

Vignette # zero is posted!! Please check it out, and test it out too :-)

Dear friends,

Software engineers begin counting from zero, not from one, and that is nice since it give that first number a pre-beginning feeling. Please consider what is below as a first, test, “Beta” Vignette Zero. A first small trial.

Andrei for the Saker blog

First, a caveat which in the future I will post under every Christian Vignette. It is important, very, so please read it carefully. **I, Andrei Raevsky, aka The Saker, have absolutely no authority whatsoever to teach. None. Zero. Ziltch. What I do have is a lot of exposure to sources of true Christianity, be it the people I met in my life, of my readings of the Church Fathers. The planned vignettes will NOT be a catechism, or a course in dogmatics or anything else formal. The planned vignettes will be one guys strictly personal musings on various topics. Nothing more.**

Next, here are some of my working assumptions:

- While some of those who signed up clearly already know a great deal about original Christianity, others do not, and that is fine. *I will primarily address the non-Orthodox in these vignettes*, but mainstream, state-sponsored “world Orthodoxy” will be mentioned too.
- My first task will be two fold: first, to try to prove my thesis that **modern Christianity has nothing in common with the original Christianity, in many ways modern “Christianity” is an anti-Christianity**. My second task will be to remove some of the worst myths about early Christianity. Before I can place something healthy before you, I need to remove the poisons currently in your “mental plate”. I will begin by the two worst and most illogical ones:
- **Saint Paul “invented/created/perverted” Christianity and Christ did not come to create an “organized religion”.**
- I will then also explain a few basics about what the Scripture is and what it is not.
- Then we will discuss our reference system and sources.
- Then we will look at what “theology” meant to the early Christians.

Finally, an important note. “Christianity” is an empty, place-holder, term which means nothing. I discuss that in [my interview](#) about Orthodoxy with Yvonne Lorenzo. And words like “God” or “Virgin Mary” really need to be very carefully defined. **We will deal with definitions a lot.** But here is what I want you to know.

In those vignettes **I will use the term of “Christianity” to ONLY refer to:**

The faith “*which the Lord gave, was preached by the Apostles, and was preserved by the Fathers. On this was the Church founded; and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer ought to be called a Christian*” (Athanasius of Alexandria, 4th century)

and

that “*which has been believed everywhere, always and by all*” (Saint Vicent of Lerins, 5th century).

and

“*As the Prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers expressed in dogmas, as the whole world has agreed, as the grace has illuminated*” (Synodikon of Orthodoxy, 6th century)

When referring to the modern times, I will call “Orthodox” and “Christian” only those entities/jurisdictions/churches/groups which have truly and fully kept the faith and traditions which were handed down to them. When referring to modern, state-supported Orthodox Churches, I will use their official names as in “Orthodox Church in America” or “Moscow Patriarchate”.

Finally, as **this is A LOT about vocabulary and its uses, I will deal a lot of definitions.**

I hope that this sounds like a fun program.

Hugs and cheers

Andrei (the Saker)

Christian Vignette #1 – who/what are modern “theologians”?

What is a theologian?

There are a lot of definitions out there, mostly like “person thinking about God” or “someone who studies the nature of God, religion, and religious beliefs” and the like. This is a profoundly **NON**-Christian view of theology, and I will come back to it later (in a future vignette)

Imagine you are one of those modern wannabe “theologians” and you think about God and religion a lot. Now let’s make a thought experiment. You, as a budding “theologian” can chose any one of these topics to write a book on:

1. A discussion of angels based on the writings of [Saint Dionysios](#)
2. A history of the [Antiochian Church](#) in the 8th century
3. A biography of **Christ’s newfound** (you did) ****sister (!!!)**

**

Which one would you pick? Option A requires a lot of brainpower, time and study of the Church Fathers (to ascertain what the *consensus patrum* on this topic is). Besides, angels are a myth, right? Invented to make little children happy, but nobody believes in them or cares anyway, so why bother? Angels are like “Easter” eggs and bunnies – simply myths for simple people: in our times of “enlightened” positivism discussing angels is only acceptable in a joke or in a metaphor (how many fit on a pin?). So not option A.

Option B is probably fine, but nobody cares (or even knows!) about Antioch, so why bother? In both case A and case B you will sell a few books here, maybe for libraries, and there and it will all be quickly forgotten. So option B is no good for anybody wanting to be noticed or in any way “original”.

Simply put, modern “theologians” are like journos – they have to chose between speaking truthfully and going bankrupt or lying (aka “presenting an original thesis”) and sells lots of books. What do you think most of them chose?

Now compare that with option C! Here is the full title of the book “*Christ’s forgotten sister – the full truth about Christ’s hidden sister!!!!*“. Woah! That might be utter nonsense (it is, of course!), but **it is hard to prove a negative and, besides, nonsense or not, that will sell!** That, for sure, is “original”, no?

First, all the anti-religious folks will love it just because it contradicts the Scripture and Fathers. Second, while some will call your thesis utterly stupid, **most reviewers will call you “daring” and “original” and commend you for your “courage” to take on “the Church”**. Do you also see the proceeds of that book suddenly rising far higher than in any of the other two options?

Next, if Christ had a sister, it begs the question of **who the father of that sister?** Was it also God? Or maybe Saint Joseph? Or even somebody else? I would not put it past modern theologians to **suggest that Christ's sister probably had descendants.** If not, **maybe she was "gay"** (*modernspeak* for homosexual)? And **maybe she rejected Christ and sided with the Pharisees?**

Now ain't that really "cool" topics, maybe for a good summer read on the beach or by a swimming pool?

Do you see all the possibilities?!

One more "advantage" of the option C: **to propose it you do NOT need to know anything about Church history, you do NOT need to have read Patristics and you even do NOT need even a cursory familiarity with the New Testament. In other words, zero effort and very nice return on investment (\$\$\$).**

Does that happen in reality?

Yes, sure, I will two perfect which are **mind blowing in their stupidity AND popularity.**

Example one – "Paulism" or how Saint Paul "created modern Christianity". It goes something like that: Christ was a peaceful, kind-hearted quasi-hippie who loved everybody and everything. Then came the nasty "Paul" (these folks will not use proper the "Saint Paul" expression) who brought a ton of nasty and intolerant restrictions, "Paul" was either a "notorious homophobe" or, coming from the same corner, a crypto-gay in love for Saint Peter (to those offended, I apologize, but *modern homos do really spew that kind of toxic nonsense* I have seen that one very often in the past)) organized what was originally in informal hippie commune -type of society and replaced it with modern Christianity aka "organized religion"!

LOL!

The sheer mendacious audacity of that thesis always blows my mind!

Let's use only our common sense next. Here is what we know for a fact:

- Saint Paul used to be a vicious persecutor of the Church until his conversion on the road to Damascus
- Some Christians initially feared and distrusted Saint Paul
- Saint Paul never meet Christ face to face, he only had a vision on the road to Damascus
- Saint Paul was surrounded by all the other Apostles all if which new Christ personally and all of whom were martyred with the sole exception of Saint John. In other words, **they really cared** about Christ's truth!

Now just **use your common sense.**

You are part of a group of people willing to die for their beliefs and for their Master whom you and the rest of the group personally know really well. In fact, 4 members of your group even put down in writing their full testimony. Now a former persecutor whom you used to really fear suddenly shows up and declares himself converted and wants to join.

Would you let him? Most of us would never. But then, **the Apostles were real saints** and they accepted him with an open and loving heart!

Okay, but we can assume that Saint Paul was still under A LOT of scrutiny (even saints are “only human” and, besides, we are all weak sinners anyway) not only at the moment of formal admission, but even later.

But if that is true, **how could this “relative newcomer” suddenly start preaching a radically different kind of message than the one taught to all by Christ Himself?** Saint Paul he also wrote a lot of letters which gradually perverts what the real Christianity, at least so say the adherents to the “Paulinian Christianity” sect.

Let me repeat, the “Paulinians” are claiming that Saint Paul perverted teachings which **all Christians had access to**, which **all Christians knew** (mostly by heart at that time!) and **all Christians agreed upon**. These early Christians were **taught by personally by Christ Himself**, and they were **more than willing to die for these teachings!**

Last, but not least, some early Christians, (including Saint Peter himself) openly polemicized with some of what that newcomer said!

And, suddenly, *voila*, in spite of it all, the newcomer somehow mysteriously conned everybody and created the “Pauline religion”. How that would have been possible in the first place is never specified or even asked. Hey, if the thesis is “daring” who cares about boring stuff like facts or logic?

Seriously, how utterly stupid and **lacking basic common sense** must one be to buy that self-evidence idiocy?!

Oh, but it gets better! After all the original Apostles (12+70) were all gone, their successors, the bishops and presbyters and laity all get together and (among other issues) decide which books should or should not be part of the Church-approved list of books to be included in the official New (and even Old!) Testaments.

NOTE: If you are not aware of this, **please stop reading and immediately read this** before continuing:

<http://orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/whichcamefirst.aspx>

Anyway, these multitudes of early Christians got together and decided to... ..include **a lot** of Saint Paul's letters into the New Testament (originally be reading Saint Paul's letters, recognized as authoritative, in official assemblies and religious ceremonies). That is a historical fact.

So the evil "Paul" must have conned them all, including "lightweights" as Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian and even The Virgin Mary!

Right? Wrong, of course, and self-evidently absurd!

So, here is what we can conclude about this canard:

- The early Christians would NEVER have allowed anybody, nevermind a former persecutor of the Church, to pervert a message which they all heard directly from Christ Himself.
- If Saint Paul had deviated only by one [iota](#) (the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, literally!) from Christ's message, he would have been immediately condemned just like the heretics who tried to replace a letter "o" by a letter "i" to the word "consubstantial" ([homoousios](#)) and turn it into "of a similar/like substance" ([homoiouosios](#)). No need for us to get further bogged down on this telling, but complex, example.
- For centuries since, council after council, saint after saint, have not only reaffirmed every word written by Saint Paul (truly a giant of Christianity) but the absolute best Christians theologians in history based their writings on **Saint Paul** and later, on each other. They include: **Saint Dionysios the Areopagite** (who knew Saint Paul and the Virgin Mary personally, and lived in the 1st century, modern "theologians" often deny his existence and/or the authorship of his writings), **Saint Maximos the Confessor** (7th century), **Saint Photios the Great** (9th century) and **Saint Gregory Palamas** (14th century).

\[Sidebar: **please remember those five names** and roughly when they lived as these saints are the "*nec plus ultra*" of Christian dogmatic theologian-saints. I also consider them among the most important philosophers in history. Any discussion of early, true, original Christianity which does not at least mention them is extremely hard for me to imagine. The problem is that they are also not easy to read, to put it mildly. Hence why Saint John Chrysostomos or Saint Basil the Great are more typically recommended for beginners. And, of course, these saints all said/wrote the "same stuff", just expressed differently. But, with this caveat in mind, please keep those "**Big Five**" (incl. Saint Paul, of course!) in mind as I will very often either quote or refer to them\]

Rhetorical question: what do we call a wannabe “Christian” “theologian” who *sincerely believes* that he/she knows more, and understand the original Christianity better, than Saint Paul, Saint Dionysios, Saint Maximos, Saint Photios and Saint Gregory?

