

## UNIT 3A: DOCTRINE

### 62: CREATION - APPLIED THEOLOGY

#### Cosmos, Faith, Science and Nature

It has become almost a truism in the West today for many to think of faith and science as belonging to mutually exclusive truth seeking and truth claims. Science, it is thought, is rational, based on empirical observation and self-correcting as new theories replace old outdated ones. Faith, on the other hand, is seen as irrational, defined by allegedly static religious texts and immovable religious authorities which can be neither challenged nor revised. There is another view that regards this conflict as a clash of two Titans—fundamentalism in religion and triumphalism in science. Each justifies its own position by denying the other and excluding any other account of reality. This is a phoney war based on a cartoon version of both disciplines and, therefore, a misunderstanding of the true purposes of each.

There are many commentators in and out of science but not belonging to the Orthodox Church who see the two disciplines as complementary and not antagonistic. Orthodox Christianity shares a common platform with these saner voices, but, even so, there are still significant differences between an Orthodox Christian understanding of these issues and other views. Some of the distinctive Orthodox approaches form the basis of the second part of this lecture today. First, the vantage point from history is essential.

An historical trajectory underpins this stand-off between faith and science in the West—a legacy in which Orthodoxy has no part. In the West in the Middle Ages the scholastic movement (of which Thomas Aquinas was an influential proponent) sought to develop the idea that reason alone could establish certain basic fundamentals of Christian believing. This has sometimes been referred to as natural theology or natural law. However, natural theology had its own built-in self-limitation in that reason alone cannot impart the fullness of faith. That came by

grace and with revelation. This distinction between reason and revelation became hardened into a division, at times even a mutual antagonism. The Galileo affair showed how incapable the medieval Catholic Church seemed to be of recognising the need not to interfere in the outworking of natural philosophy, or as we call it now, science. This is deeply ironic and tragic, bearing in mind the intellectual space that Catholicism itself had created aside from revelation precisely for the exercise of rationality and empirical observation.

Protestantism showed itself to be more amenable to the rise of science in its own host cultures, but only because, under the influence of Calvinism, it had further hardened the division between faith and reason to the point of completely isolating a grace-only theology from the natural world and human faculties. This widening gap hit crisis point in the 18th century during the full flowering of the Enlightenment, when many Protestant theologians abandoned any semblance of orthodox (lower case) Christianity and embraced deism. The deist god was only in the most minimal sense a Creator in that once he had “lit the blue touch paper,” he retreated to a “safe distance” (for the scientist, mostly) and allowed creation to develop in accordance with the laws with which he had imbued it. Deism retained the kernel of monotheism's insistence that creation was not itself God but rather a rationally accessible and predictable expression of His creative mind and will. However, it made providence, divine intervention, miracles and intercessory prayer extremely problematic notions, because these were now considered to be “supernatural” and by definition contrary to the natural order. As typical of this position, Thomas Paine’s views were most incisively asserted and influential, coming to prominence as Enlightenment moralising and scepticism strengthened.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.”

“I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.” (*contd.*)

At about this time, pietism grew stronger in Protestant traditions by way of reaction; and this tended to scorn reason and emphasise religious experience as an exclusion zone filled with grace, inaccessible by definition to scientific enquiry. Eventually, even this bastion of pseudo-orthodoxy fell with the rise of neuroscience which showed itself quite competent in analysing altered states of consciousness in the religious mind, not exactly explaining them away but at least demystifying them. From the atheist philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) onwards, the foundations of positivism were laid exalting the scientific method to an exclusive and universal throne of knowledge, which was held to be the inevitable secular godless child of rational monotheism. Soon the intellectual establishment succumbed to this Great Idea that the sciences themselves were a sufficient and exclusively reliable description of the totality of human experience. This scientism, as many have called it since, was eventually popularised in our own time by such notable atheist propagandist popularisers as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. Their relentless and theologically illiterate evangelism has been the source of much functional atheism amongst lazy thinkers and uninformed pundits in the media and elsewhere ever since. Sadly, too many people have taken their word as the true gospel of the new aggressive secularism. God has finally been dethroned; or has He?

