

# Summary of lectures from the Orthodox Study Weekend with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

20th December 2011

This is a summary by Omar Choudary, while attending the words of Fr. Kallistos Ware. Any words that might seem erroneous or offending to our Orthodox tradition are most probably my own mistakes.

## Lecture 1 - What is Theology?

- Fr. Kallistos always has 2 books in reach:
  - Bible: has no definition of the word theology
  - concise Oxford dictionary: has only dry definitions such as “study of religion”
- Then looked for answer in the works of Christof Yannaras and found Theology as:
  - a gift from God
  - the fruit of Christian spiritual life
  - identified with the vision of God
  - not a definition of our world, but the experience of Church
- Theology is not a detached study but a personal experience
- We should try to use our brain to express things clearly, even if for theology we use personal involvement
- Words from Evagrius: if you pray thoroughly, then you are a theologian
- Words from Gregory Palamas: there are 3 kinds of theologians:
  - the Saints, true theologians that have the true experience
  - those who trust the Saints, but lack the true experience. These are also good people. Fr. Kallistos hopes to be part of this category
  - those who lack the experience and neither trust the Saints. These are the “bad” people
- Definition of theologian from Scouteris: the one living God’s creation, being purified and praying God
- Words from arch-priest Georges Florovsky: one cannot separate spiritual prayer and Theology
  - you cannot separate prayers from the way you live
- Words from St. John Climacus: the climax of purity is the beginning of Theology
- Words from Vladimir Lossky: all Theology is Mystical
  - one is impossible without the other
  - Theology is done by internal prayer but also, perhaps more importantly, by external public prayer
- Therefore, Theology is linked with Mystical, expressed using the brain
- Theology is expressed through the following:
  - CHARISMA: gift, grace

- MYSTERION: mystery
- KATHARSIS: purification
- HESYCHIA: silence, stillness of heart

- **CHARISMA**

- Theology is a free and undeserved gift of grace
- It's a gift because is God's revelation
  - God is searching us and examining us
- The human person is known and found by God
- God is the active subject
- Theology depends on revelation
- Christ himself is Theology, we are theologians just by the grace received from him -> THEODIDAKTOS
- Human reason is essential in order to express Theology
  - but we can only do this in the right faith
  - else we might very well just study zoology
- "Credo ut intelligam" = "I believe to understand"
  - We first believe and then understand, not the other way around
  - "Fides quaerens intelligentiam" = "faith seeking understanding"

- **MYSTERION**

- In a religious context, a mystery is something revealed to our understanding
  - is bound to revelation
  - but is never completely revealed
  - because it leads to the infinity of God
  - we can try to look into the New Testament for appearances of "mystery" and we'll find it for example in the Incarnation of Christ
- Both mysterion and revelation deal with things that cannot be fully understood
- Words from John Meyendorff: Theology is the expression of the inexpressible
- Words from St. John: we cannot understand most things but even those that we do understand we cannot express
- Our language is adapted for this world, but in Theology we try to speak of the age to come
- Words from Palamas: the art of Theology is to say one thing and another time another thing
  - we can contradict ourselves without talking non-sense
  - we must go beyond contradiction
- In expressing Theology we can see two main approaches
  - Cataphatic: positive terminology
  - Apophatic: negative terminology
  - both are needed to express God, and Theology is both
- Quotes from the booklet "Signs of the Times":
  - "You can only wait 60 minutes per hour"
  - "Elephants have right of way"



A: We had a progress in Christian Church, each generation having a different approach. For example, John Chrysostom can be considered as good as the other Saints. To discern among our Fathers, we should look at the entire history over many centuries and get as guides the Ecumenical Councils, what has been taken from theologians and agreed in the councils.

But we can also look at other councils, like the one in the 14th century regarding parliament, and the 17th century about reformation. Although the 17th century wasn't the best period for Orthodox, we can still see what was adopted and what not. The Church has retained certain things and left others aside.

It is difficult to judge some people, like Origen of Alexandria, whose teachings were condemned but some of his views were well received. When looking at the views of such people that were not accepted by the Church, we should try to put ourselves in their place and find what were they thinking of.

**Q: How should we understand fear?**

A: Fear should not be a blind terror. Fear in our Church is not even timidity, but awareness of God's love. We need courage but with limits.

By fear of God we mean a sense of All. While there is a place of jokes and joy, what we are doing is very serious, since we are dealing with matters of life and death. We are dealing with God's economy. We approach the whole.

Similarly in the Holy Communion we approach with both fear (realize what we are doing) and love (God invites us to participate).

We are invited to theologize and we should not be stopped or inhibited. Theology is the concern of all of us.