I personally would be quick to call such a person a ignorant and delusional fool. But that’s the usual sinful me speaking. The technical term for the state these people are in is known in Greek as “[plani](#) and sells lots of books. What do you think most of them chose?” and in Slavonic “*prelest*” and roughly translates to “*spiritual delusion*” (“*a wounding of human nature by falsehood*” according to St. [Ignatius Brianchaninov](#)).

Furthermore, not only **because “The Big Five” and many thousands other saints know better**, but also because even **a small dose of common sense allows me to reject that thesis prima facie**.

If after reading the above you still believe in the “Pauline myth” please contact me ASAP, I have several beautiful bridges to sell you, and at a great price too (say \$10k only a pop)!

Now let’s deal with the second canard:

Example two – How “Christ brought us love, not an organized religion!”.

Let’s begin with a small reminder. First, in the Heavens, God created angels and arranged them **hierarchically**. (we know that from many sources, including Saint Dionysios’ text on “[The Celestial Hierarchy](#)“). Then God also gave a single command to Adam and Eve, which presupposes that He saw Himself as **hierarchically** superior to them both. So far so good? Then God gave **commandments** (not suggestions!) to His chosen people who then **organized in several ways** (prophets, kings and judges)!

Then, following His Incarnation into the flesh, **Christ created a core managerial/officer group he called “Apostles”** and then He **organized** another 70 aides/NCOs to assist them.

This all sure looks very well hierarchical and even organized to me!!!

Next, Christ’s Apostles **organized** the first (Apostolic) Council in which they **reaffirmed their infallible authority** (“*For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us*” Acts 15:28). Next, they proceeded to **organize** what we now call dioceses, run by a bishop aided by presbyters (both of them are priests, of course). In other words, **the Apostles were very much “into organized religion”**, unlike our modern wannabe “theologians”.

But this goes even much deeper. Christianity has [dogmas](#). Let me explain.

You can think of dogmas as established beliefs or doctrines which are authoritative and cannot not to be disputed or doubted by any person calling himself/herself a “Christian”. Actually, there are not that many real dogmas out there for a simple reason: the early Christians and their followers never saw any need to put it all down in writing and proclaim

dogmas left and right just for the heck of it. They wrote letters, true. But dogmas are the product of three things: a consensus of the Church Fathers, a re-affirmation of that consensus by an **authorized**/competent Church Council and the need to **denounce a false teaching!**

In other words, in its categorical affirmation of some truths *Christianity is the most theologically intolerant religion out there!* Again, I need to clarify what I mean by that.

While Christians are taught not to judge, use the Golden Rule and show compassion, mercy and love to their personal enemies and for all those who do not know the Truth of Christ, on a theological level I would argue that original Christianity is the single most intolerant religion out there: it dares to proclaim **One Single** (“*One Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (Ephesians 4:5-6)) and **Absolute** (the “*pillar and foundation of truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15)) and **Eternal Truth** (“*the gates of Hades will not overcome it*” (Matt 16:18)) and says that those who disagree cannot call themselves Christians anymore (*vide supra*). This is why the notion of “Christians sects” or even “denominations” makes no sense when discussing Christianity. Well, okay, you can, but only in the sense of “*they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*” (1 John 2:19). Those who publicly teach anything contradicting those Christian dogmas are called “heretics”, this is not an insult, it just means those who made a different choice.

By the way, the one who breaches the Church hierarchy established by Christ Himself is called either a “schismatic” or a “parasynagogue”. Don’t worry about these terms now, just remember that **they are not insults** and **that original Christianity very much had organization and authority. If not, why even have categories as “heretic” or “schismatic” anyway???**

I don’t want to discuss dogmatics here, that is also for a future vignette, all you need to know or the time being is that the Church has the authority to reaffirm/proclaim dogmas and that authority, or the dogmas, cannot be disputed by anybody calling himself ‘Christian’ in the early Christian sense. Hence Saint Athanasios of Alexandria’s (4th century) famous words about the faith “*which the Lord gave, was preached by the Apostles, and was preserved by the Fathers. On this was the Church founded; and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer ought to be called a Christian*” (St. Athanasius).

Conversely, when the Church declares “anathema” on a teaching or a person (different cases!) this is not a “curse” or an active excommunication. It is simply a public statement, by the competent Church authorities, that teaching X and/or person Y has been declared as “outside the Church” and, to quote Wipikedia (which got only this one paragraph right, the rest of it is useless for us), “*For the Orthodox, anathema is not final damnation. God alone is the judge of the living and the dead, and up until the moment of death repentance is always possible. The purpose of public anathema is twofold: to warn the one condemned and bring about his repentance, and to warn others away from his error. Everything is done for the purpose of the salvation of souls.*” (stress added by me).

You can, for our purposes only, think of the Church as a “**truth reaffirmation entity**” or a “**clarifier of what could be ambiguous to some**“. This is, **by necessity**, a highly organized entity and a highly hierarchical one. You can also say that “**Christian dogmatics are reactive**” in the sense that they are formally proclaimed only if and when someone/something is misleading the faithful.

\[Sidebar: careful with this one, the Latins absolutely love to *pervert the original meaning of this* by saying “we never proclaimed anything new, we just *clarified* or *elucidated* what which was always believed in, and by, the Church”. Simply put: this is a blatant and easy to disprove lie: the Latins have innovated for 1000 years, contradicting now only the Church and the Fathers, but even themselves!!! If anybody reads the past sentence and disagrees, I urge you to not sign up for the vignettes and, if you have, sign out. I will not demonstrate such truisms anymore, nor will I bother arguing with Latins about anything anyway for if the Latins “*had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us*” but they did not. They are still totally unrepentant. Why should I even bother with them anymore? And if they are sincere and not lying, then they failed to realized that “the Church” (not the Papacy!) and any “dogma proclamation/explanation/clarification” has to be upward compatible with everything the Church ever taught. In the words of Saint Vincent of Lérins, 5th century, who said that true Christianity is that “which has been believed everywhere, always and by all”. But then, since the self-declared infallible Popes even condemned and contradicted each other, why even waste any attention on this theological kindergarten?\]

By the way, to those Reformed and who did not read the piece by Father Bernstein above, and who say “*I believe in the Bible as the Revealed Word of God*” I always reply “which Bible” and inform them that the collection of books they are holding in their hands and whom they treat as if it was written by a single author, that it was the Church which decided what does, or does not, belong in this collection of books. Yes, the Church whose authority the Reformed deny (and the Latins terminally disfigured and perverted) decided which books you now will consider “The Revealed Word of God” :-). Furthermore, by declaring the Bible the Revealed Word of God our Reformed friends don’t even realize that they are logically recognizing the authority of the Church and place it clearly above them. So *sola scriptura* is not only factual false, it is also contains an internal logical contradiction (who decides which *scriptura* gets to be called “*sola*“?!).

Conclusions:

Before we even begin our trip into the world of early/original/Orthodox (from now on I will consider these as synonyms) **Christianity** *we will have to get a lot of bad weeds out of our mental garden*. To use that, I will use both empirical evidence and basic logic. My goal, by the way, is NOT, repeat, NOT to convince or, even less so, “convert” anybody.

One of my goals is to convince you and others (with some exceptions, of course!) of the fact that almost everything *you think you know* about early Christianity is *wrong, false, or otherwise misinterpreted*. Early Christians, Fathers and saints would never have recognized 99% of what is called “Christianity” out there as even remotely Christian. In theological terms, in a theological context, the word “Christian” only has one meaning and that could be expressed as “participant in the Theandric Body of Christ by His Grace and through His Uncreated Energies”. That’s not very convenient. So Christ also gave His Church the Eucharist and the other Mysteries (mistakenly called “Sacraments” in the West) which reveal the ultimate sign of true unity “in Christ”: partaking from the same Cup.

Yes, *in the original Christianity, a total and full agreement on faith/dogmatics was a necessary prerequisite to be allowed to partake of the Cup*. Modern pseudo-Christianity flipped this (and everything else Christ taught!) on its head and declared that “first we pray and commune together since we are all baptized in the same way (which is false, by the way, but let’s ignore this now) and we worship the same God Christ anyway”.

For early Christians a true union in faith was “crowded” by sharing the Cup while for modern “Christians” any discussion about “Christian unity” must begin with what they call “inter-communion”. What folly indeed!

Next, *I want to prove to you, over time, that The One And Only True Church Of Christ (all in caps) not only still exists, but that Christ Himself said so*. That is a true no-brainer as soon as you reach for early Christian writings.

Finally, *I want to make myself available for questions*. I mean real, sincerely expressed, questions, of course, not post-Christian Latin Pope-worshipping teenyboppers *who don’t even believe in (or even know about) their own, Latin, theology, even when it contradicts itself, and who don’t care at all about The Truth* (in [the real Greek/Slavonic sense](#) of the word).

After that, what each person does with what I share is none of my business :-)

Please remember that I have now banned any Latin propaganda in [the rules of moderation](#) (rule #21). This also goes for anybody attempted to hijack the topic, force upon us some agenda, or just using a smart-ass snarky tone. They will all be ejected by me personally. Please have no doubts on this account.

However, I want to remind you of two more rules:

Rule #5 says: **Criticism of religion**. Fundamentally, *the religion we profess is the result of a personal choice. As such, I consider religions as legitimate targets for scrutiny and criticism*. However, I also think of this blog as my “virtual home” and of commentators as guests in my home. My guests need to know that I, their host, am a traditionalist Orthodox Christian and that I consider traditionalist Muslims (i.e. non-

Takfiris) as my friends. You want to think long and hard before insulting my faith or my friends in my home. *Atheists and agnostics are welcome here as long as they know where they are and what I expect from my guests.* If you can offer a well-informed and logical criticism of Christianity or Islam, that is absolutely fine. But please aware that the minimum to qualify as “well-informed” is to understand the differences between the main Christian and Muslim branches/denominations/sects. Also, **here is a rule of thumb: avoid quoting authors, (even if they fancy themselves as “theologians”) who were born after 1900.**

There are some superb theologians born after 1900, but *unless you are pretty darn sure* that your authors deserves to be quoted in discussing the Christian Vignettes, please avoid it as much as possible. If you want to quote Father George Florovsky or Vladimir Lossky – by all means! We would be grateful. But some pretend theologian selling on Amazon – please not, really!

