-embracing unity, neither confected nor imposed—has been shattered by the schism, imposed by the Patriarch of Moscow, between the Russian patriarchate and the Œcumenical patriarchate. It is now of nearly five years' standing, and has opened up a chasm in Orthodoxy that has been used to justify the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the fratricidal war that is still continuing. We might well ask: what *is* Orthodox theology? What kind of a theology can it be, too frail to prevent war between fellow-Orthodox Christians, or so wicked as to justify it?

What am I to say? I think I shall proceed by, first, saying a little more about the two recently departed metropolitans and what their death means for modern Orthodox theology.

Met. Kallistos' gifts to the Church were above all personal: to his parishioners, to the students who listened to his lectures, to the graduate students he supervised, to his fellow theologians who sought his advice. As noted, he did not produce major theological works, or arresting theological notions, he addressed problems, often enough problems brought to him, or issues that had direct relevance to the spiritual life of Christians, Orthodox or not. This was, I am convinced, a deliberate choice. He was a brilliant scholar, with superb command of Greek and Latin, and an acute intellect. But he did not want to shine; he wanted to do good. First and foremost, he was a monk and pastor. Although he sometimes felt that he had not lived up to his monastic vocation—never spending more than two or three months a

year at his monastery on Patmos—those who experienced his wisdom and concern, especially as a spiritual father, standing (and latterly sitting) with his spiritual children before Christ in confession, found themselves convinced that the words they heard from him came from a heart purified and made a conduit for a love more divine than human. He spoke for an Orthodoxy that transcended the divisions that have become increasingly apparent in the new millennium, an Orthodoxy that did not think of itself as possessing the truth, but rather possessed by the truth, an Orthodoxy that was founded on and nurtured by a profound sense of God’s love, incarnate in Christ, manifest on the Cross, and filled by the grace of the Resurrection.

Met. John Zizioulas remained, it seemed to me, an academic, even as a metropolitan. His ideas—about the Church as a eucharistic community existing under a bishop—found from most an enthusiastic reception, at least to begin with; some come to feel that his emphasis on the role of the bishop only encouraged a one-sided sense of episcopal dignity, not something, in my view, in which bishops need much instruction.¹ Nevertheless, the central theme of his theology was *κοινωνία*, communion: it was this that defined the nature of the church and this that nourished its life. For Met. John, *koinonia* is a sharing in common among free human beings: something rendered impossible by the Fall. For after the Fall such freedom has been compromised: it is only by coercion that humans can attain a kind of community, to which the sole alternative is some form of anarchic individualism—

- 1 For examples of such criticism, see two pieces by Greek priests: Fr Demetrios Bathrellos’ contribution to a symposium on Zizioulas’ theology, idem, *Church, Eucharist, Bishop: The Early Church in the Ecclesiology of John Zizioulas*, in Douglas H. Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007, 133-145; and Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, *The One and the Three: Nature, Person, and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition*, James Clarke, Cambridge 2015; Greek original published in 2018.

both far from true *koinonia*. In such a genuine community, its members exist as free persons. Zizioulas drew on a long-established opposition between *person*, nurtured by and fostering *koinonia*, and *individual*, a unit separated from other similar units, pursuing its own agenda unless coerced by some superior force. He argued that personhood is a notion unique to Christianity, quite unknown in the classical world which thought in essentially non-personal terms. The notion of personhood, Zizioulas argued, emerged in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers—St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, and St Gregory of Nyssa—and their distinction between person, or *hypostasis*, and being, nature, or substance, later given philosophical lineaments by St Maximos’ contrast between the way (or *tropos*) of *existing* (τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως), characteristic of personhood, and the principle (or *logos*) of *being* (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας), belonging to nature. Zizioulas further analysed the notion of person or *hypostasis* in terms of a contrast between ‘biological’ and ‘ecclesial’ *hypostasis*. A biological *hypostasis* is the result of the natural process of conception and birth, giving rise to an individual determined by his or her nature; an ecclesial *hypostasis* comes about through the new birth in baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection—by which we become members of the Church, the body of Christ. So it is that true *koinonia* is to be found in the Eucharistic assembly of persons freely gathered together under the bishop. As biological *hypostaseis*, humans aspire towards a freedom they can never attain; as ecclesial *hypostaseis*, humans are granted freedom that comes through grace—something beyond human attainment. On the biological level human existence is determined by the past and subject to nature, whereas on the ecclesial level it is set free from the past through repentance and oriented towards the future. The horizon of biological existence is natural and bound by death, whereas the horizon of ecclesial existence is personal and eschatological, moving towards the eternal life of the Resurrection. Apart from Christ, human existence is essentially tragic, in the risen

