

Course Description of the Master Module *Art and Spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Tradition*

VU University Amsterdam: Faculty of Theology, Amsterdam Centre for Eastern Orthodox Theology (ACEOT)

Period: 26 March – 18 June (period 5)

Credits: 3 ECTS (84 hours)

Level: Master

Lecturers:

- Revd. Dr. Michael Bakker (coordinator; m.bakker@vu.nl)
- Revd. Prof. Andrew Louth
- Aidan Hart, BA
- Revd. Dr. Ivan Moody
- Revd. Dr. Cyril Hovorun

Introduction

On the occasion of the exhibition *Splendour and Glory: Art of the Russian Orthodox Church* in Hermitage Amsterdam (19 March – 16 September 2011) a special lecture series will be held in the museum. The Amsterdam Centre for Eastern Orthodox Theology (ACEOT) of VU University Amsterdam organises this series of four times two academic lectures. The lectures are given on Saturdays from 13:30 to 16:00 hours (including a break with coffee and tea) on the following dates: 26 March, 16 April, 21 May and 18 June.

Students who have a valid Dutch student card may attend the whole series of lectures at a special price of € 10. The special admission cards are sold at the visitors/information desk in the museum.

Master students can obtain credits (3 ECTS), if they attend the lectures, do additional reading and write a 2500-word paper. The entry requirement is a bachelor degree in, for example, theology, art history or Russian. Please let the coordinator know beforehand that you intend to earn credits and thus write a paper. After the first two lectures on 26 March additional information will be given to students regarding the required literature (appr. 500 pages in total), subjects, deadlines etc.

Objectives of the course are:

- Students have general knowledge of the Russian Orthodox tradition
- They have more in-depth knowledge of the icons, music, liturgy and spirituality typical of this tradition
- They have proven to be able to conduct research into a specific subject, critically reflect on the relevant literature and write an academic paper.

Below follows a description of the specific lectures and the recommended literature.

26 March: General Introduction & introduction to the Russian Orthodox Tradition

Ia. General Introduction - Dr. Michael Bakker

After a general introduction to the course and information about the practical arrangements, the following subjects will be treated:

- The early church and the Eastern Orthodox Church
- The Roman Empire and Byzantium
- The Old (Church) Slavic language and Russian
- Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets
- The texts initially translated from Greek into Old Slavic
- Some samples of Slavic writing: inscriptions on icons

Literature:

- Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London: Penguin, 1997
- John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, Cambridge: CUP, 1981

Ib. Introduction to Russian Orthodoxy - Prof. Andrew Louth

The traditional date in the Christianization of Russia is 988, the year of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev. Vladimir received Christianity from the Byzantine Empire (traditionally, after investigating the religious beliefs and practices of neighbouring countries). By the tenth century, Byzantine Christianity was an elaborate construction of beliefs, practices both liturgical and ascetic, philosophy, art and culture, and everything that had come to be associated with the monastic life, which played an especial role in the Eastern Church. With the example of Bulgaria (and probably Serbia) – as well as more anciently Georgia – behind them, the Byzantines brought to Kiev Byzantine Christianity in a Slav dress (unlike the West, where Christianization entailed Latinization). This meant that there was what might be called a ‘linguistic filter’: the Slavs absorbed more readily aspects of Byzantine Christianity that did not need translation – the ceremony of the liturgy, the art of icons, music (though we know little about this), and the practice of monasticism – rather than the complexities of Byzantine theology and philosophy, with the result that Slav Orthodoxy had a different complexion from its parent Byzantine Orthodoxy. Within Slav Orthodoxy, icons and ceremonial, in particular, assumed greater significance than within Byzantine Orthodoxy, as the intellectual culture fell into the background. The sense that Slav Orthodoxy was dependent on Byzantine Orthodoxy remained significant, and led to the Nikonian reforms of the seventeenth century, when the Slavonic liturgical and iconographic traditions were adjusted to correspond with current Greek practice. Many refused to accept these changes, and became known as ‘Old Ritualists’ or ‘Old Believers’, a persecuted minority, whose preservation of ancient iconographic traditions is now greatly valued.

- John Fennell, *A History of the Russian Church to 1448*, London & New York: Longman, 1995
- Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998
- George P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 2 vols., Belmont MA: Nordland, 1975

16 April: Images & Icons

IIa. Images and Icons within Russian Orthodoxy – Prof. Andrew Louth

One of the features of Russian Orthodoxy that most strikes Westerners when they encounter Orthodoxy is the prominence of icons, or sacred images. The Russians inherited from Byzantine Orthodoxy a sense of the importance of images in worship, both public and private, that had been enhanced by the iconoclast controversy of the eighth to ninth centuries, and the final defeat of iconoclasm. This controversy, far more important in Byzantium than in the West, made icons a required aspect of Orthodox practice. It also involved the acceptance of an understanding of the place of religious images as ways of disclosing invisible realities, but also a way in which the material found an important place in religious practice, and indeed came to be held to be entailed by God's assumption of humanity in the Incarnation. Because of the 'linguistic filter', all of this became hugely important within the world of Slav Orthodoxy. Orthodox devotion revolved around icons, and, as in Byzantium, they played a role in the defence of the Orthodox nations against attack. Legends traced icons back to the time of Christ; the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God being claimed as the work of St Luke the Evangelist (a claim Byzantine had made for the Hodigitria icon of the Mother of God). Particular icons – especially of the Mother of God – were associated with different places and had their own cult. Icons also provided a way of linking the public worship of the Church with the private devotions of Orthodox Christians: homes came to have a small domestic shrine, the 'beautiful corner', *krasny ugol*.