The trouble with this trajectory of alienation between faith and science is that it is so deeply embedded in Western culture that it seems blind to its own myopic view of reality and the spiritual and intellectual origins of its unquestioned assumptions.

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“The opinions I have advanced ... are the effect of the most clear and long-established conviction that the Bible and the Testament are impositions upon the world, that the fall of man, the account of Jesus Christ being the Son of God, and of his dying to appease the wrath of God, and of salvation, by that strange means, are all fabulous inventions, dishonourable to the wisdom and power of the Almighty; that the only true religion is Deism, by which I then meant, and mean now, the belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what are called moral virtues – and that it was upon this only (so far as religion is concerned) that I rested all my hopes of happiness hereafter. So say I now – and so help me God.”

(Thomas Paine, *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine* (London, R. Carlile, 1824).

In propaganda terms, atheist popularisers have a vested interest in attacking a caricature of religion as normatively fundamentalist. In the general population, the level of religious literacy is now so low that many simply buy the half-baked notions that seem to be continually recycled in the latest paperbacks by authors who have made a very decent living out of the whole sorry enterprise. Since many people unquestioningly assume that all Christians are the same and believe the same things, it has become almost impossible for Orthodox Christians to contribute to the debate without being written off as self-serving or idiosyncratic. We shall not be able to improve on this situation until we can put some clear blue water between ourselves and those heterodox Christian confessions that over 500 years or more have contributed to this sorry state of affairs.

The Orthodox perspective has been insightfully set out by Sister Nonna Verna Harrison in an essay in the succinct, but comprehensive, *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*:

People can use the methods of science to discern the patterns of the natural world, thus to ‘think God’s thoughts after him,’ to discover with awe the vast inventiveness of the Creator. Yet, as Evagrius Ponticus and his successors in monastic life have understood, there is a way of contemplating nature that goes beyond scientific method. It is possible through prayer to perceive God within everything he has made, and at the same time to see God’s ultimate purposes and plans at the heart of each created thing. Science can measure the outward surfaces of object, but prayer can plumb their depths. In the end, we can come to see the whole creation as a vast burning bush, alight with God’s glory.<sup>2</sup>

Sister Nonna’s closing metaphor of seeing “the whole of creation as a vast burning bush alight with God’s glory” invites us to approach the natural world with awe, just as did Moses in Exodus 3:2, but also to see that the whole of the natural world

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<sup>2</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “The human person as image and likeness of God,” in Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 87.

“is holy ground” to be respected in both an environmental and spiritual context while acknowledging that there are certain aspects of God’s glory to which we can “not come near.”

The last lecture set out how Orthodox Christianity emphasises certain key beliefs concerning God and the world. Consider now some important implications of these beliefs:-

1. An absolute ontological distinction is to be made between God, the Uncreated and everything else which is created to relate to him. The implication of this belief is that the cosmos is both rationally accessible and a means of communing with the Creator. It is not the business of religion to define how the creation functions, but neither is it the business of science to determine the purpose of creation as a whole and the purpose of life in particular. Faith and science may together contribute to the whole picture but not by trespassing on each other's respective domains.
2. Creation is sustained in being at every point by the Logos, the Word of God, and within creation this Logos expresses itself in the *logoi* of created things both animate and inanimate. St Maximus the Confessor, a 7th century Greek Orthodox theologian who “remains to this day the single most important figure in Orthodox cosmological thought,” has emphasised that: “The *logoi* of things express the creative will of God, according to which each thing comes into being at the appropriate time; but they equally express God’s presence within each entity, his providence for it and its ultimate goal.”<sup>3</sup> God's action in creation is not supernatural but rather within nature, and its most general expression is in a sacramental naturalism which configures to God's energies in creation and in special disclosures of this immanence in theophanies, miracles and prayer. These are by their very nature open to scientific

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation” in Cunningham and Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Theology*, p. 66.

investigation but their interpretive significance is a theological task not a scientific one. Each *logos* of each created thing responds to its creator. Even the stones cry out! Metropolitan Anthony put it in this way:

There is not an atom in this world, from the meanest speck of dust to the greatest star, which does not hold in its core ... the thrill ... of its coming into being, of its possessing infinite possibilities and of entering into the divine realm, so that it knows God, rejoices in Him.<sup>4</sup>

