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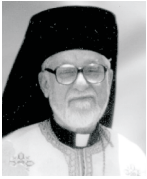


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The Crisis of Western Society, an Orthodox Interpretation

by Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

This following important message is a combination of very inspiring works from our beloved late Father Eusebius Stephanou. I had recently discovered some of these writings

which I know you will find a tremendous blessing, and a crucial teaching for our day! You may ask how this subject relates to our daily living, yet it does since there are overreaching repercussions due to the large extent in which Christianity in the West had verged off from the early teachings and practices of the Orthodox Church of the East. The result to which still infects almost every area of Western thinking to this day. Sincerely, *Joseph Abbate*.

I have had several opportunities in the past to participate in ecumenical encounters as an official representative of our Church. Consequently, much of what I am sharing with you is rooted in personal experience which I have combined with my findings from my studies into the history of the Early Church and into the causes that led up to Christian disunity.

The only intelligent approach to understanding the Roman Orthodox schism is to take into account the cultural and philosophical factors involved. Let me be more specific. **1**, the gradual disappearance of classical Greco-Roman ethos in the West. **2**, The emergence of a Teutonic ethos with the invasion

of Italy and Western Europe by barbarian Germanic races from the North. **3**, De-Hellenization and Latinization of the West. **4**, the emerging tension between faith and reason, resulting from the West's alienation from the principle of the indwelling Logos.

5, The loss of homogeneity with the Cosmic Logos as the all-embracing Truth that relates together every area of human experience. **6**, The replacement of the theology of the indwelling Logos with the theology of Grace in the West. **7**, The Great Schism in the Church can be traced back to the polarization of early Greek and Latin theology. **8**, The contrast between a God immanent and a God transcendent is the master-key to the many contrasts between the theologians of the East and West.

The Misfortune of Latinization

Alfred North Whitehead states in his book *Adventures of Ideas* that: "*the general type of the cultural development of Western civilization was predetermined when the center of Mediterranean*

learning was transferred from Athens to Alexandria". Obviously this is a reference to the expansion of Hellenism at the time of the conquests of Alexander the Great. But it is equally true that the transfer of Mediterranean learning from both Alexandria and Athens to Constantinople predetermined the cultural development of Europe.

The new capital of Emperor Constantine became the center of the Christian Greco-Roman world from the political, as well as from the cultural standpoint. Old Rome began withdrawing from the Christian Hellenism of the empire which, by the fourth century, had reached the zenith of her growth, giving lasting direction and shape to a revitalized civilization. **Rome on the Tiber was gradually alienated from the spirit of the Christian culture which had emerged in Constantinople with the synthesis of religion and government, Hellenism and Christianity.** Rome lost living and organic contact with the empire to which she had given birth and name.

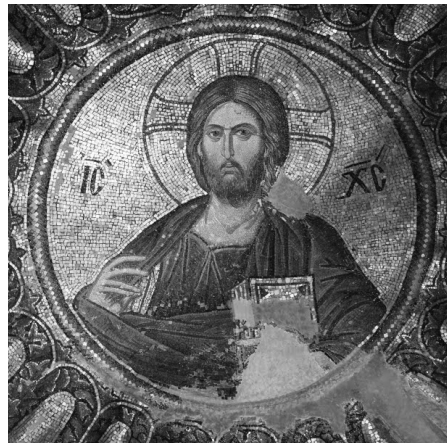
A new character was permanently imprinted upon the culture of Western Europe beginning with the fall of Rome to the barbaric races which came down from the North in the fifth century. The restoration of civilization under Pope Gregory the Great in reality marked the inception of a society quite different in spirit and ethos from that of earlier times. The knowledge of

Greek was disappearing along with familiarity with Greek philosophy and the theology of the Greek Fathers. “Gregory represents the patristic mind passing into a more barbarous stage.... Augustinianism is altered in form and barbarized.” (Henry Taylor, *The Medieval Mind*). Augustinianism became a permanent part of the structure of western thought.

Widespread Latinization of the Church in Italy marked the beginning of intellectual decadence. Pope Gregory’s attempt to restore the earlier culture proved abortive, as was later the attempt of Charlemagne to revive the Imperium Romanum during the 800s A.D. Rome needed Charlemagne, since it was no longer able to defend its borders. Charlemagne, who never had a Greco-Roman schooling or lineage, began to replace Bishops of the Roman church and leaders in government positions with peoples of Germanic backgrounds. Even though the Holy Roman Empire had been established, the undeveloped capacity of the new races that were entering the empire were not suitable for Greco-Roman ethos and spirituality. More than this, the Greek language in the Western empire fell into oblivion and Latin became the universal language.

