

Theology Lent 2018

All Theology is necessarily subjective. Since “Theology” is a Greek word, I understand it in the Greek sense.

The Greek view of any science with the -ology suffix is based on the word “Logos” which roughly translated means “Word.” When in the theological gospel of John we read in English, “In the beginning was the Word . . .” meaning Jesus, the Word of God, obviously “Word” means more than a mere symbol.

This Logos, this Word, is profound. It's of cosmological (another Greek word) significance since Jesus as the God-Man, as the Son, as the second Person of the Trinity, as the Logos, created the Cosmos.

“Logos” also means Knowledge. But the kind of knowledge that Logos is, isn't familiarity that comes from taking a class or reading books. No, that kind of knowledge is vicarious, indirect, second- third- or fourth-hand.

The Logos that we see appended to the names of all the sciences is first-hand, direct, experiential knowledge. It is like being married, versus knowing about marriage. In Orthodox Christianity we say that a theologian is not a studier of texts; he is a man of prayer. I agree.

Theology, then, is not knowledge about God that comes from going to Church or studying books, or writing papers, or thinking about God. Theology is direct, first-hand, experiential knowledge of God.

Thus, properly understood, all theology is subjective: experienced in one's own heart, mind, and soul; seen through one's own eyes. Yes it can be compared and contrasted with others' experiences; it can be validated or invalidated through objectivity and accountability; but by definition, the theology itself is necessarily subjective.

And that's a good thing. “Subjective” doesn't mean “invalid.” It simply means, experienced directly, first-hand, through one's own senses; authentic.

What follows is mine, based on 55 years of living, roughly 20 of which have been in the Orthodox Church.

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear. My religion taught me to relate to God with this attitude:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.”

It is a kind of groveling, obsequious, fearful, cowardly posture, literally prostrate. It is the attitude not of a faithful son, but of a scared, guilty hireling who hasn't yet understood the extent of his employer's goodness which, as it turns out, is boundless.

For more than twenty years I accepted and practiced it: fondling the prayer rope, repeating the prayer endlessly, and doing the prostrations. The prayer became a part of me, like a perpetual motion machine. It still is. It's still my default, habitual “lullaby” when I drift off to sleep.

With time and experience, as I became more familiar with God and His nature, I came to feel more like a son. My attitude shifted more toward the famous quote of Saint Anthony the Great, father of both Eastern and Western Monasticism:

“I no longer fear God, but love Him.”

A Theology Not of Death, But of Life. Now my theology is more subjective, in a good way, based on my own direct knowledge and experience; and my attitude in prayer is more like this:

*“Thank You for personifying Goodness and Truth.
Thank You for being in the business of Light, Healing, and Life.
Thank you for exponential reproduction and growth (including sex).
Thank you for the overflowing cup.
Please lead and guide me.
Show me what I should do today.”*

I love You."

Thanking God for sex: that is an odd prayer. Aren't we supposed to be ashamed?

But without sex there would be no life. I would not have my family. I myself would not exist.

So I find that, in the same breath that I thank Him for life itself, I must thank Him for it, including the female beauty that makes my heart skip a beat whenever I'm near it.

I'm no longer ashamed of that. I'm grateful. I'm as grateful for that as I am grateful for bees, flowers, food, and housing. To me it's all a seamless whole, the complete fabric of life. When I think of Dostoevsky's famous quote from The Idiot, "Beauty will save the world", I don't just think of beautiful churches. I think of beautiful women, too.

And I find that the shame that Christianity has developed around sex is diabolically warped, and in need of radical correction . . . correction that I can not begin to imagine how to arrange, because this shame and schizophrenic sexual secrecy is so deeply baked and hard-wired into Christian culture. It makes people crazy.

Philokalia - "Love of the Good." Personifying Goodness and Truth: that makes all the difference. For anyone else who does not theologize (philosophers, atheists), Goodness and Truth are abstract ideas that can be easily distorted or dismissed as relative, theoretical or irrelevant.

