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You are an American converted to Orthodoxy. 50 years ago, when Serafim Rose launched an orthodox magazine in America, he said that he must create his own clientele. Since then, the number of American citizens converted to Orthodoxy has grown considerably. How would you explain this phenomenon? □ □

Since the French Revolution, there has been a steady erosion of Christian influence in the Western world, as we all know. Monasticism shrank to almost nil by 1800, and Enlightenment ideas crept into the thought patterns of public figures, and even into the words of supposed custodians of Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Even though there was a decline of a similar type in the Orthodox lands since the Turks overran the Eastern Roman Empire, in the eyes of Americans the Eastern Orthodox Church still speaks the same pristine language of Christian faith, despite many challenges. Augustinianism is beginning to be seen for the pestilence that it is, and people are connecting more dots. For instance, a friend of mine broke down and told me that his Protestant upbringing was the reason for his inability to overcome guilt over sins, just like Luther broke down centuries before. Only now, this friend had Orthodoxy to answer the seemingly unanswerable question of how man might be united to God. So, I think people are finding answers with Orthodoxy and people are finding them in relation to questions about history and in relation to their own life crises.

What was the key factor in your conversion to Orthodoxy?□

A man I met at a call center where I was working around 2001 told me I should read the Church Fathers and recommended Henry Bettenson's first volume called Early Christian Fathers. By the time I got to St. Athanasius, I was for whatever these people were for and against whatever they were against. I asked this man, "what do I do to be united to these men and to Christ?" He said, "I will show you Sunday morning." About a year later, I was received into the Orthodox Church.

There are many people who converted and are attracted to the philosophical depths of the Orthodoxy, but who are, somehow, unfamiliar to this Church's practice and tradition. How do you regard this matter?□

Many today enter into Orthodoxy with the false belief that they are finding God through Greek philosophy. We anathematize Greek philosophy every Sunday of Orthodoxy, but these people do not wish to hear or understand this condemnation, or so it seems. Orthodox Fathers of the Church use the terms and concepts of Greek philosophy, but their use of them is an emptying-out and a reconstituting of these terms and concepts so that they overturn what is "philosophical" in them. Many people are seduced into believing in various "realist" linguistic and cosmological theories about words, logoi, and Platonic forms. Yes, there are "logoi," but they are not an alphabet soup of words or concepts. Logoi are energies of God that the Holy Trinity divides undividedly from the one, eternally good Trinitarian act (to use the words of St.

Dionysius) in order to create, sustain, and save contingent beings. Whatever else logoi are, for our purposes as Orthodox, we can say little more than what I just said. The Western tradition uses logoi as "exemplars" that guarantee that natural laws do not change so that our minds can understand and use these laws to arrive at truth. Orthodoxy is more pragmatic than this. We do not allow ourselves to be deceived by the false Western dichotomy of realism versus idealism, which paralysed the thoughts of Western theologians and philosophers and led to agnosticism and nihilism in the 18th and 19th centuries. This is where the misguided philosophically-focused Orthodox of today "go away sorrowfully": when you point out to them that they cannot cling to theories of intellectual or linguistic certainty, but must approach God as does St. David in the Psalms, they would rather believe in quasi-Thomistic conceptions of ideas in the mind of God (divine forms that are supposedly shared with man through man's mind, which is supposed to be a finite analogue to God's mind). This is heresy to the Orthodox, and its distant progenitor is Augustine, whose idea of man's power of memoria is an adaptation of the Middle Platonic doctrine of forms to psychology. Augustine believed that all possible phenomena were present in some kind of timeless unity in our minds, so that when we think a thought or see something for the first time, it is remembering. Even if we think of possible futures, it is through memory. This opened the door to Freud's ideas about every person having every possible taboo-breaking desire inside themselves, controlling and influencing them unconsciously. If we all do it in our deepest thoughts already, why not be true to ourselves and "just do it"? Freud's whole problem is that he cannot say that the unconscious is morally wrong. Freud was silly enough to think that we overcome death by dying in the particular way we choose to die. Not even his most fanatical followers bought this sad explanation, which is tantamount to saying "I will puff out my chest and by so doing the steamroller will not defeat me, even though it flattens me." I think Freud was influenced by earlier pseudo-scientific writers in France and Germany who claimed that mankind is immortal through palingenesis, through the survival of germ plasm that is transferred in reproduction. For anyone with a semblance of depth to their thoughts about life, death and immortality, all of this is merely comical.