3. Creation out of nothing, more properly creation of being from non-being, is not the spontaneous generation of rationally accessible cosmic structures from a pre-existent primordial chaos but rather the divinely purposeful eruption of created being within or rather from God himself. Even if creation was supposed to be eternal according to our best understanding, God himself would be of an infinitely higher order of infinity than merely endless time. (The ranking of infinities has been commonplace in mathematics since the pioneering work of Georg Cantor in the 19th century). The conundrum as to why there is something rather than nothing is not answered by supposing a godless spontaneous creation (contra Stephen Hawking). It merely displaces the question. By definition, science cannot address it, philosophy may consider it, but only theology can guide it to a meaningful resolution.

4. Human nature generally and human persons in particular constitute a microcosm of the cosmos, in which the cosmos is defined as the universe seen as an ordered system. By this we mean that something in the universe is embedded within us and that something of us is embedded in the universe. This seemingly anthropomorphic and anthropocentric doctrine is not what it seems for it is by no means exclusively confined to the human but rather to the image and likeness of God in the human, which theoretically could apply to any other putative sentient being of similar divine vocation elsewhere in the cosmos. In Orthodox Christian thought, therefore, there can be no false epistemological division

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<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *Body and Matter in Spiritual Life*, available free in full on the web at: [http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng\\_02.htm](http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_02.htm) [note underline after eng].

between God the cosmos and humankind. This is most forcibly emphasised in Orthodox worship and symbolically in the architectural design of the Temple. It is reinforced in our doctrine of salvation which insists that deification is not only a restoration and a transformation of humans to their divine purpose and calling but through them also to the metamorphosis of the cosmos itself. This goal is achieved by repentance, asceticism and prayerful communion within the body of Christ.

5. Human beings receive their divine vocation from within the world itself as being inextricably formed within its ecological matrix. The divinely animated dust of the Genesis account of the creation of Adam is a primitive and mythological expression of this conviction which today we would perhaps want to express in terms more consistent with what we know of the evolutionary process. For example, several contemporary Orthodox theologians are aware “that the notion of *logoi* in creation by no means ties us to a belief in the fixity of forms such as the Fathers themselves held; indeed, the *logoi* provide a promising way of thinking about an evolving universe.”<sup>5</sup>

6. The emergence of consciousness and the sense thereby of the divine in the human species mark the beginning of our call to be priests in God's creation. We are called to return to Him that for which we are responsible and which is indeed part of ourselves, enhanced by both divine grace and common labour. The corruption of death undid this vocation, but it has now been restored by the resurrection of Christ. As priests, humans are called to sacrifice themselves, that is, to offer themselves to God in holiness for the good of all and everything. This has profound implications for understanding the responsibilities of humans for creation; and much has been written about this and practised in the Orthodox

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<sup>5</sup> Theokritoff, p. 69, citing Father Andrew Louth, “The cosmic vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor” in Philip Clayton & Arthur Peacocke (Eds.), *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 189. See also Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Kingdom: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press [SVSP], 2009) and Anestis G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St Symeon the New Theologian* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2001).

Church. This contribution has been much valued by men and women of good faith everywhere, especially evident in the ecological leadership shown by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew 1.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, if this Orthodox approach had been upheld in teaching and in practice, not only in the West but also in Orthodox countries, we would not have witnessed the contemporary phoney hostility between faith and science that so often we sadly see today. What the world needs today, however, is not a dry restatement of doctrine but rather a lived experience of that teaching in human lives exercising a restored priesthood within the natural world.<sup>7</sup>

There are outstanding examples of the coming together of Orthodox science, worship and praxis that are truly prophetic in our own time. This is often to be seen, but not exclusively, in Orthodox monastic communities, both in the lives of monks and nuns and in the environments of their coenobia and sketes. The following elements are often observed:

1. ***A compassionate and harmonious relationship with the animal and plant kingdoms.*** St Isaac the Syrian once spoke of this harmony in these terms:

And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is

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<sup>6</sup> Deacon John Chryssavgis, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009) and Deacon John Chryssavgis (Ed.) and Patriarch Bartholomew, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See Father Christopher C. Knight, *The God of Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007) and Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works of Church History, Vol. III Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1976).



humbled and he cannot bear to hear or see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason, he continually offers up tearful prayer, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns in his heart without measure in the likeness of God.<sup>8</sup>

Outstanding in this regard amongst many other elders was Porphyrios of Athens who urged his spiritual children to take delight in all aspects of nature as being the “little loves” that draw to the great love that is Christ.