Let’s say that **my rule of thumb will keep you out of trouble :-)**

Okay, I will stop here and hope for a lively discussion including ways to make this project better, including: how we organized it, the goals of the project, any ideas or suggestions are all welcome.

Unless my plans changes, maybe in response to this first vignette, I plan “*what is a “real theologian” according to real/traditional/original/true Christianity?*” as my next topic.

Kindest regards

Andrei

PS: also, on form. I would be grateful if you could follow these rules of proper theological discourse: call any person glorified as a saint by the Church as “Saint X” not just his/her first name. The proper way to refer to a priest is “Father X”, no Bill, Frank Joe or Igor. You refer to a deacon as “Father-deacon X”. Next, the words “in Christ” should only be used by those who partake from the same Cup! Otherwise, we are only “brothers in Adam” (which is still a BIG deal!). Furthermore, when referring to the One God you write it with a capital “God” while the lower case “god” should be used only for non-Christian god(s). When writing about God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, always used capitals, not only to show courtesy and respect, but also to make it clear what you mean by “God” or “Spirit”. Christ’s name was Jesus, but Orthodox Christians prefer to call Him “Christ” (so as to avoid any semblance of familiarity), the same goes for the Mary, who we formally refer to as “the Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin and Mother of God”, whom we normally refer to as to the “[Theotokos](#)”/“Bogoroditsa” (Mother of God), but never just as “Mary”. This is better writing, shows better manners/character and is respectful of that others hold for sacred.

If you really have profound principles which categorically prevent you from doing as I request (say you misunderstood what Christ truly meant when He said "*do not call anyone on earth father*" (Matt 23:9) and, in what you mistakenly believe is obedience to Christ's words, you refuse to call any priest "father". Or, who knows, if you are a hardcore anthropomorphize literalist, you might even refuse to call your own dad "father"! If that is really the case, then, by all means stick to your choice of words as long as it is if not positive, then at least respectfully neutral.

Christian Vignette #2 – about Fathers and papayas

In my [previous vignette](#), I tried to explain why I mostly avoid modern theologians like the plague. I also mentioned the “Fathers” in many of my posts and comments. So, today, I will make a small introduction to one such “Father” and even recommend what I see as a *perfect* introductory booklet to this entire topic.

First things first – in spite of the (often misunderstood) words from Christ “*And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*” (Matt 23:9) it so happens that Christians call a lot of people “Father”. First, we refer to the God “Father”. We also call of male parents “father” (for the literalists, that could be construed as a violation of Christ’s commandment). We also refer to our priests (deacons, presbyters) as Father A or Father-Deacon B. As for our bishops, we refer to them as “Master” (*despota, vladyka*). And on top of this structure, we have the so-called “Church Fathers”.

But who are these Church Fathers anyway?!?!

The point here is not the interpretation of the words of Christ, but the fact that early Christians were never literalists. In fact, many Church Fathers have made fun of literalists. For example Saint Basil the great made fun of those who believe that “God has legs” since He was “walking in the Garden of Eden”, see for yourself: “*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden*” (Gen 3:8). By the way, this passage would imply, for the literalists, that God could not see behind tree branches!

Here is another perfect example of how literalism is deeply alien to the original Christianity:

We cannot, as mad people do, profanely visualize these heavenly and godlike intelligence as actually having numerous feet and faces. They are not shaped to resemble the brutishness of oxen or to display the wildness of lions. They do not have the curved beak of the eagle or the wings and feathers of birds. We must not have pictures of flaming wheels whirling in the skies, of material thrones made ready to provide a reception for the Deity, of multicolored horses or of spar-carrying lieutenants or any of those shapes handed on to us amid all the variety of revealing symbols of scripture.

These words were written by Saint Dionysios the Areopagite (who knew Saint Paul and the Virgin Mary personally, and lived in the 1st century. Modern “theologians” often deny his existence and/or the authorship of his writings in an attempt to discredit him and paint Christians are neo-Platonists (which is garbage, to put it mildly).

So for early/original Christians literalism is “out” (or we would have to believe that Christ was a “stone” or even a “door”). As is any form of *sola scriptura*.

So how do we interpret the Scripture?

Early Christians soon found out that on some issues they were totally united. But on others, they had differences of opinion, which is both good and healthy as Saint Paul himself told us to “test every spirit”. Last, but sure not least, Christ Himself told us that we are “friends” of God, created in His image and likeness, and that we shall know the truth and that truth will make us free. So while we call ourselves “servants/slaves of God”, this is a voluntary servitude given out of love. **But we are all absolutely free to investigate, question, doubt, and otherwise seek the truth.**

Anyway, over the years it became clear that there was a corpus of teachings, written AND oral, upon which all the Christians agreed upon and with time this became known as the “**consensus of the Fathers**“. We will deal with that issue many times again, but my point here is very simple, the idea was given to me by a Buddhist friend who told me this: *I can very exactly describe a papaya to you, its weight, structure, parts, chemical composition, etc. etc. I can even write a full book on papayas and give it to you. But none of that will never convey the real and full taste of a papaya to you – you need to taste one for yourself*“. I agree 1000% with him.

So, rather than making a list of “Church Fathers” or discussing this concept *ad nauseam*, I will do something else here: I will “plug” what is, in my opinion, THE best way to “get a taste” of the Fathers – recommend a small booklet to you.

 Here it is: “**On Marriage and Family Life: St. John Chrysostom**”

Here are two Amazon links for this booklet:

[First option](#)

[Second option](#)

These small booklets are cheap, nicely printed, short and truly priceless so that is a good deal.

However, all this small volume contains are the following homilies of Saint John Chrysostome:

- Homily XIX: 1 Cor 7:1,2
- Homily XX: Ephesians 5:22-24
- Homily XXI: Ephesians 6:1-3

You can, of course, find them elsewhere, and even online. But 16-18 bucks is a steal, so get it, especially if you have never really read any of the original writings of the Fathers.

Here are my reasons for this recommendation:

- By reading these three homilies you will “taste” the “Patristic papaya” BEFORE you hear me droning on about it for for pages and pages about how awesome these “Fathers” were (and still are!)
- These homilies are *very down to earth and written in a simple language* everybody can understand (some Fathers, like Saint Maximos the Confessor, are hard, **very** hard, to read, whether in the original language or in translations) .
- These homilies are also a true “gem” showing you what both a Christian marriage and Christian family ought to look like and how a Christian family ought to operate. In our sad days of Bible-thumping crooks and gender-fluid wokes, **this might well be the most needed text to read for any person trying to become a real Christian or have a truly Christian family.**
- These homilies also debunk (preemptively, since they were written down in the 4th century!) all the modern feminist/woke myths about “the patriarchy” and how “women must obey their husbands” (true, but completely misinterpreted AND missing a crucial part of the full quote!)
- I have personally seen at least **two marriages saved** by the reading of this small text (true, I promise), so if you are in any kind of loving relationship (even outside marriage and if you a secular or non Christian!) which is in crisis (for whatever reason) – get the booklet like your life depends on it (because it does!).
- Saint John Chrysostome was called the “Golden Mouthed” for a reason: he was a truly phenomenal speaker whose words were simple, yet they correctly conveyed even very subtle and complex nuances.

Yes, I promise, I will come back to the issues of “the Fathers” and their “consensus” in the near future, but if you could “taste” what Saint John Chrysostome wrote (well, actually, said in public, and then was written down) you will have a HUGE advantage over those who will not follow my advice. I also promise you that if you read these homilies you will quickly grasp **why reading modern theologians is almost always a total waste of time (at best) and actually detrimental to the correct understanding of Christianity.** It will feel like first tasting a delicious papaya (or any other succulent tropical fruit) only to be then offered say, a plate of melted, cold and moldy Velveeta “cheese”. The contrast will be huge, to say the least.

The choice is, of course, entirely yours :-)

Andrei

Christian Vignette #3 – theologians in early Christianity (part 1)

In my last vignette, I tried to explain “*why I mostly avoid modern theologians like the plague*“. But what I did not explain is what a “theologian” was in original Christianity. But first, for contrast and, I admit, for a little fun, let’s see what [Wikipedia has to say](#) about this. This is so “perfect” that I will quote it in length the top paragraph: (emphasis added)

Theology is the systematic study of the nature of the divine and, more broadly, of religious belief. It is taught as an academic discipline, typically in universities and seminaries. It occupies itself with the unique content of analyzing the supernatural, but also deals with religious epistemology, asks and seeks to answer the question of revelation. Revelation pertains to the acceptance of God, gods, or deities, as not only transcendent or above the natural world, but also willing and able to interact with the natural world and, in particular, to reveal themselves to humankind. While theology has turned into a secular field, religious adherents still consider theology to be a discipline that helps them live and understand concepts such as life and love and that helps them lead lives of obedience to the deities they follow or worship.

Theologians use various forms of analysis and argument (experiential, philosophical, ethnographic, historical, and others) to help understand, explain, test, critique, defend or promote any myriad of religious topics. As in philosophy of ethics and case law, arguments often assume the existence of previously resolved questions, and develop by making analogies from them to draw new inferences in new situations.

The study of theology may help a theologian more deeply understand their own religious tradition, another religious tradition, or it may enable them to explore the nature of divinity without reference to any specific tradition. Theology may be used to propagate, reform, or justify a religious tradition; or it may be used to compare, challenge (e.g. biblical criticism), or oppose (e.g. irreligion) a religious tradition or worldview. Theology might also help a theologian address some present situation or need through a religious tradition, or to explore possible ways of interpreting the world.

All of the above has ABSOLUTELY NOTHING in common, not even remotely, with the real Christian theology and notions about who/what “theologians” are.

The short answer can be found in the Gospels, specifically in the Beatitudes, and even more specifically this one:

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God“. (Matt 5:8)

This, of course, begs the question, what does “pure in heart” mean and what does “see God” mean.

In another part of the Gospels, we read this:

The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light. (Luke 11:33-36)

Again, both of these metaphors point to the same realities:

- The spiritual condition of the “observer’s” soul directly determines his ability to “see” God and the Light
- God, and the Light, can be seen and, therefore, experienced.