Christ, the human looks towards victory, “a victory not of nature but of the person, and consequently not of man in his self-sufficiency but of man in his hypostatic union with God”.²

These summaries—in very different veins—give, perhaps, some inkling of what we lost in world Orthodoxy by the death of these two priests and thinkers. But we should note what is common to them, despite their differences. First of all, in one sense or another personalism: a sense of the importance in Christianity of the person, free and created in the image of God. Secondly, and flowing from this, the importance of encounter with God, whether in gathering together for the Eucharistic celebration or in personal prayer, for example, practice of the Jesus Prayer. And finally, a continuing sense of the importance of the Fathers of the Church, a category that includes, but is not limited to, the Fathers of the early Christian centuries.

I want turn my attention now to the question of what is Orthodox theology: first, exploring the question in itself, and then offering some thoughts on where Greek Catholics stand in relation to Orthodox theology, or, as I see it, what role they have in what we call Orthodox theology.

If we look back over the history of Orthodox theology throughout the last two centuries, we cannot avoid the contrast, perhaps amounting to a dichotomy, between what is often called the ‘Russian Religious Renaissance’—to use the title of the famous book by Nicolas Zernov—and the Neopatristic Synthesis, a term invented by Fr Georges Florovsky. It refers to different trends among the Orthodox *intelligentsia* in the Russian emigration, especially those who came to settle in Paris in the 1920s. The idea of this dichotomy is Florovsky’s, who saw his theological task, pursued with immense learning in his only real book, *Пути Русского Богословия*, “Ways of Russian Theology” (the English

2 John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1985, 64.

translation widely recognized as in various ways inadequate). As I have argued in the past, the title does not mean “the various different ways of Russian theology”, as it is usually understood. The psalm verse quoted on the title page suggests otherwise—“For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked shall perish...” (Ps 1:6)—there are just two ways, and his book is mostly about the first, the way of the wicked, only in the last chapter does he turn to the way of the righteous.

Florovsky intended in his book to clear the ground for the new approach to theology that he came to call the ‘Neo-patristic synthesis’. He recounted the errant wanderings of Russian theology—which he wanted to characterize as ‘pseudomorphosis’, borrowing a geological term, applied to intellectual history by Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*—to the point where it needed to be recalled to the ‘patristic style and method’ which had been ‘lost’. This “patristic theology must be grasped from within”, he declared.³ Florovsky spoke of ‘intuition’ as well as ‘erudition’, and argued that to regain this patristic way of thinking, or *phronema*, “Russian theological thought must still pass through the strictest school of Christian Hellenism”.⁴ Vladimir Lossky was to echo Florovsky in this, and though they both thought that Bulgakov was a kind of misbegotten progeny of the ‘Babylonian captivity’ (another borrowing of Florovsky’s, this time from Luther—in captivity now not so much to arid scholasticism as to the all-too-fertile imaginings of German Idealism, with its roots in gnosticism and esotericism), in truth, Bulgakov shared many of their concerns, though perhaps had more of a sense of what was needed if Orthodox theology was to speak in the West with a voice not too forbiddingly alien.

3 Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. 2, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 6, Büchervertriebsanstalt, Vaduz 1987, 294.