The passing away of Hellenic thought and language and the subsequent Latinizing of theology banished the freedom that later was to avenge itself in a devastating way. All but gone was the Greek “arena of open ideas”. Also, the continuity between faith and reason so characteristic of the teachings of the Greek fathers became a forgotten notion. The concept of

the all-embracing divine reality in the universe was substituted by an extreme emphasis on the transcendence of God. The Church of Rome inherited the old Roman genius for organization and discipline. This included Roman legalism, which pervaded the very powers of the Papacy. In many areas of history, the position of the Pope became emperor-like in its unarguable faculties of power, which included the Popes commanding of armies.



The medieval belief finally prevailed that the absolute and arbitrary will of a **transcendent God** is the ground of right and truth. Grace was interpreted as an impersonal force and as an act of divine condescension designed to exhibit the power and glory of God. This contrasts with the earlier Christian Greek doctrine of **Divine Immanence, the idea of the presence of God in nature, in humanity, the process of history, the idea that reason itself is but the evidence in man of an imminent Divine activity.**

The seeds of unrest in the West were to germinate and blossom with the fruits of the division between Faith and Reason. This would result with the growth of secular humanism

which the world is still dealing with to this very day. The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment were in effect so many protests against the established traditions in the West, which came about because of the separation from the East. The Great Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054 would only prove to drive the polarization further. The “Dark Ages” which so ravaged Western Europe was almost never felt in the Eastern Byzantine Empire. Just a few years prior to the fall of Byzantium to the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1453, a great flood of Greek manuscripts, on mathematics, arts and sciences poured into the West by Greek migrations fleeing from the impending collapse of Constantinople. The result of the rediscovery of these writings in the West would result with the rebirth of Hellenic knowledge, the Renaissance.

The debased Augustinianism which was introduced into Western Europe became a permanent part of the structure of Western thought, and had reached its ultimate stage of development in the modern philosophy of existentialism – a philosophy and theology of despair, which is chiefly concerned with the anguish and despair of the human soul. The obvious result to this, mixed in with Papal abuses permeated through to a “religion of despair.” This caused further tensions in the church and in the field of philosophy to react strongly to these situations. Figures such as Martin Luther, Kierkegaard, Descartes and Voltaire, just to name a few, would arise on the scene in the West. In each case, they rebelled in

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their own way against the depravity of this thinking in the West.

Paschal, for example, could find no ground which would satisfy reason and stated: *“All nature both within and without us most manifestly declares a God withdrawn from us.”* It was only easy for medieval Augustinianism and even the shortcomings of Thomas Aquinas to lead man to such a predicament. This would end up leading to the *“God is dead”* theology. Scholasticism and the Renaissance represent unsuccessful attempts to regain a lost Hellenism. Later Lutheran Church leaders even attempted to join with the Orthodox Church, but it was too late at the time since the Eastern Empire was then overrun by the Ottomans.

The lack of Christian Hellenistic influence ended up in the Western loss of freedom and rationality of thought which unleashed the forces of chaotic thinking. Major breakthroughs of science often had to be passed through official Church approval, and was often rejected, such as in the cases of Copernicus and Galileo, whom the later had to recant his discoveries under threat of Papal persecution. These discoveries were actually just a rediscovery of Hellenic science from such Greek thinkers as Aristarchus of Samos. It was just one of many clashes which resulted in the further division of the field of Science and the institution of the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, even the denominations which rebelled and broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, could not break away from the Western mind-set in which they were schooled and raised in. The final result was that they still retained many Roman Catholic theological and philosophical dogmas, especially that of the Transcendence of God and the depravity of the human race.

Jesus Christ, the Three-Fold Truth

After centuries of painful experience, Western civilizations should know better than to believe that their power grows in proportion to their knowledge. Science is indeed power, but for both good and evil. As Plato once said: *“Knowledge without virtue is evil.”* Scientific knowledge can bring disaster upon the human race if not made good use of. The late General Omar Bradley stated: *“The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we do about peace. If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant may prove to be our executioner.”*

It is becoming more and more evident in our own day that nuclear science divorced from morality and faith in God, which champions morality, is awesome in its potential for evil if it falls into the hands of immoral people. This situation is only true because science and technology have too long been separated from the Christian faith. For too long, the Christian religion has been treated as being cumbersome and obstructive to the freedom of thought and inquiry. Western Man has alienated itself from God by setting Reason in direct opposition to Christ. Many in today’s generation no longer even accept the principle of an absolute truth.

Yet, can we place the blame on them, after all that the Western Church has done through the centuries? Christians themselves are responsible for Western Society’s disenchantment with religion and the Church. The rise of the “Age of Reason” signaled the emancipation of thought from religion. The secularization of Culture means that

science, education and government have become alienated from the sovereignty of Christ and His eternal and Universal Law. Man now orders his life as if God does not exist.

It was the tragic misfortune of the Christian West to **translate** The **“Logos”** of the fourth Gospel, rather than **transliterate** it. Logos became **Verbum** or **Word** in the English translation. As a result, its continuity with the Logos of the Greek Philosophy was permanently lost in the West. The *“Indwelling”* Logos which **“holds all things together”** (Col. 1:17), and which was known and written about by so many ancient thinkers of Greece, was now completely unknown in Western theology and science. The English word **Logic** comes from the Greek word **Logos, therefore those Christians who are logical are also Logos-like.** *“How could men be logical if they had no knowledge of the Logos of the Father through whom they had received their very being?”* (St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Logos of God, II*).