Okay, before we go any further, I need to clarify one absolutely crucial thing and I will do that using simple language. I hope that this is helpful, but I need to warn you that what follows is as false as, say, the “orbital” structure of the atom we are taught in school: a nucleus surrounded by electrons “in orbit” “just like” the planets around a star. So I will **deliberately grossly oversimplify an extremely complex reality**. Please do not, repeat, NOT take what comes next literally. Having said that, let me try to put that in my own, **clumsy**, words.

God is infinitely different from us. He cannot be seen, or even imagined. One major Church Father (Saint Maximos the Confessor) went as far as to say that if we exist, then God does not. He was not denying the existence of God, of course, but the application of a very human concept of “existence” to God. You can flip that around if you want and say that if God exists, then we don’t. The key here is that we are part of God creation, while He is, obviously, not. And yes, of course, He is also everywhere, but not in a way we can speculate about. This is not a contradiction, but a **paradox which cannot be solved speculatively, but can be experienced!** In fact, according to Fathers, “negative theology” – the correct term is “[apothatic](#)” (saying what God is NOT) – is a much preferable path than any “positive theology” which describes God in any human terms/categories. But even “negative theology”, while preferable, is does not address the issue of the *\purity* of the heart/soul/eye. Nor does it indicate HOW to achieve such a purity.

Furthermore, another logical question is this: if God is so infinitely different from us (much more different than, say, a virus and a human being), how can the Fathers then speak of “experiencing” God. Again, here we are touching upon a very complex issue which

generated a [lot of controversy](#). So rather than discussing it as the “distinction between essence and the uncreated energies of God”, I will quote the Old Testament:

And the Lord said to Moses, I will also do for thee this thing, which thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace before me, and I know thee above all. And says, Manifest thyself to me. And said, I will pass by before thee with my glory, and I will call by my name, the Lord, before thee; and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have pity on whom I will have pity. And said, Thou shalt not be able to see my face; for no man shall see my face, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, a place by me: thou shalt stand upon the rock; and when my glory shall pass by, then I will put thee into a hole of the rock; and I will cover thee over with my hand, until I shall have passed by. And I will remove my hand, and then shalt thou see my back parts; but my face shall not appear to thee (Exodus 33:17-23 LXX)

Needless to say, this is again a metaphor. But it shows that the “face” (or essence) of God cannot be seen by any human, but that His “back” can be seen. So what is this “back”? Here, again, the correct reply is “the uncreated energies of God”, but to keep this simple, let’s call it “God’s radiance”. This is also what the Apostles Peter, James, and John saw during the [Transfiguration](#), and **what uncounted number of saints have seen/experienced in their lives and are STILL experiencing even in our modern times!** (just let that sink in for a minute!)

Let’s not discuss any further what this “radiance” is or how exactly some people can “see” it (that is waaaaaay beyond our modest scope). Let’s that sum it up, again grossly oversimplifying this, by saying that humans can, in some specific state/condition, actually really EXPERIENCE the reality and presence of God, in spite of not ever being able to even begin to imagine, nevermind experiencing, Him directly (aka His “essence”).

Of course, God also communicates with mankind through His prophets and His Church (which is His “modern prophet” if you wish) which is filled with His Holy Spirit. And, even more obviously, Christ is God Incarnate, but that I won’t discuss now. So let’s please set that aside, just for the time being. Let’s just say that God never “left” us in any way, nor did he “deputize” anybody to be His spokesman, caretaker, substitute or “vicar” (all which do logically imply that God somehow “left” us).

I think that I can stop here for today. My plan for the next vignette will be to outline what early Christians believed is the correct method/sequence to try become able to (re)acquire a “pure heart”. I will just say this: a pure heart is a virtue, not EVER an academic title or the result of philosophical speculations.

Christian Vignette #4 – theologians in early Christianity (part 2)

In our [last vignette](#), I tried to outline what a “theologian” means in the original Christian understanding of the word, a person whose spiritual condition make it possible for him/her to “experience the reality/radiance of God but without seeing His face/radiance” (very bad choice of words, but for our purposes, I hope that it will do). I also mentioned this metaphor used by Christ:

The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light. (Luke 11:33-36)

I need to **repeat an important caveat here**: there is absolutely no way anything I write here should be seen as any type of “shortcut” or “summary” of anything we are discussing. What follows is, at best, a clumsy attempt outline the very complex in simple terms and my hope is that these vignettes will encourage at least ONE reader to go do the true sources of Christianity, that is the Scripture, the Fathers and the Church. With this in mind, let me offer you my best effort and hope that I don’t miserably fail!

How does one acquire a “clear eye”?

The short answer is through the following sequence:

catechization->baptism->purification->illumination->theosis.

I will now try to offer a simple laymen’s (which I am) understanding of what this sequence means.

Catechization: in other words, instruction. The truth is that Christianity is an extremely complex religion to study, especially in our modern times when most people would recoil in horror at the thought of having to read several hundred, if not thousand, pages of (often complicated) text. Yes, I know, there are “Orthodox” jurisdictions out there which hand out [Chrismations](#) (anointment) or Baptisms to anybody asking for it (there are several ways one can be received in the Church, but let’s leave this topic aside for today). Worse, the clergy doing so simply does not want to take the time to ascertain whether the candidate has even received any instructions at all. I have seen, many times, people getting Christmated without any catechisation at all! Again, this often happens in jurisdictions which are deeply infected with the “bacteria” of modernism, ecumenism and who have departed from the the faith *“which the Lord gave, was preached by the Apostles, and was preserved by the Fathers. On this was the Church founded; and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer*

ought to be called a Christian” (I will repeat this quote of Saint Athanasios very often in our vignettes).

The truth is that, as one priest put it, **you have to do your own footwork**. And yes, this is hard work and you cannot become Orthodox “on the cheap” or in any “quicky” way. Look at this Beatitude:

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matt 5:6)

And notice that the words “hunger and thirst” are what we would call powerful “gut feelings”, they refer to our core survival instincts, not to some highbrowed academic “interest in” or something which is relevant only on Sunday mornings. Another example:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (Matt 22:37)

Again, these are very powerful words! And how about this one:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matt 10:37)

And I could add many, many more quotes, from both the Old and New Testament. The point here is simple, Christ and His Church should be approached the same way as a person dying from thirst in a desert would approach a oasis filled with fresh, clean water and plenty of fruits to eat. In other words, we are dealing here not with a philosophy, or any kind of scholastic curiosity, but what ought to be a desperate struggle for spiritual survival. That, in turn, means that the person being received in the Church should place his/her education/instruction as the absolute number one priority in his/her life.

Would you be willing to read, say, 2000 pages to avoid being executed?

My guess is that yes, at least if you value your life.

If Christ, the God Incarnate, came back and invited you, personally, to share a meal with Him, but in a location which would require you to drive for, say, five days one way by car – would you accept or would you turn down His invitation?

Again, my guess is that you accept, right?

Well, you can think of your instruction into the Church as those 2000 pages which can save your life, or the Eucharist in any truly Orthodox Church as in invitation by Christ Himself! In other words, becoming part of the Church, the Theandric Body of Christ and one of His Incarnations, is a A LOT of work, especially in our post-Christian times when people like fast-“spiritually” for the same reason they like fast foods: cheap, nearby and comfy.

It is only AFTER you do that hard study work that you can be received in the Church.

Next,

Baptism (under that heading I include the other modes of reception too which I don't want to discuss now).

First, unless there is a major impediment (medical, emergency situation, and others) a Christian baptism must be performed full triple immersion, that is also true for babies, adults and even the elderly (which the the Greek noun βάπτισμα means, immersion). Again, those "Orthodox" which have departed from this principle are, at the very least, infected with modernism, secularism or ecumenism. This is important not just for some "abstract theological fine point with no real relevance to modern life" , and not just out of respect and reverence for the original Christianity, but also because the "old you" "drowns" and disappears in the baptismal waters and then comes back as a "new you" "clothed in Christ".

Baptism is a Mystery (a sacrament), and **discussing it like I did above is actually not a good approach**. Mysteries are not something which should be logically discussed or analyzed. So I will stop here and encourage everybody to read the Fathers or to get in touch with a true, traditionalist, Orthodox clergyman. My only goal here is to stress that the reception of a candidate into the Church is not "just" a "ritual", but as much a Mystery as any other Mystery of the Church. I did my best here, but I apologize for not having the wisdom and words to accurately and fully convey the importance and sacred seriousness of this Mystery.

As I tell all my friends who converted to Orthodoxy: welcome to the battlefield, now things will only get harder. And that is true, if you thought that reading 2000 pages and driving 5 days by car was hard, then you are about to discover that far from having "made it", you just entered the very first and initial stage of a spiritual battle you will have to fight until your last breath!

The next three steps (purification, illumination and theosis) are too complex for me to summarize here. So I will try to at least give you a general idea in a roundabout, but hopefully truthful and accurate way.

The original, Christian Church believed that our nature, at birth, is already a fallen, corrupted one. No, they did not believe that we personally and directed shared in the Original Sin (which I won't discuss today), but they all did believe that both our nature and even the entire universe were directly affected by that Original Sin, that we are living in suffering and eventually dying as a direct consequence of that Original Sin. So when Rousseau wrote that the "[noble savage](#)" was born innocent and pure and that society corrupted him, the Fathers would categorically disagree; in fact, such a notion contradicts everything Christ taught and did, including His Incarnation and Resurrection. But let's just say that the source of evil in the world is not in God's Creation, but comes from our fallen nature. God's creation was

perfect, it is our forefather's misuse of the freedom God granted them which "created" (wrong word, but I will use it for convenience sake) evil.

Again, I will use a metaphor next. The Church is not a club of saints, or a theological debate society, but a **hospital for sinners** in which the spiritual pathologies resulting from our fallen nature are treated. So when we speak of "purification" what is meant is a lifelong process of struggle to heal ourselves and that process continues for all our lives. This is why those who believe that baptism is truly an illumination (they are right!) but then confuse that illumination with the illumination which comes in the process of purification are simply wrong. They conflate two very different meanings of the same word (and need to re-read Saint Maximos on that topic).

Which leaves **theosis**. That is the most complex and what follows is an EXTREMELY inadequate attempt to put in a few words that this means. One correct answer would be "*For the Son of God became man so that we might become God* (Saint Athanasios), but that raises even more questions and needs to have every single word explained and discussed. There is, however, a very good text discussing this on the Internet which you can find here:

<http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/theosis.aspx> in TEN different languages!

