

Our Word About God

A newspaper of Orthodox Theology from the students of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge

Issue No. 1

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Welcome to the first issue of our newspaper!

This is a newspaper of Orthodox Christian Theology from the students of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies (IOCS). In it our students submit their theological ideas, testimonies and reflection. It will be published every other Tuesday, and you will be able to find it at the IOCS offices, free of charge. So please feel free to come by and pick up a copy and even have a conversation about something you read on the newspaper or have a look at the IOCS library.

All articles of this newspaper will be written by the students of IOCS and in every issue we will have a guest article written by one of our tutors.

We think that this newspaper is a unique opportunity for our Orthodox voices to be heard in the Cambridge Theological Federation, with its diversity of theological traditions.

We are also looking forward on receiving your comments, which we hope will create a constructive dialogue.

In this issue the guest article is by Dr Grant White, Principal of IOCS, titled: "A Few Thoughts on Technology and Consumption" (page 1). Miss Tamar Gogudze's (MA student in Pastoral Theology) first part of her article on the icons and their place in the Orthodox Tradition and their part in the life of Orthodox Christians can be found on our first issue too, under the title: "On the veneration of icons" (pages 2-3). Also you'll find an article written by Mr Vasileios Stamatelatos (MA student in Pastoral Theology) with the title: "Thoughts on secularism" (pages 1-2). Lastly, at page 4 you will find an article devoted to the Institute.

Finally, we hope that you will enjoy our newspaper and we are looking forward to seeing you at IOCS.

Editorial

PS You are most welcome to come to the Vespers Service every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 16:45 that take place at the library of IOCS, Wesley House.

A Few Thoughts on Technology and Consumption

by Dr Grant White, Principal of IOCS

Following are a few loosely-connected thoughts and questions about technology, particularly information technology. I hope that if anyone is interested in these things, we can find the time and space to talk about them more fully.

Lately I have begun to question my relationship to the internet. This new situation has arisen because at the moment we do not have an internet connection in our home. For various reasons, it hasn't yet been possible to set up a broadband modem in the room my wife and I use as a study. Having come from Finland, the wired country *par excellence*, it has been a frustrating experience dealing with the various obstacles to obtaining service here.

What is it about the internet that, when it is absent, I miss it so? Perhaps instead I need to question the pain of its absence. Am I addicted, and if so, to what? Probably "addiction" is too strong a word, for I have not felt so much withdrawal as inconvenience. Surely there is a reasonable dimension to feeling this inconvenience: for example, I am

used to keeping in touch via e-mail almost daily with my mother, who lives in the United States. It has been inconvenient not to be able to communicate with her when I am at home, and there have been times in the past two months when it would have been very helpful to have been able to write her from home. So perhaps from the perspective of filial piety, my feeling of inconvenience has been legitimate. And, perhaps, insofar as I am able, via e-mail, to keep in contact with friends and family living at a distance from me, the sense of inconvenience is justified in these instances as well.

So far, so good (unless one views e-mail itself, and the attendant expectation of instant availability it creates, as in themselves questionable). But the great selling-point of broadband is that it is always on. Whenever you like, it will spew forth a great flood of images, words, and sounds. Some of this is free, much of it is a credit-card number away. This is the point at which I begin to have more nagging questions. The questions always return to the issue of consumption.

Anyone familiar with contemporary cultural critique knows that how our free-market, globalising culture defines a human being is a central issue today. More and more, we are defined as homo consumens. We are what we buy, wear, eat, watch, and listen to. The ubiquity of electronic media assures that we see and hear almost continuously what those who would sell us something want us to hear. The increasing use of RFID (radio-frequency identification) chips will mean the greater ability of marketers to track masses of consumers and their buying habits, and to fine-tune the messages they send to targeted groups. By such means we become perpetual objects of manipulation.