Such early Greek thinkers, such as Heraclitus, Socrates and Plato emphasized the Logos as a main key of understanding the sciences. Heraclitus was the first to coin the word **Logos**, as the main fiery principle in which the universe holds together, is ordered and governed. Socrates was forced to drink of the hemlock do to his belief of an **“Eternal Truth”** from were all other truths originate, which he called the **“Intelligent Logos”**. His belief in only one eternal Truth, was the accusation in which he was charged with, thus denying the rest of the gods. It can even be said that Democritus in his search for a physical bonding and sustaining element for this principle which holds the universe, initiated his

theory of Atoms.

The belief in the Logos would permeate Philo's writings and especially the early Christian fathers and apologists of the Church, such as St. Justin Martyr who believed that the ancients, such as Socrates and Heraclitus were "*Christians before Christ.*" Justin used the term "*Implanted Logos*" in that these pre-Christian thinkers were enlightened only partially, as much as God revealed to them at that time as a stepping stone to the furtherance of Truth. "*For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted Logos that was in them.*" (2nd Apology of Justin chap. XIIIV).

St. Athanasius through his great work, *The Incarnation of The Logos*, in which Arianism had been defeated at the first Ecumenical Council of the Church, and the Divinity of Christ became the accepted established doctrine of the Church, dispelled the darkness of heresy in his day. This is because The Logos could not be anyone less than God. To say that the Logos was a created thing would be like saying that God was once without logic or reason. "*He is at once distinct in being from the universe, and present in all things by His own power, given order to all things and over all.*"

In His magisterial or prophetic capacity Christ teaches perfect wisdom, as professor, because wisdom is the Logos of the living God Himself. After all, it was the Byzantine Greeks who built the greatest Church in Christendom and named it after Christ Himself, (1 Cor. 1:24), the Church of Holy Wisdom (*Hagia Sophia*). The Greeks who searched for wisdom and the Universal Principle of the cosmos found both in Christ, as the Logos. The Gospel of St. John

uses the Greek philosophical term "Logos" to indicate this fact because the Logos has now "*become flesh and dwelt among us.*" The Logos has become incarnate, and become the person of Jesus. Thus Logos is not a mere abstract concept nor an abstraction of human cognition, as conceived of by the Greeks. The Logos is the key to the philosophy of education. All knowledge is to be seen in the light of the Logos "*that lights every man that comes into the world.*" Intellect and reason which the West usually regards as innate are really self-communicating powers of God.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, Christ is affirmed as the all-embracing Truth that must be relevant to every area of human endeavor – not only to religion, but to science and art, as well as to the institution of government, since He fulfills the three-fold office of High Priest, Tutor and King. Christ is the answer to the Jewish quest for the perfect atonement as the Lamb of God, to the Greek quest for the perfect knowledge, as the Tutor and Logos, and the Roman quest for a universal united commonwealth of law and as King. It was not a mere accident of history that the inscription over Calvary's Cross was in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. It was later that the Christian world would inherit the cities of Rome, Constantinople and Judea, and their civilizations. With the proclamation of "*Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews*", inadvertently admitted that Christ's Kingdom came to supersede those three ancient civilizations as Christ Himself said: "*I have come not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill*". He did not come to destroy the Roman Empire, but to perfect it. He did not come to destroy the philosophy of the Greeks, but to fulfill it by providing

it with its true object and conceptual matrix. St. Paul the Apostle would continue the mission in clearly pointing out the direct fulfillment of Divine prophecy to the Jews through Christ the Messiah, and in revealing rational truth with the philosophically minded Greek scholars. The illustrious St. Paul inflamed the hearts of the Greeks when preaching in Athens while quoting from the ancient philosophers such as Epimenides and Aratus: "*For in Him we live and move and have our being, for we are also His offspring.*"

It should be emphasized that to encounter Jesus as the Logos is to know Him as the comprehensive Truth in every aspect of existence. If Jesus is Lord, then he must exercise sovereignty over every area of human life. He must be the primary and final cause on every level of constructive and creative experience. He is to be acclaimed as the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega in every institution of human society. As the Logos, Jesus Christ is the Truth and authority in the field of science. Through Him all knowledge becomes meaningful and integrated; perhaps the answer to our present-day, fragmented understanding of the physical world. In addition to being the High Priest for the propitiation of man's sins, Jesus is the *Kathegetes (Professor)*, in the ultimate sense of the word. He tells us: "*Call no man Kathegetes, for you have one Kathegetes, The Christ*" (Matt. 23:10).

The Orthodox Church is not only the historic Church which preserved the original deposit of Faith, pure and unadulterated, but she preserves the authentic continuity of the semantic evolution in theology throughout Christian history.