**Q: How should we participate in theological activity?**

We are not to simply repeat what our Fathers said. Our Fathers, as Florovsky says, are our guides. We need to ask not just what the Fathers said, but what would they say today.

There is a risk that we might destroy the original message by using contemporary words, but this is necessary. We need not simply repeat, but also to reinterpret.

Q: What means " I shall not speak of Thy mystery to Your enemies" ?

A: In the 3rd century that would be quickly understood as the secrecy of the Church. There were some things that you would not speak with the non-Christian community. There were some things that you would only learn when you became Catechumen.

People were baptized in Easter midnight but they would not have communion until a few weeks after. In the meanwhile they would be learning about Christ's prayers.

Today we don't apply this secrecy anymore and we speak more openly. There are still some things we only discuss within Christians, because non-Christian cannot understand.

In order to convince “enemies” into Christ’s salvation we only say some things but not all. We, Orthodox, prefer to leave some things a bit blurr rather than sharp. For example, the place of the Holy Mother of God within the church.

There is a place for some secrecy. Words from St. Georges: Not everyone is to Theologise, not to all is granted. Not at all times, but at certain occasions, to certain persons and with certain limits. Theology should involve everyone but we should be cautious at the same time.

## Lecture 2 - The sources of Theology

- Theology depends on revelation
- From the book by Origen “On First Principles”:
  - The origins of Theology are in the words and teachings of Christ: the Holy Bible is the first source
  - What we believe is the succession of the Apostles: the Tradition
  - Our Reason is also part of Theology; we use our power of intellectual expression to theologise.
- The three: Bible, Tradition, Reason, can only be used together
- The Holy Scriptures
  - See the book “The Orthodox study Bible”, the piece at the end on how to read the Bible
  - see also volume 1 in “Collected works” of Father Georges Florovsky
- Once our Fr. Kallistos gave a Bible to a woman in post-communist Russia and this was her first copy of the Bible. She started to read, making breaks with joy and tears
- Story from Father Dumitru Staniloae
  - As a child he was reading a Bible with illustrations and we would be absorbed reading the text of those illustrations
  - everyone around could see that something Holy was taking place
- Words from St. Gregory the Great: we treat the text of every Bible as a Dogma, but every Scripture is the text of what we believe.
  - even if someone were to come down from Heaven, they should not deserve more faith than the Scripture
- Everything necessary to salvation is clearly written in the Scripture, in such a way that anyone reading with an open heart can understand
- Orthodox have not been as active as Catholics or Protestants in writing about the Scriptures
- Some key features in Orthodox approach:
  - All Scriptures are inspired by God. Philo describes inspiration as a loss of consciousness.
  - Athenagoras describes inspiration as listening to a flute that God is playing
  - The Orthodox way is passive. Similarly, Muslims see the Holy Qur’an as Divine dictation.
  - But this passive way is not the only way of seeing inspiration

- Origen took view against Montanism, differentiating between Holy Spirit inspiration and the work of Evil. The Evil takes our faculties completely while the Holy Spirit doesn't remove our free will, but rather clarifies our visions.
- The Holy Spirit doesn't cloud, but clears our mind

- Words from Father Florovsky: in the Scripture we see God meeting us and us meeting God. We see God answering our questions.
  - there is a dialog. Both are speaking, God and men. Divine inspiration doesn't eliminate but revives the human element.
  - when interpreting the Scripture, as Orthodox, we put the text of the context of the whole. Some times other Christians use passages from the Bible as arguments, but the Orthodox interpret those passages in the context of the whole. If you want to understand a particular word in a text, look up the word in concordance with the whole text
- There are 3 important criteria to understand the Scripture: worship, the Fathers and the Saints
  - see "Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture" by Oden. Good example that shows Protestants interested in what the Fathers have to say. A good analysis on how to understand the Bible.
  - we are to understand Scripture through the Fathers
  - we need to understand Scripture through the Saints
  - see also "Anglican Orthodox Dialogue"
- When we read Scripture, we do it as members of the Church rather than individuals
  - we try to treat Scripture as Tradition
  - any disjunction between Scripture and Tradition must be rejected
- Scripture is the way we test Tradition
  - but is the Tradition of Church the way we treat Scripture
- When we read Scripture in different ways, some seeing black where others see white, we must invoke Tradition to understand a common text. We need to be guided and is Tradition who guides us.
- Tradition is the life of the Holy spirit in the Church
  - Scripture exist within Tradition so Tradition precedes Scripture
    - Christ didn't leave any Scripture, but is Tradition that defines Scripture.
    - Tradition tells us which books are part of our Church Scripture
  - We don't separate Scripture from Tradition
- We are to give Scripture a personal interpretation
  - whenever you read something from Scripture apply it first to yourself and not to others.
  - St. Tikon adds: reading the Scripture means reading a letter that was written personally to each of us

## Questions

**Q: Do we differentiate between the writings of the Fathers? Are there some better than others?**

A: Yes, we do. The canons of the Scriptures, as we have today, were developed in time, first organized by St. Athanasios in the 4th century. But even earlier was understood what was and what was not part of our Tradition, e.g. see the confrontation with the Gnostics when the Gospel

of St. Thomas was proposed.