The attentive reader will have noticed that I have avoided the term "information" in discussing the goods available on-line. Even in the case of web news sources, the lines between journalistic reporting and propaganda have blurred. But even in the case of accurate news sources we confront the question of consumption. To what end do we consume the non-stop flow of reportage on the web? Some years ago I read in a book on Benedictine monasticism in the modern world a reflection by an American monk whose monastery wrestled with the question of introducing television into the monks' recreation room. The ostensible reason was to allow access to news programs. The monks asked themselves about the end to which their news-watching was directed: at what point did it become voyeurism? Did the act of viewing the day's headlines lead to a compassionate response in the name of Christ, or did it simply numb the viewers to the suffering they witnessed? These valuable questions are not for monks only.

I don't propose here to try to answer my own questions, but I set forth my own unease as an invitation to further discussion in the light of Orthodox theology. Already in 1935 in his book The Fate of Man in the Modern World Nicholas Berdyaev had (accurately) named technology as one of the powers of the modern world, one that drove the dehumanisation of the human person. Berdyaev was no Luddite; he did not advocate a return to a machine-free world. But certainly the increasing scope of our technology and the rise of philosophies such as transhumanism make Berdyaev's question more timely than ever: in whose image do we wish to be? That of God, or that of the machine?

Thoughts on secularism

by Mr Vasileios Stamatelatos

Secularism seems to be the Church's contemporary temptation.

But I think that secularism has been present in Church's life long before our century.

But what do we mean by "secularism"? If you open a dictionary it will tell you that secularism is "the belief that laws, education, etc should be based on facts, science, etc rather than religion". But is secularism only that or is this a rather secularised view of secularism?

I believe that secularism goes even deeper, "right to the bone". Secularism does not mean only what the dictionary defines. Secularism means that aspects of a person's daily life should not be based on religion and thus contain any religious elements. That people during their daily life are to choose not to connect any *Godly* 'thing' to their acts, communication, work, conversation. 'To live in the world as if there were no God'. And also to consider religion as something in our life that we can easily isolate as something we do once a week (at the best case).

For an Orthodox Christian, being secularised means being no longer Christian (of course God will judge everyone). But why is this? This is because you have "to live in the world seeing everything in it as a revelation of God, a sign of His presence, the joy of His coming, the call to communion with him, the hope for fulfilment in Him". We have to see our lives as a constant sacrament towards 'the life to come'. We have to understand that we are not to stay for ever in this world, that there is a perspective for eternity. 'A Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him'. Something like this, just cannot leave the life of human unaffected. 'And this joy transforms all his human plans and programs, decision and actions'.

So is there such thing as secularised Christianity? Can we say that a secularised Christianity is real and true Christianity?

If we are honest, no. If the unique mission of the Church in what we do as Christians is not present, then we are no more than social workers. (Please don't misunderstand me. I have nothing against social workers). "...not a mere humanitarian concern for abstract justice and anonymous "poor", but concrete and personal love for the human person, that makes me encounter in my life". For Christianity "man is loveable because he is *person*".

If we are afraid to take responsibility and don't want to make some people unhappy, yes: to be Christian means that you don't actually have to give much thought about what it means. You could live without it. Being a good human has nothing to do with your religion. Being a Christian becomes then more like a cultural "thing" that was inherited to you, something like your nationality. Something that if you were not born with, you wouldn't be.

I don't hesitate to say that I sometimes feel secularised myself. A non secularised Christian would think Christ before a decision; but I? Sometimes I have to try in order to consider Christ before a decision. To think of Him before I act, even before I speak. To try to see Christ in my neighbour, "in another man". All this effort not to be secularised, seems to me like a temptation. Something that needs constant spiritual struggle.

We are only here for now. We will be *there* for ever. Can we not consider that at least?

(All quotations are from Father Alexander Schmemmann's book: *For the Life of the World*. New York: St Valadimir's Seminary Press, 2002.)