**2. *A veneration of the good Earth and sanctification of place that comes from the holiness of its gardeners.*** An example amongst many comes from this encomium of the reposed monk Pachomios given to us by Archimandrite Vasileios of the Iveron Athonite monastery:

Now he sleeps in the cemetery of All Saints. He has been added to the choir of the ascetic martyrs of the Skete ... He remains in that place as a sacred compost and a spring of consolation for all. From his holy relics, as from the chestnut wood troughs they used to use for water, there will ever come holy dew to water that place ceaselessly and give it life.

**3. *New goals for science in sustainable development.*** Hitherto in the west, science has been harnessed to a considerable extent to the interests of exploitative capitalism, but this has led to a diminishing return on the earth's resources, gross pollution of the environment and a dangerous level of global warming. Similar problems emerged under communism which turned out to be a particularly repressive and brutal form of state capitalism, equally destructive of the environment. Monastic communities particularly suggest a different way forward in which the interests of the many are enhanced by the goals of the few, rather than the other way around. These principles can be seen in action on the Holy Mountain and

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<sup>8</sup> St Isaac the Syrian, *Homily 8*.

elsewhere where there is a strong commitment to sustainable development and the living out of a more simple and contented lifestyle, in harmony both with God and nature.

Of course the visible creation is not the only creation. As we explored in Lecture 61, Orthodox Christianity proclaims the glory of the invisible creation, the unseen world, the abode of angels. To this we now turn again in order to reflect on how we might speak intelligibly of these matters to a post-Christian culture.

### **Angels and Demons**

Our post-Christian culture is obsessed with the so-called supernatural. Angels, demons, vampires, fairies, ghosts and all sorts of creatures of the imagination remain big business for film producers and book publishers. One suspects that very few people take these beings to be real, except perhaps in the area of angelology where it is not uncommon to find belief in angels and demons happily coexisting with a functional atheism!<sup>9</sup> It is possible to see these phenomena of contemporary culture as fantastical post-modern reactions to the spiritual aridity of secularism and materialism. Alternatively, some of these experiences may be genuine encounters with the unseen realm. Whatever the reason for this growth in reported occult phenomena, those implicated consistently make the same point: the churches are the very last places to which they would go for help. This underscores the perception, quite common today, that the mainline Christian denominations, or as we would say, the heterodox, are embarrassed if not downright dismissive of such manifestations.

Of course, this lack or deficiency is not to be found in the Orthodox Church! The Church has always insisted that creation has two aspects, the visible and the

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<sup>9</sup> For an intriguing example of angelology, see the book with no author listed, *The Pocket Book of Angels* (London: Arcturus, 2015) which contains many saying such as a trenchant comment from an American actress, Mercedes McCambridge (1916-2004): “I never wanted a guardian angel. I didn’t ask for one. One was assigned to me.” p. 361.

invisible. We refer to this in anaphora in the Liturgy week by week. Angels and correspondingly demons are simply an accepted part of Orthodox cosmology. Remove these from the Scriptures and the Tradition of the church and there would be gaping holes in our texts. Remove these from people's faith and one loses a resource vital to understanding issues of love and hatred, good and evil, sin and redemption. The Orthodox Church has a pastoral opportunity here to help people negotiate the tricky waters of the unseen realm and to rescue them from charlatans who make no little money from exploiting their vulnerabilities with counterfeit promises. It has ever been the same since Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24). In order to give the holy angels their rightful (and not distorted) place again in our culture we could perhaps encourage people to have resort to their guardian angels. We should also be encouraged by the truth that when we pray and worship we are always surrounded by the holy ones, which includes not only the saints, but also the angelic choir. It is these that take our poor offerings and make them rich and fruitful before Almighty God (Revelation 8:4).