4 G. Florovsky, *Ways*, 2, 297.

In thinking about the nature of Orthodox theology, then, we inherit a deep tradition of genuine reflection about the nature of theology, and in particular, Orthodox theology, on which we can and must draw in our new situation. But we *are* in a new situation; things have changed and in a variety of ways our problems are different from those that exercised the great theologians of the Russian emigration. These differences are both internal and external, both concerned with who we Orthodox are, and what are the challenges presented us by the world in which we live our earthly lives and to that extent belong. The question of who we are is becoming more and more unavoidable. There are now Orthodox theologians whose intellectual training is wholly or mostly Western: Metropolitan Kallistos is a fine example, but the same is true in a different way of Frs Schmemmann, Meyendorff and Bobrinskoy; they were not Russian theologians who found themselves in the West, but people of Russian descent, educated in the West, and therefore with an intellectual formation that is genuinely Western. It is, it seems to me, becoming difficult to be clear what constitutes Orthodox theology and who is an Orthodox theologian. Another ingredient in the mix that makes up this issue is that, since the time of the period *entre deux guerres* and immediately after, the audible Orthodox voice in the West has become much less exclusively Russian. There are now plenty of other voices—Greek, Serbian, Romanian—and since the collapse of the Soviet Union we can now hear the voices of those belonging to traditionally Orthodox countries who are not émigrés and encounter the West from—in some ways—a very different perspective. It is still striking, however, that many of these newer voices—for example, to stick to an older generation and avoid a multitude of names, Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, St Justin Popović and Christos Yannaras—still seem to share an understanding of theology as outlined above: marked by personalism, theology as rooted in encounter with God, and also the importance of the Fathers. The world of Orthodox theology is now peopled with a diversity of voices that was less true (or less evidently

true) of the last century. The question of what defines Orthodox theology is one that is going to demand some attention.

How, then, could we define Orthodox theology? A theology that is faithful to Scripture and the Œcumenical Councils? That would, however, scarcely distinguish Roman Catholic theology from Orthodox theology, at least in aspiration. To expand this base by adding the Constantinopolitan councils of 1341, 1351 and 1368—as Lossky did explicitly,⁵ and others have done implicitly—looks a little artificial, while to include the ‘symbolic books’ of the seventeenth century would seem to reduce Orthodoxy to a denomination, which I think any thinking Orthodox would want to repudiate (though there are worrying signs that some young Orthodox theologians would find it acceptable).⁶

All I have are some suggestions for discussion. First, who is a theologian? Not primarily academic theologians. According to the Divine Liturgy, it is the bishops who have the grace “rightly to divide (define? discern?) the word of Your truth” (τῶν ὀρθοτομοῦντων τὸν λόγον τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας, as we pray in the Anaphora of St John Chrysostom, quoting 2Tim 2:15)—not theologians, however learned. Another fundamental definition of theologian that we Orthodox quote all the time is that of Evagrius who equated the state of pure prayer with theology. If these are the primary meanings of the term ‘theologian’ within Orthodoxy, then, I would suggest, it doesn’t matter that much how we define academic theologians; they aren’t that important!

5 See Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Faith Press, London 1963, 10.

6 Yannaras explicitly repudiates such a reduction in a recent book: see the chapter «Ὁ ὁμολογιακὸς -ισμὸς» [‘Confessional’-ism] in idem, *Ἐνάντια στὴ θρησκεία* [Against Religion], Ekdosis Ikaros, Athens 2006, 276-283.

But let me suggest some criteria for genuinely Orthodox theology.⁷

First, Orthodox theology, like the life of the Orthodox Christian, is focused on the *Paschal Mystery*. The Paschal mystery, and its celebration both Sunday by Sunday and pre-eminently in the Paschal Vigil, is something we are so conscious of that we are sometimes tempted to say that it is distinctively Orthodox—as if the resurrection was not central to any form of Christianity. But within Orthodoxy it is very striking and, for those who have made a pilgrimage to Orthodoxy, the experience of the Paschal Vigil—and the spontaneous and contagious joy of that occasion—is usually an important milestone. And so it should be. It is perhaps—bearing in mind what we shall consider later on in this lecture—worth quoting some words of the Orthodox priest, Fr Lev Gillet, from a homily at the funeral of his friend, Irénée Winnaert, for Fr Lev, French by birth, from the Dauphiné, became a Catholic monk and then, as a member of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, was ordained priest by Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, before finally being received in the Russian Orthodox Church in Paris:

O strange Orthodox Church, so poor and so feeble, which has neither the organization nor the culture of the West and which has survived, as by a miracle, through so many vicissitudes and struggles; Church of contrasts, at once so traditional and so free, so archaic and so alive, so ritualist and so personally involved, Church where the pearl of great price of the Gospel is so preciously conserved, sometimes under a layer of dust; Church which holds of first value, in shadow and in silence, the eternal values of virginity, or poverty, of asceticism, of humility, and of pardon; Church that often knows not what to do, but that knows how to sing, like no other, the joy of Pascha...!⁸

7 This list was inspired by, though is not identical with, the list offered in an article by Fr Boris Bobrinsky: “Être orthodoxe dans le monde occidental”, in *Contacts* 69 (2007), 283-292.

8 Quoted in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Un Moine de l'Église d'Orient: Le père Lev Gillet*, Cerf, Paris 1993, 173.

It is here, as we contemplate the death and resurrection of Christ—the sorrowful joy, matching the ‘joyful sorrow’ of which St John Climacus speaks as marking the ascetic life—that we come to understand who Christ is. It is in this mystery that we learn what it means “to call upon the God of Heaven as Father, and to say: Our Father...” In the Garden of Gethsemane, we hear the Lord calling on God as Father: “Abba, Father, let this cup pass, yet not what I will, but what you will”. Then, on the cross, the Lord calls out: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing”, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”. And finally, in the Garden of the Resurrection, the Lord speaks to the weeping Magdalene of “My Father and your Father, my God and your God”—extending to us participation in the mystery of being children of the One we call Father and who is our Father. What holds the whole paschal mystery together is Jesus’ prayer to his Father as Father, his prayer to the One who created everything and in whose hands are all the issues of life and death as ‘Father’, however dark and humanly desperate things seemed to be. It was the conviction of St Maximos the Confessor that this prayer to the Father was a prayer both human and divine, the expression of both his human and divine will, that led him to resist to the point of death any attempt by the Byzantine Emperor and his compliant hierarchs to fudge the reality of Christ’s experience in the Garden and on the Cross.

A second criterion is that Orthodox theology is *apophatic*. This was the conviction of all the great Orthodox theologians of the last century. For Lossky, it meant that the human intellect, encountering God, is not just conscious of its frailty, but more fundamentally challenged to its very depths by an act (or state) of “the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God”: a *metanoia* in which “knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts

into contemplation, dogmas into experience of ineffable mysteries”.⁹ Fr Stăniloae saw in the apophatic dimension of theology the pressure of experience, an experience that could never be fully grasped and expounded.¹⁰ While for Christos Yannaras, the apophatic dimension of theology, which he called an ‘apophaticism of the person’ as opposed to an ‘apophaticism of essence’, expresses the inexhaustibility of personal knowledge—and there is no other knowledge of God than personal knowledge—and “leads Christian theology to use the language of poetry and images for the interpretation of dogmas much more than the language of conventional logic and schematic concepts”.¹¹

My third criterion might seem mis-conceived, for I want to say something about the distinctive nature of Orthodox academic theology as such: the theology taught in seminaries and universities, and expressed in learned journals and monographs. I feel I cannot ignore this, though it might be thought that Orthodox theology should keep clear of Western academe, as too compromising an environment. For myself, however, I cannot avoid it: my forty years of teaching academic theology took place in various universities in England, not in theological colleges or seminaries. There are challenges in professing theology in such a context, where many of one’s colleagues in other subjects might doubt the legitimacy of theology in a modern secular university, but these challenges will not go away by confining Orthodox theology to specifically Orthodox institutions (though I know that in such institutions my degrees might not be recognized as qualifications for teaching in an Orthodox context). But it seems to me, first of all unrealistic, to attempt to confine Orthodox theology to an explicitly Orthodox environment. It is true that there are Orthodox

9 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, James Clarke, London 1957, 238.