In my own inadequate words I will say that the catechization->baptism->purification->illumination->theosis sequence heals our fallen nature, brings us to our full spiritual potential/calling and unites us to God, at least as much as a person can be united with Him. If correctly understood, you could say that it is our calling to become "Christ-like" saints. Again, this is one of the highest of Mysteries and I really don't feel comfortable discussing it here, even with all my caveats.

Now (finally!) **back to theologians in original Christianity:**

From the above you can say that **theologians are those who, at least, have successfully completed catechization->baptism->purification->illumination sequence**. Not all those so illuminated achieve the last stage, theosis, as the latter is a Grace granted by God (again, not a topic needed for our very modest purposes). Speaking of which, one more disclaimer:

Christianity is not magic, nor is it a mechanism. Nothing is conferred or given automatically or formally. "Just" being baptized or, as some in the West say, "establishing a personal relationship with God" will not somehow automatically "save" you. So those who say, "I was saved on that day of that year" and who think that they "made it" are deceived and deluded. In truth, not a single soul truly and finally will "make it" until the Last Judgement Day (again, not our topic today). Even saints and bishops can fall, like "*stars falling down from the heavens*" (Rev 6:13). **A Christian life is a life of a never ending spiritual struggles.**

Lastly, for the sake of (at least an attempt at) completeness, I have to add that martyrdom is a "**baptism through blood**", but only if the person dies for Christ and/or (same thing, really)

His One Single True Church and not for any other reason. Remember the word of Christ to the malefactor “*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*” (Like 23:43). I feel that I have to mention this here, but this is another topic which deserves at least one, if not more, vignettes. So for today, let’s please leave it at that.

Unless I get specific requests to discuss another topic (and I feel like this request is appropriate for our format), my next vignette will be about two aspects of Orthodoxy which mostly overlooked in our times: **asceticism** and **experimentalism** (careful, I am not sure if that is the correct English word for this! see the small note below about my lack of adequate English language skills).

Now I open the floor for comments, criticism and further information (some of our 96 current commentators made some very good and useful points in the last vignette, so thank you to them all for helping me here!).

Andrei

PS: I read the Scripture in Church Slavonic and much of my instruction was in Russian (and I still think in Russian), hence please be very careful with my choice of words, English is my 3rd or 4th language, and I am a terrible writer to begin with. I am sure that there are all sorts of mistakes above and I ask you to focus my intention to put the complex in simple words rather than on my the frequently poor choice if words!

Christian Vignette #5 – Christ in the Old and New Testament

Today, all I propose to do is to share with you two articles fused into one which show that, as Augustine of Hippo wrote, *the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New*.

You can either download the PDF from here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qnjvo7HdZeJedq9jaKc3y3Hbib2-Lw2/view?usp=sharing>

Or read it below. The source for both of these documents (which I merged into one) is this excellent website:

<https://www.fatheralexander.org/>

with articles in English, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese.

Enjoy!

Christian Vignette #6 – Comparing approaches to “fine and obscure theological points”

16010 Views October 23, 2021 [17 Comments](#) [Vignette](#) [The Saker](#)

A few years ago I wrote an article entitled “[Russia and Islam, part eight: working together, a basic “how-to”](#)” in which I wrote the following about how (some) Christians and (some) Muslims could/should try to work together:

The fundamentally misguided yet typical approach:

Having had many opportunities to exchange views with Muslim from different countries and having also heard Christian and Muslim religious figures engaged in various debates, dialogs and discussions, I can describe the typical scenario by which such dialogs are conducted.

Typically, both sides try to establish a list of all the issues Islam and Christianity agree upon. These include that God is love, that the Mother of Jesus was a virgin, that the anti-Christ will come before the end of time, that Moses was a great prophet, that angels are the messengers of God any many other things. Added to this list of topics of agreement are usually statements about how Christians and Muslims have lived in peace side by side and how this should continue today. This is a well meaning and polite way to engage in a dialog, but this is also a fundamentally misguided one for the simple reason that it overlooks absolutely fundamental theological and historical problems. Let’s take these one by one.

Irreconcilable theological differences between Christianity and Islam

The highest most sacred dogmatic formulation of Christianity is the so-called “Credo” or “Symbol of Faith” (full text [here](#); *more info* [here](#)). *Literally every letter [down to the smallest ‘i’](#) of this text is, from the Christian point of view, the most sacred and perfect dogmatic formulation, backed by the full authority of the two Ecumenical Councils which proclaimed it and all the subsequent Councils which upheld it. In simple terms – the Symbol of Faith is absolutely non-negotiable, non-re-definable, non-re-interpretable, you cannot take anything away from it, and you cannot add anything to it. You can either accept it as is, in toto_, or reject it.*

The fact is that Muslim would have many problems with this text, but one part in particular is absolutely unacceptable to any Muslim:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made

This part clearly and unambiguously affirms that Jesus-Christ was not only the Son of God but actually God Himself. This is expressed by the English formulation “of one essence with the Father” (ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ in Greek with the key term *homousios* meaning “consubstantial”). This is *THE* core belief of Christianity: that Jesus was the *theanthropos*, the God-Man or God incarnate. This belief is categorically unacceptable to Islam which says that Christ was a prophet and by essence a ‘normal’ human being.

For Islam, the very definition of what it is to be a Muslim is found in the so-called “[Shahada](#)” or testimony/witness. This is the famous statement by which a Muslim attests and proclaims that “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God”. One can often also hear this phrased as “**There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is His prophet**”.

Now without even going into the issue of whether Christians can agree or not that “Allah” is the appropriate name for God (some do, some don’t – this is really irrelevant here), it’s the second part which is crucial here: Christianity does not recognize Muhammad as a prophet at all. In fact, technically speaking, Christianity would most likely classify Muhammad as a heretic (if only because of his rejection of the “Symbol of Faith”). Saint John of Damascus even called him a ‘false prophet’. Simply put: there is no way a Christian can accept the “Shahada” without giving up his Christianity just as there is no way for a Muslim to accept the “Symbol of Faith” without giving up his Islam.

So why bother?

Would it not make much more sense to accept that there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences between Christianity and Islam and simply give up all that useless quest for points of theological agreement? Who cares if we agree on the secondary if we categorically disagree on the primary? I am all in favor of Christians studying Islam and for Muslims studying Christianity (in fact, I urge them both to do so!), and I think that it is important that the faithful of these religions talk to each other and explain their points of view *as long as this is not presented as some kind of quest for a common theological stance*. **Differences should be studying and explained, not obfuscated, minimized or overlooked.**

Sorry for the long quote, but this will save us all a lot of time. What I want to discuss today, is how the early Christians dealt with this issue and what general lessons we can draw from their example.

First, I think that we should not have the tree hide a forest: what I am writing today is NOT about Christian-Muslim dialog, but goes much further, it also applies to, say, any dialogs between the Latins and the Christians, and even INSIDE Orthodox jurisdictions (say, “World Orthodoxy” as oppose to traditionalist Orthodox jurisdictions). So this is first and foremost about a mindset.

- Mindset one: seek out and list all the things two religions/denominations/jurisdictions/etc have in common and proclaim as a basis for unity (of what kind will be discussed below); this mindset also tries to ignore/obfuscate the “small and obscure theological points” which really “don’t matter too much”.
- Mindset two: seek out and place a powerful “flashlight” on all and ever “minor theological point” and openly discuss them not only internally, but also with the other side.

One example: the Latins. Here is what I have heard innumerable times from them: “while we have different rites and traditions, we have the same faith, and we even have inter-communion!”. Here is what is overlooked:

- The issue is not “ritual”, the Latins are, and always have, been liars about that, especially when they created the “Eastern Rite” to try to mislead the naive. The issue is the differences in *doxa*, in the faith.
- While it is true that the Latin allows the Orthodox Christians, and pretty much anybody else who happens to walk in, to receive their sacraments, the reverse is not true. The Latins never mention that.
- The true is that the Latins see the Orthodox as **schismatics**, folks who did not change/pervert the faith, but who did not submit to the Pope.
- The Orthodox see the Latins has **heretics**, people who have changed/perverted the original Christian faith.
- Orthodox Patriarchs, especially the “World Orthodoxy” types, can hug and even pray with Popes, but they have no authority whatsoever to lift the **anathemas** (see explanation below) imposed by Church councils.

Note, since the three words above are totally misunderstood in the West, here a few **very simplified** (please remember this) definition:

Schismatic refers to a person/group who creates or incites the organization of, or who is a member of, a splinter group, somebody who breaks the proper order of the Church, usurps the proper hierarchy. Strictly speaking, the schismatics do not differ in faith, in *doxa* (unless they built a theological justification for their schism which, by definition, is an ecclesiological heresy, but we can ignore this for the time being).

Heretic: person, or teaching, which differ on issues of faith, of *doxa*, and who then proclaim this “false knowledge”.

Anathema: this is an official denunciation by the Church of a person and/or teaching which set himself/itself aside from the Church and which represents a danger for the faithful of that Church. Note that the purpose of public anathema is twofold: to warn the one condemned and bring about his repentance, and to warn others away from his error. It is thus a profoundly pastoral act where a person is separated, cut off, the Church, not “cursed”, but handed over to the judgement of God.

So these are not insults or curses, but “theological categories” which have been used since the Apostolic times to define who/what the Church was dealing with. These are necessary theological categories without which Christianity cannot exist, nor can anybody understand what the Apostles and Fathers wrote without understanding the true meaning of these categories.

In our times, many will wonder if the various religions/denominations/jurisdictions should not unite with each other on the basis of what they have in common and then stand together against their common enemies.

Of course, some of those unity-seekers are simply liars (the Latins, specifically, their own doctrine contradicts their actions and syrupy words), but many others are sincere. Here is what Saint Gregory the Theologian wrote in a letter to a priest in the 4th century about such liars and deceivers: (emphasis added)

I desire to learn what is this fashion of innovation in things Concerning the Church, which allows anyone who likes, or the passerby, as the Bible says, to tear asunder the flock that has been well led, and to plunder it by larcenous attacks, or rather by piratical and fallacious teachings. For if our present assailants had any ground for condemning us in regard of the faith, it would not have been right for them, even in that case, to have ventured on such a course without giving us notice. They ought rather to have first persuaded us, or to have been willing to be persuaded by us (if at least any account is to be taken of us as fearing God, labouring for the faith, and helping the Church), and then, if at all, to innovate; but then perhaps there would be an excuse for their outrageous conduct. But since our faith has been proclaimed, both in writing and without writing, here and in distant parts, in times of danger and of safety, how comes it that some make such attempts, and that others keep silence? The most grievous part of it is not (though this too is shocking) that the men instil their own heresy into simpler souls by means of those who are worse; but that they also tell lies about us and say that we share their opinions and sentiments; thus baiting their hooks, and by this cloak villainously fulfilling their will, and

making our simplicity, which looked upon them as brothers and not as foes, into a support of their wickedness.