### **The Redemption of Persons**

Metropolitan Kallistos has explained that in both “Eastern and Western Christendom, there has never been a universally accepted doctrine of human personhood.”<sup>10</sup> Not only does the doctrine of the Fall need to be considered, but:

The ambivalence arises in part because Greek Christianity is heir to a double inheritance: to the Hebraic-biblical tradition, which is strongly holistic in its understanding of the human person, and to the Hellenic-Platonist approach, which—without being strictly dualist, except in rare instances—makes a firm differentiation between soul and body.<sup>11</sup>

In the mediaeval west the separation between natural and revealed theology narrowed the scope of salvation to the condition of the individual human soul.

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<sup>10</sup> [Metropolitan] Kallistos Ware, “‘My helper and my enemy’: the body in Greek Christianity, pp. 90-109 in Sarah Coakley (Ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Ware, p. 91.

Creation was merely the backdrop against which this divine drama was played out. Today it is almost inconceivable for the Western Christian mind that the death and resurrection of Christ should have any implication for creation itself other than that saved humans might have more respect for it as an extrinsic moral requirement.

The Orthodox Christian approach is quite different:

All things are to be brought into unity in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit: and in this process, a key role has been appointed to the human being. By being himself focused on God, man was to heal the divisions within the created order and unite it with its Creator. But man failed to be centred on God and thus became a force for division instead of unity. This is how [St] Maximus [the Confessor] understands the cosmic effects of the Fall: it is not the shattering of a golden age, but a failure to take creation forward to its appointed goal.<sup>12</sup>

Within this Orthodox perspective “which encompasses the whole arc of created existence, it can be seen that the process of deification is inseparable from the work of creation. Having their being in God, all things can be fulfilled only when he is all in all.”<sup>13</sup> Precisely how we are each to “take creation forward to its appointed goal,” while linking our personal striving for deification with the work of creation is a continuing challenge throughout our lives.

In Orthodox anthropology, human beings can never be separated from their social, political, cultural and ecological context. The thread that connects divine grace to all these human contextual realities is asceticism. Sobriety of spirit and humility before God, which is the ascetical task and goal, transforms the human being in his relationship not only to God but also to the created order. In the West, asceticism is commonly and mistakenly understood to imply a rejection of physicality and the good things of the earth whereas actually precisely the opposite applies. Asceticism

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation,” p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation,” pp. 66-67.

with repentance leads to a transformation of the spirit of man through its elevation to God. It is exactly this transformation that is required if humans are to cease their own unbridled degradation of the natural order arising from the unmitigated scourge of the passions. There can therefore be no dichotomy between the call to contemplation and the call to action. Both constitute that *metanoia* (change of mind) in the human spirit upon which our human survival and the future of the biosphere now vitally depend. As Elizabeth Theokritoff has pointed out, “Asceticism looms large because it is in essence a struggle to free ourselves from a relationship with the world that is predatory and addictive; this liberation enables us to approach God through creation.”<sup>14</sup>

In seeking the redemption of the human person in the context of creation it is helpful to remember the importance of both the Eucharist and the Holy Trinity. As Elizabeth Theokritoff has rightly insisted:

The Eucharist, the centre of sacramental life, is the supreme example of the world transformed into Christ. This idea goes back to Irenaeus.... But our increasingly sophisticated understanding of the nature of matter and the interconnectedness of the universe allows ever deeper insights into its significance. [Oliver] Clément speaks of the Eucharist as a ‘dot of matter brought into the incandescence of the glorious Body,’ from which ‘the fire spreads even to the rocks and the stars whose substance is present in the bread and wine, gradually pervading with eternity the heart of things.’<sup>15</sup>

It is also essential to accept that this awareness of a universe “transformed into Christ” includes the personal transformation of each of us as persons created by God—the personal deification of each of us, our own experience of linking our lives to God, our own unity with the Holy Trinity. This is not an easy challenge, as John Donne (1573-1631) reflected in *Holy Sonnet 14* when he wrote:

Batter my heart, three person’d God; for, you

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation,” p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation,” p. 74. The quotation from Oliver Clément is from his *On Human Beings: A Spiritual Anthropology* (London: New City, 2000), p. 116.