10 Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline MA 1994, 96 ff.

11 Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1991, 17.

journals, and Orthodox presses, and Orthodox Faculties—and they are needed—but a lot of Orthodox theology finds expression in journals not exclusively Orthodox, is published by University Presses with no confessional allegiance, and many Orthodox theologians belong to faculties in secular universities (or ‘public’ universities, as we call them in England), or in universities of other confessions—Catholic or Protestant—and often enough not in faculties of theology (which increasingly are being transmogrified in faculties of religious studies), but faculties of philosophy, or history, or some other disciplines. Academic theology—like any academic discipline—is not sealed off hermetically from other academic disciplines: it tends to ‘borrow’ from other disciplines and even adopt the approach of other discipline—most commonly history or philosophy, or more recently literary theory or psychology. Florovsky reflected on the role of the Christian historian as theologian in a famous paper, interestingly written originally as a contribution to the *Festschrift* for the Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich: “The Predicament of the Christian Historian”.¹² In it he made the important point, which relates to his ‘personalism’ noted above, that the Christian historian’s approach to history is concerned not with ‘objects’, but with ‘subjects’, it is a personal engagement with persons, not an impersonal survey of events and happenings.

It seems to me that it is important that there remains a Christian voice within an increasingly secular academe, one to which Orthodox must contribute if they are not to allow themselves to be enclosed in a ghetto, for there is a dimension beyond the disciplines of human learning and science that Christian theologians, whatever their academic ‘specialism’, must bear witness to. We are faced by a multitude of problems: problems concerning the environment, profound bioethical problems, especially those concerned with the

¹² Now most conveniently found in *Christianity and Culture*, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 2, Nordland Publishing Company, Belmont MA 1974, 31-65 and 233-236 (notes).

beginning and end of earthly life, economic and political problems, problems concerned with justice, a justice that is to mean fairness not just between the different classes, but between nations and continents, all these problems raised in a context of relativist post-modernism, globalization and consumerism. It is too easy for these problems to be seen simply as questions of human management, so that all we need to do is work out a human solution and impose it—an approach that is likely to lead to a sense of being utterly overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the issues, which itself will lead to despair, or an ostrich-like attempt to ignore them, or a temptation to adopt draconian solutions that will undermine the very humanity that we feel to be at threat, or to a kind of hubris that imagines that, of course, we shall devise techniques, for the human is in control, now even in control of the process of evolution itself. The Christian has to try and see that all these problems take on a different dimension if we can see the universe as created by God, and all existence, including our existence, as a gift, a gift to be received in thanksgiving. Earlier, when speaking of the different valencies of apophatic theology, I might have mentioned the theologian who introduced the term ‘apophatic’ into Christian use, namely Dionysios the Areopagite. One of the implications for Dionysios of his apophaticism is that when we speak of God, we are not describing an object more or less accurately, but rather we are *praising* the One to whom we owe everything. The fundamental attitude to existence on the part of the Christian is to be one of praise and thanksgiving, *eucharistia*, the very name of the central Christian sacrament: an attitude of thanksgiving, not suspicion, or resentment, or simply world-weary acceptance. Only that attitude will be able to foster an approach to the problems faced by humanity that is not caught between despair and hubris, but is rather marked by humility and confidence, a confidence inspired not by ourselves or our resourcefulness, but by a recognition of God as Creator—a creator who cares for his creation.