- Viktor Nikitich Lazarev, *The Russian Icon. From its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997
- Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion. Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, London: Reaktion Books, 2002
- Lilia Evseyeva et al., *A History of Icon Painting: Sources, Traditions, Present Day*, Moscow: "Grand-Holding" Publishers, 2005
- Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei. The Byzantine Apologia of Icons*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990
- Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision. Essays on the Perception of Art*, London: Reaktion Books, 2002

Iib. The icon as a living tradition: Diversity within unity in Russian iconography – Aidan Hart

The icon tradition is rooted in timeless theological truths, which are summarized in the formula of St Athanasius the Great that God became man so that man, by grace, can become god. These truths have informed not only the use but also the style of Orthodox icons over the centuries. This unity of purpose and inspiration explains why we can so readily distinguish an icon from other types of painting of religious subjects.

And yet within this unity there is also great variety of style. The icon tradition is not static, as though the icon painter is restricted to precise copying from a set body of work. The realities and events that icons depict are so profound that no one culture, epoch or individual can express their meaning exhaustively. This is why a central tenant of Orthodox spirituality is that each culture should live and express life in Christ in its own unique way, whilst retaining unity of belief and sacrament with the whole Church. This enculturation is a natural continuation of Pentecost, where the twelve apostles preached the same Gospel but in different languages. At its conversion, for example, Russia adopted from of its parent Byzantine culture the forms of its church architecture, iconography and music. But very soon it adapted what it adopted. Architects transformed the round dome into the onion dome; Russian iconographers began to model their figures less than the Byzantines and instead concentrated on the contrast of flat areas of colour; and Znameniy chant grew out of Byzantine chant.

In this lecture we will first summarize the theological basis of the icon tradition – what is unchanging, and then consider some of the Russian icon schools, their characteristics and what may have produced their particular forms.

- Lilia Evseyeva et al., *A History of Icon Painting: Sources, Traditions, Present Day*, Moscow: “Grand-Holding” Publishers, 2005 (Russian edition in 2002). ISBN 0955008905. Covers the history, theology and some technique of icon painting.
- St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Image*, trans. by Andrew Louth. Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003. ISBN 0881412457. Seminal texts by the main defender of icons against the iconoclasts (eighth century).
- St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. by Catherin P. Roth. Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981. ISBN 0913836761. Like the above, a seminal primary text in defence of icons, written in the early ninth century.
- Egon Sendler, *The Icon: Image of the Invisible*. Torrance, California: Oakwood Publications, 1988. An excellent introduction to the theology, style, history, and technique on icon painting. Out of print but due to be reprinted.

21 May: Liturgy & Music

IIIa. The Place of the Liturgy in Orthodoxy – Prof. Andrew Louth

It is claimed by the *Russian Primary Chronicle* that it was the experience of the Divine Liturgy in the church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople that persuaded the ambassadors of Prince Vladimir to recommend the adoption of Orthodoxy: ‘we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth... We only know that there God dwells among men’. The experience of the Divine Liturgy remains central to Orthodox experience, not least Russian Orthodox experience. First of all, the liturgy takes place in a sacred space; the church building is divided by an iconostasis which separates the sanctuary (called the altar) from the nave, the clergy from the people. ‘Separates’ – but also links and unites: the deacon, in particular, passes between the nave and the altar, and in singing the litanies, carries the prayers of the people into the presence of God. Secondly, the differentiated space makes possible a movement of symbolism – from nave to altar, from earth to heaven. The movement of the liturgy – processions, incensing – draws together heaven and earth. There is a sense of rhythm about the liturgy, which one very soon picks up. The music – sung by human voices, without instruments; that is, by ‘instruments’ made by God in his image – the colour of the icons and the vestments, the splendour of the sacred vessels: in all of this, the material world is affirmed and offered to God. Thirdly, the splendour manifest in this way is the splendour of the Kingdom of God, of the Heavens, which is proclaimed by the priest at the beginning of the Liturgy – ‘Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ – and which recurs throughout the liturgy, until before Holy Communion, we beg to be ‘remembered in the Kingdom’ along with the repentant thief.