As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,  
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue,  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am bethroth'd unto your enemy:  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I  
Except you enthal me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever one's personal approach to sexuality, Donne is certainly right to stress the danger of believing that reason should defend us, because reason ultimately proves to be "weak or untrue" when we seek oneness with the Holy Trinity.

Over the years of our lives, as we participate in both the redemption of persons and the redemption of the universe, we may experience the same struggle as the Welsh poet R. S. Thomas when confronted with the empty tomb of the crucified Christ. In the poem "Easter, I approach," Thomas wrote: "Easter. I approach/ the years' empty tomb./ What has time done with itself/ Is the news worth communicating?.../ I have nothing to hold on/ to, an absence so much richer/than

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<sup>16</sup> For the text and an analysis of the poem, see the website: <http://www.shmoop.com/batter-my-heart-holy-sonnet-14/summary.html> . Donne's emphasis on asceticism in the confrontation with sexual desire, can be seen as orthodox, with a small "o." However, for a "theology that encompasses the spiritual potential of sexual love," see Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and Eros: Essays on the Theme of Sexual Love* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, 1976) and the work of the Greek Orthodox theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, especially *Person and Eros*, translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005; originally published in Athens in Greek as *To prosopo kai o eros*, 1987) and also Yannaras' *Variations on the Songs of Songs*, translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007; originally published in Athens in Greek as *Scholio sto Asa Asmaton*, 1990). For a balanced analysis of "the distinctive character of early Christian teaching on the body and sexuality," see Metropolitan Kallistos, as cited in notes 8 and 9 above.

a presence, offering/ instead of the skull's/leer an impalpable possibility/ for faith's fingertips to explore."<sup>17</sup> In looking at our own lives, we may question whether the news of our lives over time is "worth communicating," and yet even if we fail to reach the fullness of redemption of persons and the universe as we balance the call to contemplation and the call to action, we can still reach "an absence so much richer than a presence . . . an impalpable possibility for faith's fingertips to explore."

As we seek to balance the call to contemplation and the call to action, we are also confronted with the tension between the holistic Hebraic-Biblical tradition and the Hellenic-Platonist approach to the body and sexuality. Metropolitan Kallistos rightly follows St Gregory Palamas in seeing "the person as an undivided unity" of body and soul:

The body is directly involved in the vision of God. At Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the apostles beheld the uncreated light of the Godhead through their bodily eyes, and at the second coming the righteous will likewise gaze on Christ's eternal glory through the physical eyes of their resurrection body. Even in this present life the bodies of the saints sometimes shine outwardly with the same divine light that shone from Christ on Tabor. 'If the age to come,' says [St Gregory] Palamas 'the body will share with the soul in ineffable blessings, it must certainly share in them, so far as possible, here and now.' . . . In that double inheritance to which Greek Christians were the heirs, it is the biblical element that proves in the end the more influential.<sup>18</sup>

May we each be guided in prayer as to how to balance the calls to both contemplation and action.

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<sup>17</sup> R. S. Thomas, "Easter. I approach," in R. S. Thomas, *Uncollected Poems*, Tony Brown & Jason Walford Davies (Eds.), (Highgreen, Tarncliffe, Northumberland, England: Bloodaxe Books, 2013), p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Metropolitan Kallistos in Coakley, *Religion and the Body*, p. 108. The quotation from St Gregory Palamas is drawn from *The Tome of the Holy Mountain*, P, Christou et al (Eds.), *Writings of Gregory Palamas*, Vol. 2 (Thessalonica, Greece), pp. 567-568.

## Conclusion

In every aspect of creation doctrine and praxis, the Orthodox Church has something life-giving and transforming to offer this generation, particularly in the West which to all intents and purposes has abandoned Christianity (or more strictly we should say, has abandoned heterodox Christianity) as a life-enhancing faith. What is needful above everything else are Orthodox Christians in families, communities and monasteries who are prepared to live according to the dignity and high calling of being God's priests in creation. It is hoped that these E-Quip lectures will make a small contribution to this goal. Amen.