Now where do the ‘Greek Catholics’ (an odd designation, however the term of choice, at last a good deal better than ‘Uniates’, though Vatican II uses the term *ecclesiae orientales catholicae*)¹³ come in all this? I have to make an initial confession, namely, that I am more or less colourblind when I come to differences between the different Orthodox Churches and the Greek Catholics: they both seem to me varieties of the same thing. The Orthodox Churches differ among themselves, but not in ways that seem to be very significant. I should perhaps confess that in my now nearly twenty years as an Orthodox priest, my bishop has always been of the Moscow Patriarchate, and I was ordained by a bishop of that jurisdiction, but the parish I have served has been claimed by all the Orthodox jurisdictions in England—Greek, Russian, and Romanian—so my experience as a priest has been various, and I have adapted. The differences I perceive are sometimes national, very often liturgical, but they don’t seem to me very important. My experience of Greek Catholics is much less, but there I find the same thing: there are national differences, and there are some, though few, different liturgical practices. When it comes to theology, my colour-blindness is almost total: I know that Fr Khaled Anatolios is Greek Catholic and so, too, are Brian Butcher and Deacon Daniel Galadza, but it doesn’t impinge in any particular way. We seem to speak the same theological language, and I agree with or differ from them, as I do more generally. Indeed, as a patristic scholar I find myself reading philologists, philosophers, sociologists and so on: they all feed my reflection on the problems that concern me.

Of course, there is a reason for—or at least a contributory factor to—my colour-blindness. The history that lies behind the divisions between Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Orthodox is, for the

13 See the decree, *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, of Vatican II, in Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols, Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, Georgetown 1990, 900-907.

most part, not my history; I am English, for better or worse. I may know a good deal about the history of the vicissitudes of Christians of Eastern and Western rites in regions often classified as *Mitteleuropa*, but it is not my history. Indeed, since becoming Orthodox I have felt a kind of dissociation of sensibility in contemplating the history of the British Isles, which *is* my history. But that is now hardly unusual in the multicultural society that British society is increasingly becoming.

So, what is it that distinguishes Orthodox from Greek Catholic in matters of theology? The term ‘Greek Catholic’ derives the epithet, ‘Greek’, from liturgical rite—Greek being identified as ‘Byzantine’. That might be a place to start, though it has its problems too. First of all, I may be wrong in this, but I think Greek Catholic covers all Eastern rite Christians who accept Papal authority. Most Eastern Churches, however, do not use a Greek rite; some do, but many don’t. That question, however, does not concern our question: where do the Greek Catholics belong in relation to the Orthodox. In terms of rite, we are all Byzantine.

It is perhaps worth remembering Fr Alexander Schmemmann’s mixed reaction to the decree of Vatican II, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. While he accepted the event of Vatican II and its ecumenical intentions, and in particular the way in which the Eastern Catholic (‘Uniate’) Churches seem to be regarded as bridges to the Orthodox Churches rather than substitutes, he had reservations about the approach. First, there was the way in which the decree seems to reduce the differences between East and West to the sole area of rites, discipline, and ‘way of life’, ignoring the doctrinal principles bound up with these differences. Secondly, while the decree proclaims the *equality* of the Eastern tradition, it defines and regulates it in an essentially *Latin* way; for example, the patriarchates are given an importance they do not have in the Eastern tradition, defining them in terms of the personal jurisdiction of a patriarch over his bishops, which is alien to the Eastern tradition, according to which a patriarch or primate is always *primus*

inter pares. Thirdly and finally, over the question of *communicatio in sacris*, it is not clear that the decree realizes that any such decision would have to be bilateral and express, on the Orthodox side, the consensus of all Orthodox Churches. Reflecting on Schmemmann's observations, one must also bear in mind the struggles that the Greek or Eastern Catholics have undergone to preserve even the integrity of their commitment to the Byzantine rite. As Fr Peter's study of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky has demonstrated, the rolling back of centuries of Latinization in the early years of the last century was not accomplished without determination and struggle.¹⁴ The way in which this restoration of liturgical integrity has had consequences for Eastern Catholic theology should not be ignored, either. The doctrinal principles that Schmemmann spoke of need themselves to be scrutinized.