The context of this letter was a denunciation of various heresies of the time (see full letter [here](#)), but the mindset and deceptive tactic Saint Gregory describes have become extremely common in our modern times. This letter is so fundamental to Christianity, that it was the basis for future Church Council decision and a text which each Orthodox Christian ought to read at least once in his life.

Okay, fair enough, but an honest reader might still wonder whether such “fine and obscure theological points” should not be overlooked, or at least set aside for a while, for the sake of a putatively much more important unity.

This is a fair and valid question, and I will address it next.

First, let’s ask “unity of what, by whom and for what”? Russian Orthodox Christians and agnostics fought **very** successfully alongside Chechen, Syrian, Iranian and Lebanese (Hezbollah) Muslims. Yet no “inter-faith dialog” was needed for that purpose at all. So unity against a common political or military enemy does not require any theological discussions AT ALL.

Next, some religions are diametrically and irreconcilable at their core, in their essence, because they compete for the same “title” shall we say. As I have said many times, Latin “Christianity” is nothing more than an “anti-Orthodoxy” and rabbinical “Judaism” is nothing more than an “anti-Christianity”. In other words, Latins and Christians fight for the same “title” as do Judaics and Christians. Now compare that with Islam: have any Muslims ever declared themselves “true Christians” or have any Judaics declared themselves “true Christians”? What about the opposite? Have any Christians declared themselves “true Muslims” or have any Christians declared themselves to be “true Jews”. Not the former, for sure, but the latter, yes, very much so in fact. So the most futile and impossible religious dialog would be one between Judaics and Christians, but the one between Christians and Latins is not much behind, especially since the Latins have now officially declared that Judaics are their “older brother in faith” and that they together expect the coming of the same Messiah, except that for the Latins it would be His second coming, but for the Judaics it would be His first. In sharp contrast, Christians have always know what comes next: the anti-Christ.

The truth is that the entire “ecumenical dialog” is, at best, a colossal waste of time and, at worst, a “pan-heresy”, that is the sum total of all heresies, a super heresy if you want. The only “unity” which it shows is a unity unbelief, indifference and hypocrisy. By all the involved participants.

\[Sidebar, can anybody imagine any of the Church Fathers sitting down with an entire panopticum of heretics to discuss with them what the Church might have in common with them? In fact, look at all the major

Christian heresies, say Nestorianism or Arianism, they did not reject Christianity as a whole, only some specific teachings, yet the Fathers denounced them as anathemized heretics, not “brothers in a common quest for unity”!]]

Coming back to Russians and Muslims, in the article I mention in the opening, I said that Muslims and Christians ALREADY have a lot in common, specifically ethics:

Any religion has two primary components: what it believes in, what it proclaims, and then the rules of life, the “how to” of daily existence which it mandates. In Christian terms there is the doxa (what you proclaim or glorify) and the praxis (how you live your spiritual life on a daily basis). These are the basic rules common to most religions: not to kill, not to steal, to live a life of modesty, to protect the weak, etc. When comparing Islam and Christianity one can find both differences and similarities between their praxis and ethics. The differences in praxis are not that important because they mostly affect the private lives of the faithful: Muslims will fast during the month of Ramadan, Christians during the four major fasts of the year and on Wednesdays and Fridays. So let them, who cares? They really do not bother each other and, in fact, they are typically respectful of each other’s traditions. On ethics, however, the two religions mostly agree both on a social/corporate and individual level and, with one notable exception which I will discuss below, Christianity and Islam have very similar ideas of what is right and wrong and what society should stand for or pro-actively reject.

But I also mentioned a fundamental ethical difference: capital punishment, the death penalty.

But how big a deal is that? While Christians are by and large opposed to the death penalty, most Russians today are not, quite the opposite. Not only that, but this issue is a social and political one, yes, influenced by religious values, but this is not a dogmatic, crucial issue of faith. The millions of Muslims in Russia do not protest for the restoration of the death penalty, and if they did they would be joined by a lot of non-Muslims, including plenty of Orthodox Christians.

Again, **our issue today is not Islam in/and Russia or, even less so, Islam vs Christianity.
**

\[Sidebar: I have covered that at length in the following series:

<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-one-introduction-and-definitions/>

<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-two-russian-orthodoxy/>

<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-three-internal-russian-politics/>

<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-four-islam-as-a-threat/>
<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-five-islam-as-an-ally/>
<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-six-the-kremlin/>
<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-seven-the-weathermans-cop-out/>
<http://thesaker.is/russia-and-islam-part-eight-working-together-a-basic-how-to/>

I also discussed it further here: <http://thesaker.is/russias-civilizational-choice/>

So let's not discuss this here, please\]

Our main topic today is differing approaches to “**fine and obscure theological points**“.

Today we live in a post-modern, post-Christian, society which has even totally lost interest for the very notions of true/false, right/wrong, healthy/pathological, etc. Our so-called “pragmatism” is nothing but a complete denial of such categories (other than maybe for propaganda purposes). And, of course, as Jerry Mander and Chris Hedges pointed out in their books (see [here](#) and [here](#) – I HIGHLY recommend them both), we now live in **an empire of illusions** and in a total **absence of the sacred**. This is what 1000 years of lies and deceptions by the Papacy has resulted in: a post-Christian world with no concept of truth, not moral, not factual, not even logical. And everybody is lying practically on auto-pilot, mostly by obfuscating the differences between true/false, right/wrong, healthy/pathological of course, but also between even “simpler” categories, such as beautiful/ugly, male/female, adult/child, etc. Instead we are fed a diet of “acceptance” or “positivity” which is nothing more than a form of brainwashing on a societal scale.

No wonder the proponents of such deceptions have no use for “fine and obscure theological points” and, crucially, no wonder they **misrepresent** whatever truth they pretend to stand up for! Most grievously, they are ALL doing what Saint Gregory described in his letter: *they also tell lies about us and say that we share their opinions and sentiments* this applies especially to the following three categories:

- Latins (the Papacy) and its “offsprings”
- World Orthodoxy (official, government supported, Orthodox denominations)
- Judaics (especially the Haredi types, the modern version of the sect of the Pharisees)

From these three “source liars” then come even more offsprings, even rebellious offsprings (say the Reformed denominations) which **might not even realize** that they are repeating the lies, mindset, assumptions, those whom they rebelled against.

One of the key purposes of these vignettes is to first, bring your attention to this reality and, two, to show you what/how the original, early Christians did and wrote and how they dealt with so-called “minor and obscure theological points”.

By the way, my purpose is not to “gun for” the three groups I mentioned above (let God be their judge), only to give you some instruments as to how to detect them and to offer you at least one alternative to their current monopoly on the mind and souls of millions of sincere, well intentioned, people who are simply not equipped with the tools to discriminate between the fake lie and the real thing.

Allow me a metaphor: you can make fish soup out of an aquarium, but you cannot make an aquarium from a fish soup. The modern deceivers have turned a very diverse and well lit aquarium into a tasteless and dark fish soup, “spiced up” with lie after lie after lie. Some have been at it for 2000 years, others for “only” 1000. **Eventually they all joined forces: that is the world we live in today.**

I don’t want to let them get away with this, hence these Vignettes, which are really only an attempt to pass on that which was handed down to me. Nothing more.

In conclusion, to those who have no time, interest in putative “minor and obscure theological point”, I will simply repeat the words of Christ Himself: *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it* (John 8:44). As for those who truly seek the truth, I will repeat the words of Saint John the Theologian who warned us all about the deceivers: *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* (1 John 2:18-19).

Andrei

Christian Vignette #7 – some useful sources

Dear friends

If you make a quick search for “Orthodox Church” or something similar, you will find hundred of thousands of website, article and books out there. This presents the reader with two problems:

- How to separate the fake (90%+) from the real thing (under 10%)?
- How to find the time and energy to plow through such a wealth of information?

The bad new is this: **original Christianity, which today still exists under the general designation “traditional Orthodoxy” is a very complex religion, especially for those raised in our modern times and who have been exposed to the pseudo-Christianity which is so prevalent out there.** The fact is that if you want to get a grasp of what traditional, original, Christianity was, and still is, like you need to do a lot of studying, nobody can do that for you and complex and subtle topic cannot be squeezed into a few pious slogans.

Finally, no amount of reading can replace the actual experience of participating in a church service or, even better, visiting an Orthodox monastery. But these are options which are not always accessible, especially considering the relatively small size of the true Orthodox parishes and monasteries (especially compared with the “official”, i.e. state supported) jurisdictions.

The good news: there are some very good sources easily available online.

Today all I want to do is give you a few sources you can consult to get some general information about true Orthodox Christianity. Again, they are not “perfect” and neither can they be compared with truly authoritative sources such as the Church Fathers. But as a first step into the discover of true Christianity, they can be very helpful.

First, a series of books on Orthodox ecclesiology (what/where is the Church?) which are available online:

- Saint Cyprian of Cartage “[On the Unity of the Church](#)”
- Saint Metropolitan Philaret “[Will the Heterodox Be Saved?](#)“
- Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili “[And Who Is My Neighbor?](#)“
- Alexei Khomiakov “[The Church is One](#)”
- Archbishop Hilarion (Troitsky) “[Christianity or the Church](#)”
- Right Reverend Photios, Bishop of Triaditza, “[Orthodox Unity Today?](#)”
- Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky “[On the Church](#)”
- St. Justin (Popovich) “[The Attributes of the Church](#)”
- Dr. Alexander Kalomiros “[Orthodox Ecclesiology](#)”
- Saint John Chrysostom “[The Character and Temptations of a Bishop](#)”

- Archpriest Georges Florovsky “[The Catholicty of the Church](#)”
- Archpriest Georges Florovsky “[The Limits of the Church](#)”
- Archpriest Georges Florovsky “[On Church and Tradition](#)”
- Hieromonk Seraphim Rose “[The Royal Path: True Orthodoxy in an Age of Apostasy](#)”
- Bishop Artemije of Raška and Prizren “[Deification as the End and Fulfillment of Salvation According to St. Maximos the Confessor](#)”

Most of the articles/books listed above discuss the question of “what is the Church” and this is an absolutely crucial topic since neither the Latins nor the Protestants have kept the original understanding of what the Church really is.