But when Goodness and Truth are personified, they're not abstract any more. They're concrete, tactile, tangible, relatable, and absolute.

The personification of Goodness and Truth that God does, and is, is what makes them compelling. It's easy to dismiss or mess with an idea, but it's not so easy to dismiss or mess with a Person when He's standing right in front of you, looking in your eyes.

Notice how I don't mention Love, except that I direct my love toward Him. I don't expect love from God. I don't expect Him to define it. I don't address Him in terms of His love. As far as love is concerned, I only address Him in terms of mine.

Why? Because it can be so easily misunderstood, and the only love I really understand is my own, is the love that I feel in my own heart. I've never been able to understand anyone else's.

For 24 years, from 1983 to 2007, wives professed their love to me, then behaved like enemies.

In retrospect I look back and ask myself, "What was that?"

I have no idea what it was. But I know it was neither good nor real.

I've learned that there can be good and bad love, good and bad sex, good and bad religion. So to me the highest thing, higher and better than even love itself, is Goodness. That is why the term "Philokalia" is such a beautiful thing.

Axiology – experiential knowledge of value – that thing inside us that helps us figure out what is good, what I call "The Better Meter" – is what sorts them all out. That is why I'm an [Axiology](#) Nut.

So I don't need to talk to God about Love because to me it falls under the umbrella of Goodness. All I need to do is thank Him for personifying Goodness, and I suppose that Love (and all the rest) will take care of itself.

The Cross. I have come to realize that the crucifixion was a mistake. Idiots tried to murder God. They murdered an innocent man for the "sin" of being good. That is about as stupid as stupid gets.

I have come to see how the Cross has been called “a mystery” because it makes no sense. As long as we continue to deny that it was a mistake, it will continue to seem mysterious. When we accept that it was a mistake, the shroud of mystery dissipates and the truth becomes obvious.

Why would anyone shroud the Cross in mystery and contrive some tortured implausible argument that it was somehow necessary for anyone’s salvation?

Because that is what guilty people do to obscure their guilt. They rationalize. They dissociate. They project. They triangulate. They obscure, prevaricate, and dissemble. They try to turn tables, or flip the script. They concoct an elaborate, twisted plot. They lie.

It's like a husband blaming his wife for his own adultery. It's classically narcissistic behavior.

The truth is that since God is omnipotent, He can save us however He wants – crucifixion or no.

So I don't wear a cross any more, and I don't glorify or exult in it. I just view the crucifixion as a silly mistake, rendered ineffectual by God's omnipotence.

And I have come to understand that Holy Week is a gruesome re-living of this mistake. It's an annual week-long grudge fest that stirs up hatred and antisemitism. Combined with exhaustion and malnutrition, I have seen it drive both clergy and laity mad. I can't do it any more.

I remember that “Christ” does not mean “crucified.” It means “anointed.” Properly understood then, the symbol of Christianity oughtn't be a cross at all; it ought to be oil, which is invisible and absorbed into the skin, and is therefore not a visible symbol at all. Perhaps this shows how we ought to shift our focus from symbols to people.

The Resurrection. I believe in the Resurrection of Christ. Furthermore I have noticed that Jesus didn't have to be murdered for God to be in the Resurrection Business. He had already been resurrecting people in both the Old and the New Testaments.

Having learned in The Rudder that the real motive for the timing of Pascha/Easter is antisemitism (7th Apostolic Canon, pp 9-20), and having concluded that The Holy Fire “miracle” that happens each year in Jerusalem is an elaborate and ancient hoax, I have come to realize that Easter/Pascha is hysterical madness suffered by the guilty; again, that the Crucifixion was an inconsequential error (since God in his omnipotence overruled it), and that Holy Week is an antisemitic grudge-fest, an annual re-murdering of the Christ Who, from the cross, instructed all to forgive.

Easter/Pascha has become an annual tourism and fundraising spectacle that, compounded with Pagan Easter Bunny madness, sends people into a frenzy of insanity unmatched by any other occasion in the year. Indeed it has become the spoke of a madness wheel otherwise known as the annual liturgical cycle.