Eastern Catholics, in this narrower sense, and Eastern Orthodox differ, not by their liturgical rite, but by their acceptance or not of papal primacy. What effect does this have on their theology? If we are asking this question of theologians currently writing, then it seems to me a question that can only be intelligibly answered by placing it in a much broader context. For virtually no theologian today writes within a strictly confined tradition, in the sense of having no knowledge of or interest in other Christian traditions. We read what we find interesting and important, and particularly for theologians, whether Eastern Catholics or Eastern Orthodox, who acknowledge the determinative role of the patristic tradition, that means drawing on the wealth of patristic scholarship, mostly Western from the time of the Reformation onwards, when patristic scholarship was largely an ancillary discipline to polemical theology (mostly Catholic *v.* Protestant, though sometimes inter-Catholic, e.g. in connexion with the Jansenist controversy in France, often bound up, too, with rivalry

¹⁴ Peter Galadza, *The Theology and Liturgical Work of Andrei Sheptytsky (1865–1944)*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 272, Rome and Ottawa, 2004.

between the religious orders),¹⁵ though the nineteenth century saw the flowering of patristic scholarship in Russia, to be cut short by the Communist Revolution. In the last century, however, there was an enormous expansion of patristic scholarship in the West: scholarship that rapidly became ecumenical, whether self-consciously or not (one does not always, or in some contexts ever, ask oneself the religious affiliation—or not—of scholars, whose work one respects).¹⁶ This means that the traditions in which we stand are less like divergent streams and more like Venn diagrams with complex overlap. Sometimes one will stand back and reflect on the ‘confessional’ bias of one scholar or another, but scholarship has become inherently ‘ecumenical’ (for want of a better word). Where acknowledgment of the papacy comes in is not obvious to me in terms of the day-to-day concerns of the learned scholarship with which I am familiar and in which I participate. What is much more striking is the way in which our theological palate is very nearly all-embracing—it is perfectly normal to draw on thinkers who couldn’t be regarded as ‘fellow workers’ in any theological enterprise; even non-Christians—Nietzsche, for instance, raises questions that we need to address if we are to have any chance in addressing the world in which we live (cf. Jean-Luc Marion’s seminal *L’Idole et la distance* [Paris: Grasset, 1977], the central three chapters of which are on Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and the divine Denys).

One way of approaching the question raised by the claims of the pope to primacy is to follow Pope Benedict XVI’s suggestion in the context of *rapprochement* between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, that

15 See Bruno Neveu, *Erudition et religion aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Albin Michel, Paris 1994.

16 On 20th-century patristic scholarship, see *Les Pères de l’Église au XXe siècle: Histoire – Littérature – Théologie “L’aventure des Sources chrétiennes”* Cerf, Paris 1997, and Dominique Gonnet – Michel Stavrou, *Les Pères de l’Église aux sources de l’Europe*, Cerf, Paris 2014. There is doubtless further literature with which I am not acquainted.

theologians might start by looking at what papal primacy meant in the first millennium, before this question had come to divide the Church. This issue had already been addressed in the 1995 profession of faith made by the Melkite archbishop, Elias Zoghby, with its two affirmations: 1) I believe everything which Eastern Orthodoxy teaches; 2) I am in communion with the Bishop of Rome as the first among the bishops, according to the limits recognized by the Holy Fathers of the East during the first millennium, before the separation.¹⁷ I am not sure how free someone in communion with the Bishop of Rome, and especially a hierarchy, is to define the terms of his obedience to the Pope by limiting it to what was accepted/conceded in the first millennium. As an Orthodox priest, I can see the wisdom of beginning a consideration of the papacy by looking at what had become accepted in the course of the first millennium, but I cannot see how the question of primacy could be limited to that. It would amount to asking the Christians of the Latin Catholic tradition to write off their whole experience of the second Christian millennium. For such a suggestion to come from Christians who appeal to *their* lived tradition over the centuries would seem self-contradictory.