- Robert F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite, A Short History*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992
- Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy*, New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986
- Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy. The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite*, London: SPCK, 1989
- Hieromonk Gregory, *The Divine Liturgy, A Commentary in the Light of the Fathers*, Mount Athos: Cell of St John the Theologian, Koutloumousiou Monastery, 2009 (distribution outside Greece: orders@deniseharveypublisher.gr)
- Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*: in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, Classics of Western Spirituality, London: SPCK, 1985, pp. 181-225 (primary text)
- St Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984 (primary text)

IIIb. The Many Voices of Russia: A Survey of Russian Choral Music – Dr. Ivan Moody

This lecture presents a survey of the history of Russian polyphonic choral

music, from the earliest experiments at two-and three-part writing in the 17th century to the work of contemporary composers such as Dimitriev and Genin, and including the repertoires influence variously by Polish-Ukrainian music and German and Italian styles, the change in approach heralded by Tchaikovsky's Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, and the work of the "Moscow School" and the achievements of Rachmaninov.

- David Brown, *Tchaikovsky, A Biographical and Critical Study - To the Crisis 1840-1878*, London, 1992
- Carolyn C. Dunlop, *The Russian Chapel Choir 1796-1917*, Amsterdam 2000
- Johann von Gardner, trans. Vladimir Morosan, *Russian Church Singing vol. 1: Orthodox Worship and Hymnography*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980
- Johann von Gardner, trans. Vladimir Morosan, *Russian Church Singing vol. 2: History from the Origins to the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980
- Vladimir Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, Ann Arbor, 1986
- Milos Velimirovic, "Russian Chant" in Crocker, Richard and Hiley, David, eds: *New Oxford History of Music Vol. II: The Early Middle Ages to 1300*, Oxford, 1990

18 June: Monasticism & Spirituality

IVa Eastern Orthodox Monasticism: History and Ideals - Dr Cyril Hovorun

This lecture consists of an overview of Orthodox monasticism. The following subjects are treated:

- Judaism: Essenes
- Celibacy in the Gospels and the Early Church
- The Egyptian Desert, Palestine and Syria
- Mount Athos
- Monasticism in the Slavic world
- St Seraphim of Sarov
- The elders of Optina
- Contemporary Monasticism

Literature:

- A Monk of the Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality: an outline of the Orthodox ascetical and mystical tradition*, 2nd ed. Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, Chapter 1.
- Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, *The Inner Kingdom*, Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000, Chapter 7.
- Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford University Press, 2006, Introduction.

- J. Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaiite Mountain*, London: Ashgate, 2004, Chapters 1 & 6.
- Hilarion Alfeyev, *Saint Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford: OUP, 2000, Part I. Chapter 1 & Part II. Chapter X.
- D. Conomos, G. Speake (eds.), *Mount Athos, the Sacred Bridge: the spirituality of the Holy Mountain*, Peter Lang, 2005

IVb. Prayer and Hesychasm in the Orthodox Church- Prof. Andrew Louth

One of the features of Russian Orthodox Christianity has been the prominence of monasteries. Soon after the conversion of Russia there was founded the monastery of the Caves in Kiev; later on, there was established by St Sergei of Radonezh the famous monastery of the Trinity (now called the Sergei-Trinity Lavra) outside Moscow. Monasticism had been a feature of Christianity since the fourth century. At the heart of monasticism is commitment to the life of prayer, and in the earliest texts onwards we find discussions about how to maintain a life of continual prayer. In fourteenth-century Byzantium there arose a controversy about the so-called hesychast monks ('hesychast' being derived from the Greek *hesychia*, quietness) about claims that, through continual prayer, there could be attained the vision of the uncreated light of the Godhead itself. Hesychast monks were important in the bringing of Christianity to the region around Moscow in the fourteenth century (the circle of St Sergei). The notion of contemplating the uncreated light of the Godhead is manifest in iconography, especially of the Transfiguration of the Lord, about this time. The hesychast monks came to be associated with a practice of inward prayer ('prayer of the heart') achieved by practice of the Jesus Prayer ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner'): a prayer that became very popular in nineteenth-century Russia, as the famous book, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, bears witness.

- G.P.Fedotov (ed.), *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1952 (now published by SVSP, Crestwood NY)
- A Monk of the Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality*, London: SPCK, 1968 (2nd ed. Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978)
- Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart. An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality*, Torrance, California: Oakwood Publications, 1992 (includes 'The Power of the Name: the Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality', by Bishop [now Metropolitan] Kallistos of Diokleia, also available separately as Fairacres Publication 43 [revised ed., 1977])
- Igumen Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer. An Orthodox Anthology*, London: Faber & Faber, 1966 (often reprinted): contains an anthology largely from the writings of St Feofan (Theophan) the Recluse and St Ignaty Brianchaninov
- *The Pilgrim's Tale*, edited with an introduction by Aleksei Pentkovsky, Classics of Western Spirituality, Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1999 [A fresh translation of the work usually known in English as *The Way of*

the Pilgrim, with an important introduction on the genesis and context of the work]