On the Veneration of Icons

by Miss Tamar Gogouadge

From the times of the iconoclastic controversy (8th century) until today the Orthodox Church has had to define the difference

between worship and veneration of images. Even today remains the question whether the orthodox Christians worship icons or only venerate the images of God and His saints. But even veneration seems to some people the same as worship or adoration. Those people who blame the Orthodox believers for the veneration of icons, see it as presenting a danger to fall into idolatry; they find the sources of this accusation in the Old Testament Deuteronomy (4.15-17; Exodus 20.4; Psalm 97.7; Isaiah 40.18) and in Pauline passages (Rom.1.23; Rom.1.25; 2Cor. 5.16; 2Cor.5.7). All of these passages proclaim that God forbids us to worship images; as we may worship only true God; we may not worship "The creature rather than the Creator".

The historical review of the iconoclastic controversy brings us back to the historical period in the 8th century Byzantine Empire. The iconoclastic controversy maybe argued to be begun by the Emperor Leo III, who published a decree against icons in 730. The persecution of iconophiles was continued by his son

Constantine Copronymus and his grandson Leo IV – Khazar. After the death of Leo IV authority was given to his wife Irene with whose name is connected the calling of the Seventh Ecumenical council in Nicea attended by Patriarch Tarasius. The Seventh ecumenical council confirmed the theological truthfulness of the veneration of icons; the council accepted that the true image must be of the same essence with its prototype, an idea that was formulated before by great theologians. St. John of Damascus lived in the 8th century isolated from Constantinople and had no connection with the political and social atmosphere of Byzantine Capital. He lived in Syria under Arabic rule. St John wrote his famous work "on the Divine Images" at the beginning of the iconoclastic controversy. After the death of Irene (in 802) iconoclasm revived with new strength. Emperor Leo V the Armenian began a new persecution of iconophiles.

He demanded that the Patriarch Nicephorus should place icons in the Church above human height so that nobody could reach them for veneration. The Patriarch did not agree to this demand, but he also denounced publicly the wrongness of the Emperor's attitude to the Church. The Patriarch was exiled. St. Theodore the abbot of the monastery of Studios took his place as a spiritual leader of the Orthodox population; St. Theodore was engaged in iconoclastic controversies throughout his life. On Palm Sunday while people openly manifested their reverence of icons, the procession was broken up by soldiers and a bloody persecution began, which was continued by Leo's successors Michael II and Theophilus.



The final restoration of icons is also connected with the name of another faithful woman. Empress Theodora has ceased the persecution of iconophiles immediately after the death of her husband Theophilus. On the first Sunday of Lent the reinstatement of icons was proclaimed in St. Sophia's Cathedral. That day is celebrated today by the Orthodox Church as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy".

Throughout the iconoclastic controversy icons remained in Churches but to venerate them was forbidden. They thought that iconic representation should exist only for the purpose of remembrance and not for veneration. That is why they placed icons above human height.

For Orthodox Christians the Holy Scripture and the holy lives of Saints are not only historical events which can be only remembered or just illustrated by art treasures. The joy of the resurrection penetrates our every day lives



The grace of God works through icons and icons in the Orthodox Church are placed where all people can come to them, pray before them and venerate through them the image of God and His Saints. We would never say that the service to God can be dependant on the existence or non-existence of icons. The aim of Orthodox believers is to serve and to worship God and veneration of icons is a way to do that. All Orthodox believers usually have corners of icons in their houses, where the members of a family come, pray and venerate them with great reverence. Icons are placed on the level of human height in order to be accessible for veneration. But they also place icons not only in a particular corner but in different rooms and places where the icons bring God's grace and blessing.

An Orthodox believer can pray everywhere even if there is no icon, as God is everywhere and the existence of an icon can not make His presence attached to a particular place or situation, but the presence of an icon makes more intimate our relationship with God and we can feel the action of grace that comes through them. The work of grace through icons can be confirmed by the

existence of wonder-working icons. All icons are wonder-working and through all of them God listens to us, but some of the icons are well-known for special miracles: myrrh-streaming, healing, icons, which change their places without human activity.