But none of this depresses me nor does it motivate me to become an atheist. Quite the contrary, I thank God for being in the Resurrection Business, both before and after the Crucifixion. Free of Paschal Madness, I'm liberated to focus all the more on the life that Christ lived instead of the death that He died, and to appreciate all the more the ever-presence of the Holy Spirit Who enables me to notice things like this, Whom, through the Father, Christ left us, and Who, because He is invisible and ineffable, does not get nearly as much attention, gratitude, appreciation, or love as He should.

Scapegoats – Dissociation. From the Old Testament system of sacrificing poor dumb innocent animals onward, I find that Dissociation is hard-wired into the Judeo-Christian experience and narrative.

I can't do it any more. I won't do it any more. I don't tolerate it.

This dissociation comes in many forms, the creepiest and most disturbing of which is blaming Satan and demons for one's own choices and behavior.

Don't get me wrong: I know they exist. I just know they're defeated foes, punks, annoying little insects to exterminate. I think of them as mosquitoes that buzz annoyingly in one's ear.

I think we give them far too much power; and when we blame them for what we did, we lie.

Whenever I encounter a Christian who complains about what Satan is doing in his or her life, I want to run in the opposite direction. Here is a person who isn't honest about his or her own choices and deeds. Here is someone who dissociates.

Then once we're in the habit of thinking and saying "The devil made me do it", the same habit, or pattern, spreads like a cancer into ordinary interpersonal relationships, leading to a sick codependency in which one person blames another for his or her own thoughts, feelings, choices, and deeds. Nobody owns up, and life becomes a miserable death-embrace, like two drowning people who cling to each other and sink when they could let go and swim.

Antisemitism, Hatred . . . and Sainthood. Years ago I learned a metaphor about poison, in the context of heresy. The idea was that heresy is like poison and if you put one drop of poison in a glass of otherwise clean water, that one drop ruins everything.

It is easy to split hairs about doctrine and heresy, but it is not easy to split hairs about hatred. When hatred exists, it's quite obvious. I find that it is the true underlying motive for quarrels about doctrine and heresy. If that is so, we may as well lay aside doctrinal wrangling (2 Tim 2:23, Titus 3:9, etc.), and face hatred squarely.

I've come to view hatred itself as the poison, versus heresy. In passages like the story about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-29), the command to love enemies (Matthew 5, Luke 6) and 1 John 4:20 and elsewhere, the Bible makes the primacy of radical love obvious and shows how there is really no room in the soul of a Christian for even one drop of hatred.

I have seen how one drop of hatred can ruin the whole glass of water. I have seen how it really does not matter if someone manages to live a loving life 99.9% of the time. If they manifest hatred .1% of the time, the 99.9% is ruined.

Take murder for example. The seed of murder is hatred, and there are people in the world who managed to live a loving life almost all of their lives, but struggled within with deep feelings of hatred. Then one day, those feelings got the best of them; they snapped, and killed someone. Now they're in jail forever, life ruined.

A life sentence in prison for murder is a very obvious case of how hatred can ruin a life. But there are less obvious, more subtle examples.

The examples I've seen are about antisemitism and partisan politics. I've met many Jew-hating Christians. I've also met many professing Christians who hate their political opponents, both Republican and Democrat, Conservative and Liberal.

But I feel that the origin of all other kinds of hatred among Christians is antisemitism. It's so pervasive that it is hard-wired into liturgical texts. The rationale among Christians for antisemitism is that it's all right to hate Jews because they killed Christ.

Well once you've created room in your heart to hate anyone, you've let the camel's nose under the tent. The next thing you know, the whole tent is demolished.

Different kinds of Jews hated each other, and still do, I suppose. That's why Jesus presented the story about the Samaritan. A Samaritan is a kind of Jew whom non-Samaritans hated. He used hatred among and between Jews to show how there's really no room for hatred in anyone's soul. To Samaritan-hating Jews, He said the Samaritan is your brother.