What role did Joseph Farrell's book, „God, History and Dialectics”, play in your intellectual biography? As far as I know, there were many American orthodox philosophers who were influenced by this book.□ □

I was influenced by Farrell's book, but also by Orthodox monastic literature, which says the exact same thing Farrell said in that book. I am a follower of Orthodoxy, not of any cult of personality. I have a spiritual Father, and I try to follow his teaching, which is that of the Church. In Orthodoxy today, you find people who are in touch with the core of Orthodoxy, which is the cure of the heart through asceticism and the sacraments, and then you find people who do not have a clue what is going on. They think of Hobbits, Jungian archetypes, or even occultism when they think of Orthodoxy. Praying for them and showing patience and love toward them is all you can do.

Another converted philosopher, with an enormous influence in the Anglo-Saxon world (Prince Charles, Bishop Kallistos, to name just two) is Philipe Sherrard, author of some „dangerous speculations”, as you described them in an essay. How do you see its legacy? Can we speculate a connection between the recent position of Bishop Ware regarding the LGBT issue and Sherrard’s influence over time?

Sherrard saw Orthodoxy through the lens of Romanticism. Broadly speaking, this tendency is widespread in the kind of theology that comes out of most Orthodox seminaries. Sherrard's trinitarian theology is shockingly off-the-mark: He speaks of God in Boehmenist terms as having to find Himself in His own Ungrund. A cursory reading of the Gnostics, Jacob Boehme, Spinoza, and Fichte will reveal the same idea: man finds himself by following the same path God has to follow in becoming God. Though any truly Orthodox person would recoil at this, it seems that others, especially American and English theologians from Oxford and from St. Vlad's Seminary, love this "Romantic Orthodoxy" and think it is also a road to ecumenical reunions with Rome and with the Protestants. Which, of course, it is, but at the cost of leaving Orthodoxy.

How do you see Orthodoxy’s future in America? Clark Carlton, another covert, said, in a recent conference that the time of catacombs has arrived.

I do not know what the future holds, but without a flowering of monasticism, or without a reawakening to the true basis of our salvation through ascesis, Orthodoxy will continue to be in the catacombs; it will be the salvation of a few people, and the culture at large will go on sliding toward Enlightenment heaven on earth, which is Orthodox hell on earth.

You are part of ROCOR Synod. What is your opinion about the Crete Synod?

Stay away from its baleful influence and hold up the Cross around your neck to ward it off. The Synod is a joke, and has no effect on Orthodoxy, which is purification of the heart in the life of the Church.

Your research, following John Romanides, have highlighted the crucial role of Augustinian theology in the development and falling of the Western World. For someone who is sceptical to this influence, could you summarise Blessed Augustin role in Western’s history?

Augustine gave the West the filioque, original sin, irresistible grace, created grace, analogia entis and analogia fidae. All are heresies, and are templates for all later Western heresies. Those in the West who have developed these heresies usually cite Augustine as their source. Others cite intermediaries who cite Augustine directly. It is there for anyone to see who is looking. Read Fr. John Romanides' works for specifics, plus St. Photius and St. Gregory Palamas. It is hard to miss it, but Western Christians who grew up reading Augustine and who are impressed with his "psychology," which has influenced Western visual and prose art, and thus all modern media, cannot see how all of this can be wrong. It feels so right to them; it all seems so natural.

What is the relation between Augustinian theology and the papal primate?

What do you have left once you follow Augustine and throw out the illumination of the nous, which is the only direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit? You get the need for unquestioned authority, what Daniel Dennett called "conversation stoppers." The Pope stops conversations because he is supposed to be a Christomaton, immune from error in certain cases. However, the Pope has no illuminated nous, and Catholic theology rejects uncreated grace as being operative in any human being. Without Augustine's ignorance of the nous's destiny to be united to uncreated divine energies, there would be no Papal infallibility, because the only real infallibility is in God Himself, accessible to man only in an ineffable union with God's energies.

How do you see this distinction between Orthodoxy of heart and Orthodoxy of mind? I have in mind the polemical exchange between Father Seraphim Rose and Father Michael Azkoul about Blessed Augustine? Do you make a distinction between Blessed Augustine (his life) and Augustinism (his theological writings)?

I will answer these two queries together. We can view Augustine as an ecclesiastical writer who lived and died within the Church, but whose writings exhibit many theological errors. Maybe he renounced all of his errors on his deathbed and we do not know it. That is fine, but he is not a Father of the Church. His teaching cannot be relied upon to guide Orthodox theology. However, we can cite him to support a point as long as we are not drawing upon his erroneous teachings. Fr. Michael's analysis is correct in the main; as far as posthumous condemnation, my approach is to condemn the errors and leave it at that. Naming my kids Augustine is not going to happen, and if anyone puts an icon of Augustine in front of me, I will venerate it in the hope that he achieved greater understanding in his last days (though this is doubtful).