Nobody can accuse Christians of making idols of birds, trees, animals, reptiles or any creature... "If anyone should dare to make an image of the invisible formless and colourless godhead, we reject it as a falsehood. If anyone should make images to give glory, honour and worship to the devil and his demons, we abhor them and deliver them to the flames, or if anyone makes idols of men, birds, reptiles,

or any creature, we anathematise him" – says St. John of Damascus. At the same time we can not recognise idolatry as something that belongs to history or that is always connected with the images of materialised images - figures. Idolatry exists in our every day life. Images can be created in hearts and minds. All our attachments that take our attention away from God or become more important than our relationship with God, makes us fall into idolatry. Everything can be an idol, to which we sacrifice our attention and respect, which instead must be directed to God. People can turn different things into idols: themselves, chosen people, money, beloved material things, careers, power, fear, obedience to rules, material prosperity and safety or even ideas every attachment, without which we are unable to live becomes an idol; everything, which we obey and direct our lives towards; everything that we adore. We could say that the main danger of idolatry lives in every person through the ego, which builds the idol of self-image. Even our sins become idols when we enjoy them and can not be detached from them. The problem of idolatry consists not in the image itself, but in its prototype which is a false god. Behind false gods always hides the devil that is the true prototype of any idol and who tries to immerse men into sinful worship through daily sacrifice to him. The main thing is to whom we direct our prayer and worship, who is the prototype of the image which we respect. We always have a free choice: the only true God or false gods. We can clearly make a difference that the one is darkness, and the other is light. The Orthodox Believers respect icons as the images of their prototypes.

The great theologians St John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite saw the accusation of the veneration of icons as idolatry, as incomplete understanding of the Incarnation. They underline the fact that since Christ became incarnate and became visible, it became possible to depict God. The image always has its prototype and any honour given to the image is directed to the prototype. This main importance of the prototype was confirmed by Jesus when he asked the Pharisees about a coin with the image of Caesar: "whose likeness and inscription is this" (Mat.22.20). and after their answer he said: "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mat 22.21). We can give money to the prototype of the image on the coin, as he is an earthly authority, but we give glory to the prototype of the icon of Christ, because He is the heavenly king. All Christians believe in Christ and not in wood or paper and so this sort of accusation of idolatry when icons are venerated, can not be taken seriously by any Christian. On the icons there are always depicted the images of those who have been seen by human beings. We can not depict the invisible God. We have the icons of Christ, Who has been incarnate and took visible, human nature; we have the icons of the Most Holy Trinity in the image of three angels Who visited Abraham; we have the icons of the Mother of God, who was a human being but bore Christ; and we have icons of Saints who are partakers of God's divine nature through their holy lives, deeds or martyrdoms. *(end of part one)*

The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies

The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies was founded in 1999 with the blessing of the Orthodox hierarchs in Britain after more than two years of consultation and

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(no service on Federation Worship Tuesdays), Wednesday and Thursday 16:45 that take place at the library of IOCS, Wesley House.

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collaboration among members of the Orthodox churches, the University of Cambridge, and the Cambridge Theological Federation (new browser window).

Although theology has been taught in Cambridge since 1284, this was the first time that the Orthodox theological tradition was offered for study. The Institute was established as a centre for higher education and research and became a member of the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF) - a group of seven theological colleges representing a range of Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist and now Orthodox).

The CTF works closely with the University of Cambridge Faculty of Divinity (new browser window), through which many of its degrees are validated. In addition to its involvement as part of the CTF, the Institute also has a research project within the Faculty of Divinity's Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies (CARTS) (new browser window). The CTF and the Faculty have warmly welcomed the presence of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in their midst. This is an immensely positive sign, pointing to the growing awareness of the significance of the Orthodox Church as other Christians seek to draw on the riches of Orthodoxy.

Serving the Orthodox Church

The Institute serves the Orthodox Church as a whole and is governed by a Board with representatives from the various Orthodox Churches in Great Britain. By using the traditions and resources of all Orthodox communities, the Institute can offer the best possible education to students and enable them to appreciate their common inheritance, the universality of Orthodox theology, and the rich variety of the Orthodox tradition.

