

Amsterdam Lectures 2011-12:

Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Personal Introduction

Lecture V: Who is Christ? The life of Christ; the Paschal mystery; the doctrine of Christology.

The Life of Christ: modern scholarship and the Gospels.

Suggestion: that modern scholarship, in showing how much the traditions in the Gospels are not so much eye-witness traditions, as traditions preserved by the Church, has provided a way through, at least for Orthodox and others with a strong belief in the Church. All we are being asked is to trust the Church, that is, our fellow-Christians, to trust the traditions they preserved, and to trust that through participation in the Church we shall come to encounter the living Christ of whom the Gospels speak. For it is the risen Christ we want to get to know, not some dead figure from the remote past.

So: we are to read the Gospels, and the New Testament in general, from the perspective of our faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. This ties in with what we have already learnt, that it is death that is the consequence of the Fall: death that casts its pall over human life, and threatens everything with dissolution and unmeaning. Death is the problem, and it is through the death of Christ – his voluntary passion (τὸ ἐκούσιον πάθος) – that the problem is faced and a solution found.

In overcoming death, Christ shows himself to be sovereign over the whole creation, and quickly Christians came to see that this entailed that Christ was the one through the creation had come into being (1 Cor 8:6).

Christ as a man of prayer, and the one to whom we have resort in prayer: Christ as man and God. See for the man of prayer: Mark 1:35; Matt 14:23–33; Mark 46–52; John 6:15–21; giving his disciples the Lord's Prayer, the 'Our Father': Matt 6:7–13; Luke 11:1–4; praying at his Baptism: Luke 3:21; at the Transfiguration: Luke 9:28; in the Garden of Gethsemane: Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–6. As the One to whom we have resort in prayer, and whose manifestation as God draws forth our veneration: see Matt 11:28, and the account of the Transfiguration, where the Lord appears transfigured in glory (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). And in John's Gospel: John 14:9, 2:5, 20:28.

Orthodox Faith in Christ as One Person in two perfect natures, human and divine.

Brief survey of the emergence of this doctrine, as affirmed eventually by the Ecumenical Councils of the Church, which is to be seen as the history of attempts to preserve the true confession of Christ as uniting in himself God and man:

- Jesus the Messiah, the Christ... and the hope of the nations
- Christ as the Incarnate *Logos* or Word of God

- Problems posed as the radical nature of the doctrine of creation began to be realized: Arianism and the Council of Nicaea (325); Athanasios
- Apollinarianism: Christ without a human soul or mind. Opposed by St Gregory the Theologian, amongst others. Condemned at the Second Ecumenical Council, at Constantinople in 381
- Nestorianism, and fracturing the unity of Christ, and doubting Mary's title as *Theotokos*, 'Mother of God': condemned at Ephesos in 431
- Further controversy: Chalcedon 451 and its definition: one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being [*hypostasis*]...
- Legacy of Chalcedon: schism with the 'Monophysites' (believers in 'one nature in Christ'), now called the Oriental Orthodox (found nowadays in Egypt ['Copts'], Syria, Armenia, India, Ethiopia)
- 'Theopaschism': 'One of the Trinity suffered in the flesh'. Accepted at the fifth œcumenical council, held in Constantinople in 553
- Maximos and his struggle against monenergism and monothelitism; Sixth Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 680–1

Orthodox Faith, as confessed in song on the Eve before Christmas:

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord as we tell of the present mystery. The middle wall of partition has been destroyed, the flaming sword turns back, the Cherubim withdraw from the tree of life; and I partake of the Paradise of delight, from which I was cast out through disobedience. The undeviating image of the Father, the stamp of his eternity, takes the form of a servant, and without suffering change comes out from the Mother who knew no wedlock; what he was remains, being true God, and what he was not he assumes, becoming man for the love of mankind. To Him let us cry out: God, born of a Virgin, have mercy on us.