Rather we need to find some way of sharing with each other what we think we have learnt—both Orthodox and Catholic—in the millennium of separation (not, in my view, a whole millennium of unrelieved separation): the traditions of theology and spirituality, of liturgical practice and proclamation of the Gospel, that began to seem distanced from each other at least from the eleventh century onwards. In such an attempt at learning to understand one another, it needs to be said that the West has had so far a better track record than the East: there are plenty of Western theologians who have worked long and hard to understand theological traditions in the East—the rise of hesychasm

17 I learnt of Abp Zoghby's proposal from Fr Khaled Anatolios in an email exchange.

and the hesychast controversy, the Slavophil movement, and so on (indeed, some of the authorities in the field of Eastern Christianity are of Catholic allegiance, one thinks of Hausherr and Špidlík); this is hardly true of Eastern theologians in relation to the rise of scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and so on, indeed, it is far from unknown for theologians of the East to take pride in the innocence of their tradition—and even themselves—of any taint from these developments. Moreover, it is arguable that something one might call the ‘closing of the Orthodox mind’ really reached its heyday in the twentieth century (there are, of course, exceptions). Interest in, at least, Western spirituality was manifest in such pillars of Orthodoxy as St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain or St Philaret of Moscow. If we could learn, both Orthodox and Catholic, the ways of living and praying that shaped Christian lives, both Catholic and Orthodox, in the centuries of separation, we might gain a mutual understanding of each other in our ‘otherness’, something that is certainly needed if we Orthodox are to be in a position to see not only how the papal claims developed but also what these claims meant for how one lives as a faithful Catholic.

Abstract

First this lecture represents a personal account of Orthodox theology today: given by an Orthodox theologian from the ‘Diaspora’, himself belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate, invited by the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary. It does not represent a general view ‘from nowhere’. So far as Orthodox theology is concerned, we stand at a watershed, presented by the deaths in the last calendar year of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (24 August 2022) and Metropolitan John Zizioulas (2 February 2023): two metropolitan bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who were shining stars in the Orthodox theological firmament, with an influence reaching beyond to, at least

ecumenically-minded, Christians throughout the world. They were two very different theologians, for, though both academic theologians holding university posts, only Met John could be described as an academic theologian, renowned for his distinctive ideas, Met Kallistos' influence being much more diffuse, less associated with theories, but exercised through his many research students. Twentieth-century Orthodox theology, at least in the Diaspora, had been largely influenced by the concerns of the Russian émigré theologians, centred on Paris, and the divide between two paths into the future: the so-called Russian Religious Renaissance and the Neopatristic Synthesis. Our two deceased metropolitans were associated primarily with the latter, though in the latter decades of their lives the star of the most prominent representative of the former, Fr Sergii Bulgakov (died 1944), has been in the ascendant. That is certain to affect the nature of Orthodox theology in the immediately future decades. Other changes will affect the future of Orthodox theology, both the fact that the last half of the last century saw the emergence of theologians (whether native Orthodox or converts), indebted to formation in Western academic standards and approaches, as well as the change from a theological agenda determined by the impact in Western Europe and North America of the Russian émigrés to one, more and more presentative of theologians belonging to the different national Orthodox traditions: Greek and Romanian, and then after the fall of communism, Russians who grew up under communism, and others like them—Serbs, Bulgarians, and Georgians. In this new context, the first question about Orthodox theology that emerges is: who is a theologian, one who prays (following Evagrius' famous definition) or one with academic learning (something increasingly influenced by the Western academic expectations and approaches), which leads into a question about the role of the spiritual elder in any Orthodox theology worthy of the name? What about approaches to theology? Two criteria seem to emerge from the experience of the last century: the centrality

of the Paschal mystery, and the importance of the apophatic dimension of theology. Another more general question concerns the resources for Orthodox theology, consideration of which is hampered by a stubborn tendency towards anti-Westernism. But in terms of resources—reliable editions of theological texts (nothing new in Orthodoxy as the quest culminating in the *Philokalia* of SS. Nikodimos and Makarios makes clear), as well as questions of academic methodology—it seems to me that Orthodox scholarly theology has, with whatever reluctance, accepted the influence of prevailing methods in the West. The lecture ended with a coda on the question of the relationship between Eastern Orthodox and Greek Catholic theology. Seen in the light of an opening to the West, what we have in common seems far more important than what divides us. Furthermore what divides us—finding ourselves on different sides of rift in Christendom between East and West—is an issue that needs to be addressed, as a matter of paramount importance and urgency, for the credibility of the proclamation of the Gospel in a world, increasingly estranged from the values that have traditionally shaped it.



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