The interest that the Institute has generated among the Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike springs from the fact that there is nothing quite like it elsewhere in the world. The Institute - pan-Orthodox in nature, not dependent on any particular Orthodox jurisdiction, linked to a major university in an inter-Christian setting, and striving to promote Orthodox scholarship for both lay and ordained people alongside an authentic Orthodox witness - has a new and exciting role to play within the Orthodox Church.

A Brief History of The Institute

The initiative for an Orthodox Institute in Cambridge came in response to a request from the University. In May 1996, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Moscow Patriarchate) received an honorary doctorate from the University of Cambridge. At that time Professor David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity, approached the Metropolitan to ask how the Orthodox presence in the University might be developed. He felt this would be an ideal time to raise this possibility since the Faculty was engaged in a process of evaluating the future teaching of theology in Cambridge in advance of moving to a new building in the year 2000. (The new Faculty building was opened on 23 November 2000 by the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh).

The matter was not allowed to drop and Professor Ford had further discussions with Bishop Basil of Sergievo. Fr John Jillions was invited to attend Faculty discussions on the future of theology in Cambridge and he drafted an initial proposal for establishing an Orthodox Institute for theological research and for the training of clergy and laity.

At this point Prof Ford recommended that the Cambridge Theological Federation, the consortium of theological colleges in Cambridge, be approached about founding an Orthodox Institute. The first conversations with Chris Wright, Executive Officer and the Revd John Proctor, then President of the Federation, were very encouraging and a working group was set up to look into the possibility of establishing an Orthodox Institute that would be linked to the University and the Cambridge Theological Federation.

Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia and Bishop Basil, the two Orthodox bishops in Oxford, headed the working group. The Federation appointed Dr Joy Tetley and the Faculty of Divinity appointed its then chairman, Dr Eamon Duffy, as representatives.

The first formal meeting of the working group took place on 26 March, 1998, after almost two years of prior conversations and groundwork. As Bishop Basil said, he hoped that the group could respond to the University's initiative in a way that would address the needs of the Orthodox churches as well. By God's grace, through the efforts of many and with the financial help of donors who substantially helped to fund the initial phase, the plans moved forward with remarkable speed.

A meeting on 15 July 1999 formally constituted the Institute and appointed Bishop Kallistos and Bishop Basil as Heads of the Board and Fr John Jillions as Principal. The meeting finished with a Thanksgiving Service in Wesley College Chapel.

Over the course of the past three years there have been changes in the structure and staff of the Institute - a registered company and a registered charity - as it has developed and expanded its student body. A twelve strong Board of Directors, the official decision making body of the Institute, meet three or four times a year headed by Bishop Basil as Chair. The Board of Members is comprised of the Directors, members of the Institute's staff and around thirty

representatives from the Orthodox community, the University of Cambridge and from the Cambridge Theological Federation. The Board of Members meet annually to discuss the life and work of the Institute and to formulate proposals to the Board of Directors. Members are also responsible for electing the Directors. The Academic Board chaired by Pr David Frost, has been established to plan the theological structure and content of the programmes of study in Orthodox theology. The Academic Board meets twice a year and is currently devising the scheme of work for an Advanced Diploma in Orthodox Christian Studies to complement the Certificate and Diploma courses which have already been validated by the University of Cambridge.

The Institute currently employs the following staff members:

Dr Grant White, Principal
 Dr Marcus Plested, Vice Principal and Director of Studies
 Fr Raphael Armour, Acting Chaplain
 Esther Hookway, Communications Officer
 Razvan Porumb, Graduate Assistant
 Mat Ridley, IT Officer

Many people were involved in bringing the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies into existence and many others have assisted at various stages of the Institute's development. We are particularly grateful to the Institute's first Principal, Fr John Jillions, and to all those who have offered and continue to offer their time and energy to this growing venture.



The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies

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The name of the font used for this newspaper is Samos.