I suppose the mark of a true saint must be this total absence of hatred and the presence of all-consuming, overflowing, boundless love that is a byproduct, a consequence, of Theosis, of dissolving one's self in God.

Ecclesiology and churches. I'm grieved to confess that I do not feel safe in churches. I find that:

- They are filled with sick, angry people whose heads are filled with magical thinking.
- Leadership positions attract manipulative, sadistic narcissists.
- Women gossip in a way that is most hazardous to men.
- Men who interact with children in churches endanger themselves, subjecting themselves to evil suspicions of predation. This is very frustrating for any man who has been a father and who cares about kids.
- Most of the women are unattractive – homely by design – and, out of jealousy and envy, mean to the few attractive ones. There is some truth to the Dana Garvey “Church Lady” stereotype. That's why it's funny.
- In many cases, churches have a tendency to discourage beauty and alienate attractive women, putting a man who wants an attractive wife, who is capable of sustainably commanding his attention, in the awkward and unfortunate position of having to look beyond churches to find one.
- Music is usually banal, mediocre, and uninspiring, and not conducive to worship or prayer.
- Discipleship and pastoral care are abysmal, nonexistent.
- They're abusive of time, energy, money, and people.

An irony I've discovered recently is that for the first time in my life, by not going to church on Sunday, I'm obeying the commandment to rest. In retrospect, I realize I was exhausting myself doing the church rigamaroll and being a church slave. It was a lot of work. It most certainly was not rest.

Be that as it may, I also find that if there is One True Church, it's the Orthodox Church, that I have to thank for my theological understanding. I've found it to be the most substantive and authentic of any church I've ever experienced, and I am sure that, while it may be encumbered by hatred and hoaxes, at its core, in its heart, it possesses the grace of God.

I will always respect it. I yearn to overcome somehow the concerns described herein, that I might one day rejoin it.

The Holy Spirit. I've come to realize that I don't know Jesus very well, and never will, because He lived 2,000 years ago. I can only know ABOUT Him second- and third-hand from what I read and learn from others.

He Himself knew this and told us so. That is why He heralded the Holy Spirit before He ascended. He left us, and the Father provided the Holy Spirit in His place. It says so right there in the Bible, as plain as the nose on your face (John 14).

He also warned us that many would claim falsely to know Him, even to go so far as not just knowing Him, but prophesying and casting out demons in His name (Matt. 7:21-23). To such as them He says, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

Orthodox Christians don't even call Him Jesus any more. In the present He's described as “The Son” or “The Logos” and is only described with the name Jesus historically. The Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, manifested Himself as the person Jesus for thirty-some years, two thousand years ago. Then, He was known as Jesus. But eternally – before and since His incarnation – He is the Logos, the Son. That is how I understand Him.

Yet people claim to know Him personally. I've learned not to trust such people. I've found they're usually liars or scoundrels, or people who've believed the lies of other scoundrels, and learned to relay them, like a weed or a cancer. This puts me in the awkward position of being at odds with almost all of Christendom.

By contrast, I do know the Holy Spirit first-hand. The Holy Spirit has been my source of guidance and inspiration, the catalyst of my conscience, the Still Small Voice, just as Jesus promised in John 14. I feel much more comfortable talking about the Holy Spirit than I feel talking about Jesus, because I KNOW the Holy Spirit while I only know ABOUT Jesus.

Jesus does not talk to me. I only read and hear about Him. But the Holy Spirit does.

Indeed, people who have Jesus on their lips constantly kind of creep me out. I think of them as Jesus Freaks or Jesus Zombies who personify Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ, therefore I no longer live. Jesus Christ lives in me."

They're not alive. The lights may be on, but nobody is home.

But those are Paul's words. That is Paul talking about himself, and nobody else is Paul but Paul. Anybody else who puts Paul's words into their own mouth is, as far as I am concerned, guilty of impersonation. It's very creepy to me.

I have found that professing Christians who do that are suffering from deeply troubling dissociative personality disorders. They've suffered a lot of pain, grief, and loss, and wearing a creepy Jesus Mask, being Creepy Jesus Zombies, is their way of bandaging a wound, of numbing their pain.