By the end of the 4th century we accepted there are 4 Holy Gospels, not more, not less. The book of Revelations is officially included in the Scripture, but is not read publicly because is considered a difficult text.

The Scripture has a special authority, as embodying the word of God. All that is in there we believe is true. It is not a geographic or temporal true, but a religious true.

Some of the texts in the Old Testament are understood in the light of the New Testament.

Many canons do not apply literary today, so we are selective and allow for the ongoing practice of the Church. As always, there are matters in which the Fathers disagreed. The final test is the ongoing truth of the Church.

**Q: Who actually dictates what is in the Scriptures? Are not men those who decide this?**

A: The origins and meaning of Scriptures overlap. There is a distinction and the origins are analysed in terms of what we understand today.

St. Ciprian says that all heretics are received in Church by baptism. St. Basil says there are different groups, some received by confession, some by chrismation (those unsure about certain aspects of our Church but certain about the faith in the Holy Trinity), and some by baptism. Therefore, there is a present confusion on how people should be received in Church. Condemnation of some of the old Fathers (e.g. Arius) has generally been accepted in Councils, so there was no disagreement in those cases. It was agreed by everyone in the Council.

But at the 4th council (451), the Council of Chalcedon, the person of Christ was disputed. The Chalcedonians try to be open to non-Chalcedonians although each sees matters a bit differently.

The whole question of Tradition is complex, but we are certain of the nature of God.

To be in the truth doesn't mean to know absolutely everything, but rather like a powerful light that is brilliant in the center but then blurs towards the edges.

**Q: Why we accept the Apocrypha and Protestants don't?**

A: By Apocrypha we refer to books that are canonical, but which were written only in Greek and not in Hebrew. Therefore, some communities don't accept them as Dogma. In Orthodoxy we don't make a distinction between these books.

**Q: How and when should we read the Bible?**

A: There is a calendar which says what to read in each day, e.g. the calendar kept by the Fellowship of St. John the Baptist:

(I think Fr. Kallistos is referring to this: <http://www.ofsjb.org/publications/publications.htm>)

Using this calendar you are reading with the Church. The disadvantage is that you'll be reading

just some fragments from the Gospels.

Another option is to select a Scripture book and read thoroughly. From the Old Testament, recommended are Genesis, first chapters of Exodus, book of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Proverbs, and the book of Job.

A good approach is to read the daily Scripture as part of our prayers and as a study read one of the Bible books.

**Q: Some evangelists differ in arguments. How should we approach these differences?**

A: We should be comprehensive and read them all.

Lecture 3: Neo-patristic synthesis. Is Florovsky's programme viable today?

- Reading list:
  - G. Florovsky. Bible, Church, Tradition, Collected Works vol. I (1972)
  - K. Ware, C. Davey. Anglican-Orthodox dialogue: the Moscow Agreed Statement, (1977)
  - N. Zernov. The Russian Religious Renaissance (1963)
  - P. Valiiete. Modern Russian Theology (2000)
  - A. Schmemmann. Ultimate Questions (2nd edition, 1977)
  - Avril Pyman. Pavel Florensky (2010)
  - Lossky. Mystical Theology vol. I
- Georges Florovsky, 1893-1979
  - Moved to United States toward the end of his life
- Vladimir Lossky, 1903-1958
  - lived the second part of his life in Paris
- Orthodoxy in the 20th century had 2 schools
  - Russian Renaissance
  - Neo-patristic synthesis
- Russian Renaissance
  - started in Russia
  - active within emigration with active people such as: Florensky, Bulgakov and Berdyaev
  - considered as the first approach of Orthodoxy to deal with current problems of society such as: Church and state, Church and nation
- Neo-patristic synthesis
  - continuous action against the Russian Renaissance
  - active people included Florovsky and Lossky
  - considered that current writings (especially those by Bulgakov) were too affected by western society (in particular by the Germans), and that Orthodoxy should go back to the teachings of the ancient Fathers
- After Bulgakov there were mostly just Neo-Patristic currents with people as Zizioulas
- But, what does Florovsky mean by the Fathers?

