

“Orthodox Christianity in Four Quotations”

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0. Introduction

- My hope = to give an account “from the inside” that might useful points of contact
- Orthodox Church History in 90 seconds.
- Will use four quotations to hit four areas of common interest: (1) bible, church, and worship, (2) the Incarnation, (3) atonement, (4) the Cross.
- But first ... Orthodox Church History in 90 seconds!

1. The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." (John 1:35-39)

(a) Scriptural. The basic Orthodox understanding of the Bible: we believe that through every word of Scripture, the risen and glorified Lord comes to us and speaks to us. Every word.

(b) Ecclesial. Second, we invite the world to come and see the Lord Scripturally, but in the context of the church.

- “Everywhere, in the public squares, at crossroads, on the streets and lanes, people would stop you and discourse at random about the Trinity. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of a reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask “Is my bath ready?” the bath attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing (On the Deity of the Son [Gregory Nazianzus, “On the deity of the son and spirit,” P.G. xlvi, 557b])
- Fr Thomas Hopko (20/21st C): “The gospel implies the Church.”
- Tertullian (3rd C): “One Christian is no Christian.”

(c) Doxological. And so we invite the world to come and see, to encounter the risen Lord in Scripture as it is proclaimed through the Church, and specifically through the worship life of the church.

- Fr Alexander Schmemmann (20th C): human beings are “eucharistic” (they were created to give thanks) and they are “doxological” (they were created to worship).
- “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendor or beauty upon the earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty” (Emissaries from Prince Vladimir of Kiev and All Rus, 10th C).
- Prodigal Son, who even with the pigs could “remember the house of the Father.”

2. “God became man so that man might become God” (Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation*, §52).

- Theosis = becoming through grace what God is by nature.
- St Maximos the Confessor (7th C): our vocation as human beings was to steer all of creation, the entire cosmos, into communion with God.

- Fr Thomas Hopko: "As Orthodox it is not correct to say that we speak anthropomorphically about God, but rather that we speak theomorphically about human beings."
 - 2 Peter 1:4: that you may "become partakers of the divine nature".
3. "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation." (Gregory of Nazianzus, epistle 51, "To Cledonius")
- Athanasius the Great: "The solidarity of mankind is such that by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses: because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so it is with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death" (*On the Incarnation*, par. 9).
4. And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).
- How we carry out this command depends on how we understand the meaning of the Cross.
 - Orthodox understanding ≠ transactional sacrifice ≠ image of the "suffering man"
 - Orthodox understanding = the place where Jesus Christ is glorified as God.

Further Reading:

- Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*
- Meletios Webber, *Bread & Water, Wine & Oil*
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*

Web resources:

orthodoxsaalem.wordpress.com

- This is the web site of St Nicholas Orthodox Church, my parish. By this evening, I will try and post a recording of this talk under "Resources" > "For Gordon Students"

ancientfaithradio.com

- Here you will find streaming music but also archived podcasts by scores of Orthodox Christians. The amount of material can be overwhelming. May I give you a suggestion? From the home page select "Podcasts" and then "Author Index". Speakers you might find worthwhile include: Fr Stephen Freeman, Fr Thomas Hopko, Frederica Matthewes-Green
- Or, from "Podcasts" choose "Specials". In the search field, type in 'Ware' or 'Hopko' for additional podcasts of interest.