I have found that professing Christians who do that do not have personalities of their own. They can not be known. They can not be befriended. There is no "there" there. Behind the Jesus Mask and the Bible quotations is a frightful Pandora's Box, the contents of which are anybody's guess.

I don't feel safe around them, and I wouldn't trust them with anything or anyone I valued, especially my family, friends, and loved ones.

My latest experience of this happened earlier this year. On a Christian dating site I met a woman from a nearby city. Her profile picture was of her smile, of the lower part of her face – no eyes, just a nose and smiling mouth. And the text of her profile was all about Jesus. "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Three times, with exclamation points. There were other things about God, faith, family, it all looked very sweet, innocent, and pious.

We went on one date. I spent a day with her. She was not very transparent, she would not speak in her own words much. Anything I said, she would try to cross-reference with the Bible to validate, then speak to me in Bible quotations. And when she spoke, especially about Jesus, she got a far-off look in her eyes and looked up and off to the side, like liars do when they are lying.

I met her for breakfast at a midpoint between her city and mine and we spent three hours together at a restaurant. Then I escorted her back to her city and bought her dinner. I had to get home because my poor puppy dog had been cooped up all day in my apartment and the drive back was three hours. I explained this to her.

Outside of the restaurant I hugged her goodbye and prepared to leave . . . then I received a text from her disclosing her street address and inviting me to come to her house.

For what?

By the surreptitious way she did it, and the time of evening, I can only suppose that it was for a Jesus Zombie Booty Call.

I declined the invitation but thanked her for her address, noting that now I have a location where I can send flowers.

It turns out she was recently divorced and that she had created the dating profile immediately upon the finalization of her divorce, allowing herself no time to grieve or heal.

A few days later I wrote to her explaining how I believed she was in the very early stages of a 1-3 year grieving process, that I liked her very much but that I felt our timing was off and that I was going to leave her alone to give her time to grieve and heal.

So in this case, in her case, I believe we have a professing Christian using Christianity as a drug to numb her

pain and as a distraction from a grieving and healing process that she would rather avoid. I feel she was also using me as a distraction, so I put a stop to it as quickly, decisively, and kindly as I could.

The wounds are still there; the pain is still there; they are not healed; and the Holy Spirit is nowhere to be found. All the religious talk is about “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!”, a Person we can never know first-hand, and there’s no talk of the Person we CAN know first-hand, the Holy Spirit. Indeed, I find that such people are afraid of the Holy Spirit, like they’re afraid of ghosts: the Holy Ghost.

But I’m like the guys in the movie Ghostbusters. “I ain’t ‘fraid o’ no ghosts.” I know the Holy Spirit, and because I do, no other ghosts can touch me. I am completely undisturbed by any other paranormal phenomena.

Strangely, I hear very little mention of the Holy Spirit except in Pentecostal and Orthodox circles. Most everybody else is obsessed with Jesus. It seems kind of backward to me.

But I’m not Pentecostal – I think they’re sick – and ironically, thanks to the Holy Spirit, I’ve come to see that the Orthodox Church is riddled with hatred (antisemitism and old grudges that are baked into Hagiography and Liturgics) and hoaxes (Real Presence, Holy Fire in Jerusalem, Mary’s ever-virginity, etc.), which are certainly not of God.

God is not in the hatred or hoax business. He’s in the Love and Truth business. Everybody would agree about that.

So while Orthodox Christianity is as good as Christianity gets as far as I am concerned, I still find myself in several ways at odds with the Orthodox Church, BECAUSE of the Holy Spirit.

I don’t know what to do about any of this. I find myself bereft of a faith community, and at odds with The Orthodox Church over her hatred and hoaxes.

But I feel very peaceful and grateful that even in the worst of times, by personifying Goodness and Truth for us, thereby DEFINING “better” in the most personal and experiential terms through the actions of the Holy Spirit (what I’ve come to understand as Axiology), God enables us apophatically to feel, and find our way toward a better tomorrow.

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