- Anglican position: up to the Chalcedonian Council in 451, up to st. Cyril of Alexandria
- but discussions about Christianity continued uninterrupted afterwards as well
- the Fathers should also include:
  - Maximum the confessor
  - St. John of Damascus
- then we also have the iconoclast controversy in the 7th council which is to be considered part of Christianity
- what about later saints such as St. Simion or St. Gregory Palamas in the 14th century?
- shouldn't we include also St. Nicodimius in the 18th century?
- Perhaps the age of the Fathers never ended, so perhaps even in our days the Fathers still emerge
- "Back to the Fathers" means to be united with past and current Fathers. The age of the Fathers never ends.
- Words from Florovsky: antiquity without truth is just an error grown old
  - we need a living Tradition
  - "depositum juvenescens" = "auto-rejuvenating deposit" (or "a living tradition")
  - we should look at the creative fire of the Fathers
    - we should adopt the criticism of the Fathers and treat them as contemporary. What would they have said if they were alive today?
  - therefore the goal is not so much *back to the Fathers*, but *forward with the Fathers*.
- The core point of Florovsky:
  - we got to acquire some knowledge of the vision of Fathers
  - to follow the Fathers means to acquire their mind
  - to understand the Fathers means to understand how they understood the Christian faith, and how they prayed
  - for the Fathers, Theology was a Mystical Theology
  - we should ask ourselves what were the questions of the Fathers.
  - R.G. Collingwood was very keen on understanding what were the questions, and from that then find how the Fathers' answers relate to today's world
  - we need a creative reassessment
- Florovsky has been heavily criticized, e.g. by A. Gallaher:
  - doesn't Florovsky lack specifics?
  - doesn't Florovsky merge the Fathers too much into the same group?
  - shouldn't we allow for more contexts in which the Fathers were thinking?
  - how do we discern the common mind of the Fathers?
- Though Florovsky rejects German influences in Orthodox Tradition, he too was influenced by society
  - there is no harm in being influenced, but we should admit that
- Neo-patristic Theology of Florovsky indicates a future Orthodox program but doesn't indicate the specifics of how to do that
  - so we need to bring together both schools

- we need to re-envision Florovsky's program, make it more precise

- In the 21st century we should shift from ecclesiology to anthropology
  - how do we understand humans?
  - many of current technology advances challenge our Tradition
  - there are subjects on sexuality that need to be clarified
  - we need clarity on what is a human person
  - is a difference between men and women at a human level? issue regarding women priests in Anglican Church
- We won't come to grips with current ecological questions unless we understand what means to be humans
  - for this, the Fathers have left us many discussion on the Trinity which we should look into

### Conclusions

- Theology is a path that never ends
- We should take an approach as in the cartoon "Felix the cat", where the cat kept walking and walking having some magic boots.
- If the Fathers had already said everything perfectly, then nothing else would be left for us
  - but this seems a very negative view
  - Father Alexander said: Christianity is just beginning
  - see Book of Revelations chapter 21: "Behold, for I am making all things new"

### Questions

#### **Q: Do we need to go back to philosophers as well as we need to go back to the Fathers?**

A: It is good if theologians have read some of the philosopher's works, but we should not limit ourselves to that, but reinterpret the past in today's light.

The philosopher uses reason without revelation, while the theologian is using reason in the light of the revelation. However, they are both concerned with existential questions.

#### **Q: How should we deal with modern science?**

A: About the year 1800, there were 3 dialogues involving Christians:

- The theory of evolution. Does this theory undermine Christianity?
  - If you accept the traditional Orthodox view, we shall say that long before the fall of humans there was the fall of the Angels.
  - Evolution is part of God's work
- Christian origins
  - Some critic that we don't actually know that much about who Christ was or where it came from.
  - As Orthodox we are not happy with that view, but we should understand what and why they are doing this, in order to be able to have a dialogue.
- Modern psychology
  - Interesting subject for many.

- Jung can be a high threat against Christianity.
- It should be read in order to understand it, but this should be done with care.

Then there is also scientism, a current whereby everything in our world can be explained by science. However, this was not necessarily said by the best scientists. In fact, most of the best scientists had some belief in God.

We do support science, but we cannot accept scientism.

**Q: How should we understand the concept of freedom?**

A: When we look at poverty or some other problems in our world, we should also take into consideration the aspect of freedom.

Words from Florovsky: in Tradition we are not given a set of prearranged answers, but a key. We are not given a Holy land, but a way of approaching it.

The exploration of these subjects must involve the element of freedom.