

## Amsterdam Lectures 2011-12:

### Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Personal Introduction

#### Lecture IX: Where are we going? The Last Things and Eternal Life.

*Eschatology*: the Four Last Things – Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell.

*Orthodox beliefs*:

- Little explicitly defined: the Creed speaks of the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the life of the age to come
- And yet: Orthodox beliefs about the afterlife are highly developed, its sources the Liturgy and the lives of the Saints
- Two dangers (Bulgakov): rationalism, anthropocentrism

*Eucharist and eschatology*

- ‘Until he comes’
- Anticipation of the Kingdom of God and the Celestial Banquet
- Last things not remote events, but experienced in the Liturgy
- Church a community embracing both living and departed

*Universal Eschatology*

- Expectation of the Church as a whole: the Church looking for the *Parousia*, the Second Coming of Christ: ‘Thy kingdom come!’
- Implications now, both moral, ascetical and political, of our working towards the coming of the Kingdom
- Glory: cosmic transformation with the coming of the Kingdom
- Role of the Mother of God at the Last Judgment: not one to be judged, but pleading for sinners
- Her own manifestations to the saints, foreshadowings of the Second Coming of Christ

*Individual Eschatology*

Fate of the individual soul after death:

- Role of liturgical services, especially panikhidas (or the ‘Trisagion for the departed) on the third, ninth and fortieth days after death
- ‘Toll houses’ (*telonia*)
- The core of Orthodox belief: that the departed are supported by the prayers of Christians, that the communion of living and departed has not been severed by death, and the hope of ‘a place of light, a place of refreshment, a place of repose, whence pain, sorrow and sighing have fled away’ for the departed

### *Problems in eschatology*

- The notion of eternal damnation and the nature of judgment
  - God's love and human freedom
  - Nature of judgment, and punishment: For what is punishment, save the privation of what one longs for? According, therefore, to the analogy of desire, those who long for God rejoice, and those who long for sin are punished. And those who obtain what they long for rejoice in accordance with the measure of their longing, and those who fail suffer in accordance with the measure of their longing (John Damascene, *Against the Manichees* 75)
- Purgatory?
  - Developed in Western theology in 12<sup>th</sup> century, encountered by Orthodox in union negotiations with the West
  - Particular judgment
  - A 'place', like Heaven and Hell?
  - A place of expiatory suffering?
  - Purgatorial Fire?
- Nature of the Resurrection Body
  - Spiritual body, body of glory?
  - Body: part of what we are
- Universal Salvation?
  - Origen and his condemnation
  - Motives: philosophical tidiness or inexhaustible love of God (cf. Pascal: Christ remaining on the Cross until the last soul has acknowledged him)
  - Evidence for belief in God's indefeasible love in the Eastern tradition (Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, Isaac the Syrian, Kneeling prayers at Pentecost)
    - In modern Orthodox thought: Olivier Clément, Kallistos Ware, Hilarion Alfeyev
    - St Silouan's conversation with another Athonite elder:

'God will punish all atheists. They will burn in everlasting fire.'

Obviously upset, the Staretz [Silouan] said,

'Tell me, supposing you went to paradise, and there looked down and saw somebody burning in hell-fire—would you feel happy?'

'It can't be helped. It would be their own fault,' said the hermit.

The Staretz answered with a sorrowful countenance:

'Love could not bear that,' he said. 'We must pray for all.'