The following documents are also very helpful:

<https://www.imoph.org/Theology/en/>

<https://www.hsir.org/pdfs/2014/10/01/E20141001aSynodikesTheseis-Antidrontes%20Folder/E20141001aSynodikesTheseis-Antidrontes.pdf>

<http://www.dep.church/ecclesiology.html#eosi>

<http://www.dep.church/articles.html>

<https://www.hsir.org/pdfs/2014/03/22/E20140322aCommonEcclesiology15/E20140322aCommonEcclesiology15.pdf>

Next, I would like to point you to the many excellent articles/talks of **Father Steven Allen** which you can find here:

<https://www.spreaker.com/user/youngfaithradio>

<https://www.spreaker.com/show/fr-steven-allens-show>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQb5bdq0KYOcIzJI9dlUFZQ/featured>

<http://orthodoxtruth.org/>

While I don’t always agree with everything Father Steven says, I am absolutely amazed at the wealth of precious information he presents and I highly recommend all his sites and lectures (and, if you can, **please consider supporting his work with a donation**).

Next, there is the website by **Father Alexander** (later bishop): <https://www.fatheralexander.org/> which offers excellent information in FOUR languages (English, Russian, Portuguese and Spanish).

There there is also this website: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/> which also contains a wealth of good article, however I must mention one caveat: the author is this website originally was part of the Traditionalist Orthodox Church, but left it for personal reasons and then purged his site of most of the information which it contained originally about traditional Orthodoxy.

On our (very slowly progressing) site “History of the Orthodox People” we posted to crucial books which I also highly recommend:

<http://orthodoxhistory.info/fundamentals-of-orthodoxy/orthodox-dogmatic-theology/>

<http://orthodoxhistory.info/fundamentals-of-orthodoxy/orthodox-apologetic-theology/>

I hope that the above list will be helpful to at least some of the readers. At the very least, now you have options from online audio lectures, to full books, to short(er) articles, etc. Any of them could be helpful to you, it all depends on your own preferences and availability.

In my next vignette, I will try to explain why there is not quick and easy way to gain the kind of minimal knowledge to begin to understand the real nature of the original Christian Church. Please consider the above as a suggested reading list as a background for future vignettes.

Andrei

Christian Vignette #8 – contrasting attitudes towards Christology

The study of Who and What Christ was/is is called “[Christology](#)“. This is one of the most complex and controversial topics in Christian theology and it is **most definitely not my intention today to provide an exhaustive and authoritative answer** as such an answer would be either too ambiguous (if short) and too complex (if exhaustive).

However, what **I do want to tackle today is how illustrate dramatically different the discussion this topic was in ancient Christianity and today.**

For this purpose, I will use, as a basis, a rather helpful page [I found online](#) on the server belonging to the [University of Washington](#). Here is is:

Positions rejected by the early Ecumenical Councils (i.e., “heresies”)

Ebionitism — Jesus was not divine, but was a holy man and a prophet, upon whom the Spirit of God descended at his baptism.

Docetism — Jesus was only divine; his body was only an appearance. (More a tendency than a particular school of thought)

Arianism — Jesus, as Logos, was a superhuman creature (something like an angel) between God and humans. At least as interpreted by those who opposed Arius, this was a version of Origen’s neo-Platonist interpretation of creation as a process of emanation, in which the Logos and Spirit are something other than the God from whom they emanate.

Apollinarianism — In Jesus the human nous (intellect) was replaced by the divine Logos. (A divine mind in a human body.)

Nestorianism — Christ was two persons, divine and human, functioning in parallel (in what might be called a moral rather than a hypostatic union). Mary was mother only of the man (not “Theotokos,” “God-bearer”).

Monophysitism — The union of divine and human natures resulted in a single divine nature; the human nature was extinguished at the moment of conception. (Also known as Eutychianism, after Eutyches, the first person to formulate the position.)

Monothelitism — The union of the divine and human in Jesus resulted in a person who could be called both human and divine, but who did not have a human will apart from the divine will. This was a later version of monophysitism; it tried to rescue the monophysite position by restating it in terms of “one will” rather than “one nature.”

Sabellianism (also known as “modalism”) — Father, Son, and Spirit are not real “hypostases,” but “roles” played by God at different times.

Gnosticism — The material world is evil, the creation of an evil demiurge (or “archon”). Salvation comes through secret knowledge (gnosis) of this (brought by Jesus) and is available only to a spiritual elite, those “who have ears to hear.”

Schematic classification of some of the above

Jesus was simply God

Docetism; Monophysitism

Jesus was not God but simply a creature

Arianism; Ebionitism

The Christ was part man and part God

Apollinarianism; Nestorianism; Monothelitism

Some will call these “ancient heresies”, which is not false, they are ancient, but neither is it true, because **in the modern world all of these heresies can still be found.**

[\Sidebar: “heresy” is not an insult, it is a theological category which I already explained in a \[previous vignette\]](#) so I won’t repeat it all here.

The same goes for the expression “anathema” which is not a curse; again, I refer you to the same vignette for an explanation of the correct understanding of these terms\]

For example, it would not be incorrect to say that Islam teaches a form of Ebionitism while most (but not all) of western Christianity is neo-Nestorian (both the Latins and the Protestants). But mostly what we can observe is what I would describe as a **comfortable indifference to this crucial issue**, one which was so insightfully noticed by C.S Lewis in his “**Mere Christianity**” lectures when he said: (emphasis added)

Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men’s toes and stealing other men’s money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were

forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences.

This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history.

Yet (and this is the strange, significant thing) even His enemies, when they read the Gospels, do not usually get the impression of silliness and conceit. Still less do unprejudiced readers. Christ says that He is “humble and meek” and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

C.S Lewis was not an Orthodox Christian, but he was undeniably filled with a lot of the spirit of early, original, Christianity, and I often think of the passage above as a powerful “wake-up slap in the face” to those millions today (including those poor souls who think that Christ was some kind of ancient woke hippie and that it was Saint Paul – whom they would, of course, only refer as “Paul” – who introduced all sorts of nasty “non-incusive” “bad stuff” in Christ’s original teachings) who are utterly unaware of the stark nature of the choice before them: **either accept Christ as the ManGod (*theantropos*) or consider Him as either totally insane or very evil: *tertium non datur*.**

By the way, the famous **First Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325) and, later, the Second Ecumenical Council Constantinople (381)** gave the most authoritative and exact definition of both What and Who Christ was:

“One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end”.

In addition to that, the **Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431)** later also fully endorsed the following **12 anathemas proposed by Saint Cyril of Alexandria** ([source](#)):

- 1\.* If any one confess not that Emmanuel is in truth God and that the holy Virgin is therefore Mother of God, for she bare after the flesh the Word of God made Flesh, be he anathema.
- 2\.* If any one confess not that the Word of God the Father hath been Personally united to Flesh and that He is One Christ with His own Flesh, the Same (that is) God alike and Man, be he anathema.
- 3\.* If any one sever the Persons of the One Christ after the Union, connecting them with only a connection of dignity or authority or sway, and not rather with a meeting unto Unity of Nature, be he anathema.
- 4\.* If any one allot to two Persons or Hypostases, the words in the Gospel and Apostolic writings, said either of Christ by the saints or by Him of Himself, and ascribe some to a man conceived of by himself apart from the Word That is of God, others as God-befitting to the Word alone That is of God the Father, be he anathema.
- 5\.* If any one dare to say, that Christ is a God-clad man, and not rather that He is God in truth as being the One Son and That by Nature, in that the Word hath been made Flesh, and hath shared like us in blood and flesh \[Heb. 2:14\], be he anathema.
- 6\.* If any one say that the Word That is of God the Father is God or Lord of Christ and do not rather confess that the Same is God alike and Man, in that the Word hath been made flesh, according to the Scriptures, be he anathema.
- 7\.* If anyone say that Jesus hath been in-wrought-in as man by God the Word and that the Glory of the Only-Begotten hath been put about Him, as being another than He, be he anathema.
- 8\.* If any one dare to say that the man that was assumed ought to be co-worshipped with God the Word and co-glorified and co-named God as one in another (for the co-, constantly appended, compels us thus to deem) and does not rather honour Emmanuel with One worship and attribute to Him One Doxology, inasmuch as the Word has been made Flesh, be he anathema.

9\ *If any one say that the One Lord Jesus Christ hath been glorified by the Spirit, using His Power as though it were Another's, and from Him receiving the power of working against unclean spirits and of accomplishing Divine signs upon men; and does not rather say that His own is the Spirit, through Whom He hath wrought the Divine signs, be he anathema.*

10\ *The Divine Scripture says that Christ hath been made the High Priest and Apostle of our confession [Heb. 3:1] and He hath offered Himself for us for an odour of a sweet smell to God the Father. If any one therefore say that not the Very Word of God was made our High Priest and Apostle when He was made Flesh and man as we, but that man of a woman apart from himself as other than He, was [so made]: or if any one say that in His own behalf also He offered the Sacrifice and not rather for us alone (for He needed not offering Who knoweth not sin), be he anathema.*

11\ *If any one confess not that the Flesh of the Lord is Life-giving and that it is the own Flesh of the Word Himself That is from God the Father, but say that it belongs to another than He, connected with Him by dignity or as possessed of Divine Indwelling only and not rather that it is Life-giving (as we said) because it hath been made the own Flesh of the Word Who is mighty to quicken all things, be he anathema.*

12\ *If any one confess not that the Word of God suffered in the Flesh and hath been crucified in the Flesh and tasted death in the Flesh and hath been made First-born of the Dead, inasmuch as He is both Life and Life-giving as God, be he anathema.*

Once again, **I do not propose to discuss these 12 anathemas today** (please!), or even explain what they mean and at whom they were directed or why. Instead, I want to show **the subtle and yet absolutely crucial complexity of each and every word contained into these dogmatic definitions** which, I remind you, are obligatory statements of faith, not “opinions” or “obscure theological points”! Christians and heretics died in huge numbers to defend/condemn such dogmatic definitions. This bears repeating: **many thousands of people died, were martyred, because they either accepted or rejected these extremely precise formulations.**

At Her core, the Church of Christ is a Church of martyrs, founded by and on martyrs, and true Christianity is always a form of martyrdom (as is any “imitation of Christ”).