You have indicated the essential part played by Pope Gregory VII in the disputes between imperium and sacerdotium in the West. In his book, „Law and Revolution”, written from a non-traditional or orthodox perspective, Harold Berman states that the first revolution in Western’s history was the one of Gregory VII, while all the other ones somehow occurred necessarily. Do you agree with this opinion?

There are many senses in which Berman's claim can be showed to be true. If spiritual authority is misconstrued as princely power, as was done by Pope Gregory, you have opened up the biggest can of worms in history. And worms keep flying out of that can even today.

Is there a relation between the catholic theology and the development of some occult sub-currents, such as Templers, alchemist activity or Jesuits’ Order?

Yes, as I wrote in a few of my books, there is a common doctrine of human/divine progress in all of these currents. The idea is that God has to alienate Himself from Himself in order to be God. So God creates a cosmos as the medium in which and through He can become God. Man is the crown of this creation, the most Godlike being, and so man must become God by transmuting the cosmos into perfection. Whether it is an alchemist making gold, or a Templar caressing the spine of his fellow Brother in the Lodge, the goal is transmutation of alienated, finite matter into a divine, immutable state. Catholicism opposes all of this in the letter of their theology to an extent, but since their theology is thoroughly Augustinian, they use tools of his like analogia entis to fight occultism. Think of a video game where the dragon gets more power every time you strike him with your sword. You cannot win, though you can reset the game and keep swinging in vain. This is how effective Catholics are in fighting the occult. Orthodox who love the New Age are no more effective, though.

You look into Carl Schmitt’ work, a political thinker from the turn of the 20th century, who was rather politically incorrect, according to present standards. What raised your interest in this philosopher, who is quite underestimated today?

Carl Schmitt mounted a devastating critique of Romanticism in his early work. He was influenced by Kierkegaard in the 1920's, and, as a cultural and spiritual critique of Romanticism, his work is unequalled. Schmitt also make a crucial distinction between two categories of existence that I call "reciprocity" and "transcendence." Reciprocity is the level of "law and

order." Even if I personally am a glorified saint, and thus live at least some of the time above the need for food, law, or direction, I cannot abolish law and order, since there are people in the world who are not saints, and thus who still need direction, protection, and an economy that allows them to eat and exist. So, the political is operative at this level of reciprocity. Is violence wrong at the level of reciprocity? Violence is always a sin, but does that mean that we should abolish organized police action and state military action? Any society that seriously considers putting this into practice is so decadent and out of touch with reciprocity that they can truly be called nihilist. So, no one has the right to abolish, or even consider abolishing authority per se. It may sound obvious, but there are still people where I live that believe that aggression should be outlawed. Would such people have the courage to protect their own children from an intruder? You have to use violence to do away with violence, so we are dealing with an ineluctable feature of the fallen world: the political. Now, if everybody jumped up and became a saint at the same time, then we would be a law unto ourselves. But until such time, some kind of authority and force is going to be legitimated, at least provisionally, in the here and now. The level of sainthood and theosis in this life is "transcendence," which is above the law, but which is also outside of politics. Theosis influences politics indirectly, saints advise worldly leaders, and so on. However, sainthood cannot become a normative law. I cannot promulgate a statute that says: become a saint. However, I can pass a law that says "do not steal." There is much more to say on this, but that will suffice to show what I am finding in Schmitt so far.

Taking into consideration the interpretation you do for Carl Schmitt and the distinction you make between the moral ascetic level and the legal one, what place would you see for the byzantine symphony?

The byzantine symphonia has many affinities with Schmitt's work, but that is because Schmitt is trying to avoid the contradictions of Western modernity while preserving the quasi-independence of spirituality from politics. Orthodoxy also does not present politics as an earthly struggle to make people saints. Yes, we pray for victories for Orthodox Christians, but it is understood that Christ triumphs only in illuminated nouses. However, it just so happens that societies that pursue what I call "reciprocity," or "law and order to preserve freedoms" are desirable so that individuals can follow a relatively dispassionate existence unhindered by adverse conditions. But, we cannot come up with a set of preordained rules for ordering society that correspond to the path to theosis. We are dealing with constant reajustments and compromises. Here Schmitt helps because he cuts to the heart of liberal (and conservative) political theories and shows how and why they are fragile. However, a prophet he was not, and we have many unanswered questions about exactly how an Orthodox Christian relates to the state.

Thanks for this opportunity to reach people in your country!

Whithout a flowering of monasticism Orthodoxy will continue to be in the catacombs

Scris de Ninel Ganea

Miercuri, 01 August 2018 11:03

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.