[\Sidebar: inevitably, some smartass modern positivist will remind us all \(as if that needed reminding!\) that “the Church” killed an “innumerable number” of “absolutely innocent people” to impose its view of the truth on everybody else. This is both truth and false at the same time. It is a kind of semi-truth. Before the conversion of Saint Constantine the Great in 312 and the Edict of Milan \(313\), Christianity was mostly persecuted by \(non-Christian Jews\) and Romans \(read the Book of Acts](#)

is that is a challenge for you). Later, following the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325), the Second Ecumenical Council Constantinople (381) and the Edict of Thessalonica (380) Christianity was proclaimed as the established religion of the Roman State. This was neither a theocracy and bishops did not rule over the state but, instead, the bishops and the heads of state ruled side-by-side in what was called a “[symphonia)” while “caesaropapism” is a western concept to slander and obfuscate the real nature of the original Christian Roman Empire and, especially, its successor states (the Eastern Roman Empire and Russia). Humans being humans (humans with a fallen nature, according the Christianity!), it did not take long for rulers to figure out that religion can be very conveniently used as an excuse/pretext not only for the suppression of internal dissent (religious or not!) but also for foreign wars. So OF COURSE Roman secular rulers did, at times, use Christianity to persecute all sorts of groups, including, by the way, Orthodox Christians who were also persecuted by non-Orthodox/heretical Roman authorities (by, for example, [Leo III the Isaurian](#) or [Constans II](#)). And yes, there were also quite a few bloodthirsty bishops in history, if only because bishops are sinful and passionate people too! To the modern, secular, mind, religion is something [akin to a personality disorder](#), and it is responsible for horrible persecutions for 2000 years. Logically (at least to that type of folks), if the Roman Christians were so bad, all those they persecuted (for cause or not) in the name of “the Church” must have been good (by the same token, if Stalin was evil, Hitler must have been kind, and vice versa, of course). Friends! we are talking about how all humans, irrespective of religion or lack thereof, mostly acted in history, both ancient and modern! Considering the massive and utterly unprecedented 300 year long bloodbath resulting from the “progress” of western (masonic) secularism and its various ideological offshoots – including nationalism, liberalism, capitalism, Marxism or National-Socialism, I would not advise modern secularists to thump their chest in self-righteous indignation too much. I would also remind them that the real roots western civilization are the time of the First Crusade and that modern western imperialism is as alive and evil today as it was in the now distant 11th century! For those not familiar with this topic, here is a short “Roman Timeline” to refresh your memory:

- Rome founded in 753 BC
- Rome becomes an empire in 27 BC
- Constantinople founded in 330 AD
- Rome sacked in 410 AD
- (Only the) **Western Roman Empire** finally ends in 476 AD (see [here for what that meant to the entire Christian world](#))
- Rome cuts itself from the rest of Christianity **1054 AD**

- The Papacy adopts the [Dictatus Papae](#) in **1075** AD (check the link!)
- First Crusade is unleashed in **1096** AD
- False Council of Florence 1439 AD
- Constantinople falls in 1453 AD and the **Eastern Roman Empire ends** (over a full thousand years after the fall of the First, western, Rome!)

I especially draw your attention on the **very quick succession of the events in 1054, 1075 and 1096: first the break away** (schism and heresy) from the rest of the Christian world, immediately after, the **megalomaniacal forgery** of "[Papal Dictates](#)" quickly followed by **the First Crusade**. If anybody seriously thinks that the fact this all happened in only 42 (!) years all "just a coincidence", then please email me, I got a few great bridges to sell to you!\]

Again, what I am trying to illustrate is not how bloodthirsty humans have been through history, but only that **in early Christianity people not only adopted a very specific set of beliefs, they cared for them enough to die, often in horrible tortures, rather than abjure them.**

Nowadays the word "Christian" has lost any objective sense (see [here](#) and [here](#) for a discussion), it encompasses anything, everything and its opposite, hence utter and proven futility of this entire endeavor and, especially the terminal hypocrisy of World Orthodoxy denominations saying that they are only participating in this charade to "bring Orthodoxy to the world", "share the message of Christ" or any other similar nonsense! The undeniable and infinitely sad truth that World Orthodoxy jurisdictions failed to achieve a single tangible positive objective by their participation in the "ecumenical dialog of love", and the only thing they created are schisms, schisms and more schisms which, of course, they deny and blame on True Orthodox Christians (I always am amazed how all the ecumenists call each other "brothers" (and even "brothers in Christ"!!!) but call True Orthodox Christians "schismatics", "graceless and the like. Feel the love!

The Ecumenical Movement is the where these **putative "Christians"** sit down with **unrepentant heretics** and **even pagans** and try as hard as can be to **obfuscate any and all differences** between the many religions and denominations out there.

BTW – the technical term for this activity is "religious syncretism".

Remember that list above of the "ancient" heresies? They are ALL represented in one form or another in the World Council of Churches and the various "Ecumenical" movements out there. **This is why "ecumenism" (aka "religious syncretism") has been called a "pan-heresy" or a "heresy of heresies": its purpose is to unite as many people as possible under one umbrella "world religion" and, in the process, obfuscate or even "lift" (by what authority exactly remains unclear!) all the "ancient" and "outdated" anathemas ever pronounced by the One True Church of Christ throughout the centuries.**

It is no wonder then that many True Orthodox Christians have come to the conclusions that the sole real purpose of this entire ecumenical rigmarole is to create a single “umbrella” world religion which would create (one of) the preconditions for the coming and the rule of the Antichrist, which now even the Latins will officially welcome as they have now proclaimed that they “await the same messiah” as the Judaics (whom they now call their “older brothers in faith”) except that for the Latins it would be a 2nd coming while for the Judaics it would be the 1st one.

Long forgotten are the words of the early Christian saints who solemnly defined Christianity as the faith “*which the Lord gave, was preached by the Apostles, and was preserved by the Fathers. On this was the Church founded; and if anyone departs from this, he neither is nor any longer ought to be called a Christian*” (St. Athanasius) and that true Christianity is the faith “*which has been believed everywhere, always and by all*” (Saint Vicent of Lerins) and which “*the Prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers expressed in dogmas, as the whole world has agreed, as the grace has illuminated*” ([Synodikon of Orthodoxy](#)).

At its core and in essence, **the entire “Ecumenical Movement” is not “just” a denial and obfuscation of the true, original, Christology, it is much more than that: it is a rejection of the importance and even relevance of Christology as such!**

Those who today attend such blasphemous conferences have utterly forgotten even the very first verses of the Book of Psalms (which Christians should be reading on a daily basis!) “*Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and has not stood in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of evil men. But his pleasure is in the law of the Lord; and in his law will he meditate day and night*” (Ps 1:1-2 LXX) or even the words of Christ Himself: “*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*” (Luke 12:51-53).

Yes, of course God wants all of mankind to unite, Orthodox Christians pray for the unity of all in every service, but that unity has to be **a unity founded on the full Christian Truth** (both *doxa* and *praxis*), not outright lies or other forms of obfuscation.

[\Sidebar: in the western denominations unity is always seen as something organizational and ceremonial. The perfect example of that is the so-called “\[Eastern Rite” which demands that its members accept the Filioque, but does not demand that they say so publicly \(see Article 1 of the infamous Treaty of Brest for proof of this!\)](#) To put it simply, if you accept the authority of the Pope you are “Catholic”, and what you actually believe, or not, makes no difference whatsoever. As for the Protestants, they too can believe anything they want, as long as it is

based on the Bible aka “the revealed Word of God”; however, which version of the Bible (Masoretic or LXX) is never clarified and, frankly, it does not really matter since the interpretation of the Scripture is left to each individual acting as his own “mini-Pope”, *sola scriptura* and all that...

In diametrical contrast, in the East, unity is seen primarily as a “**unity of faith**” which **must come first and which must be total and complete before** any organizational or ceremonial expression of unity would be even considered!\]

There is a verse in the New Testament which often is very quoted: “*ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). It is even the (unofficial) motto of the CIA! Yet in 99.99999999%+ of the cases, **this verse is truncated and actual sentence by Christ is never mentioned in full**: “*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31-32). The terms in red are **unambiguously conditionals**. The terms in blue indicate which **conditions must necessarily must be met** for the full proposition to make sense (and take effect in our personal lives!).

The Ecumenist always tell us “but, but, we did not sign any heretical statements!”. First, this is plainly **false** (see [here for a superb discussion of this issue](#)), *but it is also nonsensical: **by sitting down with heretics at a “council of the ungodly” the pan-heretics have basically treated all of Christology as utterly irrelevant, simply too passé*. That is what “religious syncretism” is: a wholesale abandonment of Christology and, therefore, it represents and embodies the ultimate apostasy, even when cloaked in beautiful liturgical vestments or when proclaimed in (truly) holy places (be it in/by Rome or Moscow!).

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Can you imagine the Holy Church Fathers sitting down with a worldwide gathering of schismatics, heretics, apostates and even pagan to “seek a common ground and unity”? In fact, most ancient heretics clearly considered themselves Christians (which, of course, they were objectively not, but that is immaterial here, because it would be completely pointless for a non-Christian to argue, kill or even die for Christological issues) and “only” disagreed on what nowadays are called “[fine and obscure theological points](#)“!

When I look at the list of “ancient” heresies I listed on top, I often think that very few, if any, of the founders of these heretical sects I listed would have agreed to even sit down with the type unity-seeking pan-heretics which nowadays regularly meet at the World Council of Churches (and elsewhere): even the condemned and anathematized heresiarchs of antiquity would have recoiled in utter shock and disgust at what is said (and done!) by the Ecumenists nowadays.

Conclusion: how to really achieve unity?

For a quick and authoritative pointer on how to achieve real unity we can turn to these words of Saint Paul:

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:19-20). This clearly shows that **in Saint Paul’s mind “Christology”** (not that he used that term) **was the cornerstone of the entire Christian faith**. Which is hardly surprising since Christ Himself said: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6) and *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”* (John 10:9). Again, **notice the conditionals, they are crucial**.

As is all of Christology.

That is why I can only ask every person reading these line to answer (not necessarily in the comment section, though that is fine too, but even in his/her mind only) CS Lewis’ question:

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

So what will you chose, if anything, or will you, like the pan-heretical ecumenists, simply chose the comfortable indifference and ignore Christology and all its momentous implications?

Andrei

I, Andrei Raevsky, aka The Saker, have absolutely no authority whatsoever to teach anything to anyone. None. Zero. Ziltch. Nada! The “Christian Vignettes” are NOT a catechism, or a course in dogmatics or anything else formal. These vignettes are only one guy’s strictly personal musings on various topics. Nothing more.