

Lecture 1

Introduction - Orthodox World View

This course is to give one a perspective on those things which are happening in the world today which we come across in our daily experience, everyone of which has a philosophical undercurrent. If one goes to any big city one will find that there are churches of every description and they all offer a different view, a different doctrine. The Catholics will tell you one thing, and the Mormons will give you something else; the Seventh-Day Adventists will give you something else quite definite; the Fundamentalists will say something else; the liberal Protestants will give you another current; the Theosophists will give you something else. And a person in search of truth goes perhaps from one to the other looking for the truth. Quite often people find, "Aha, I found it!" -- something clicks. They find that Mormonism has the answer; or else they are very impressed by a speaker who knows how to get in touch with, well, the contemporary people.

There was one, for example, Alan Watts, who died just recently. I was a student of his. In fact, I was extremely impressed because I was an undergraduate looking for some kind of truth in philosophy, not finding it. I was very bored by Western philosophy, and all of a sudden he comes and gives a lecture on Zen Buddhism. And [I thought] that is the answer because it's not a philosophy; it's just the way things are. He said it's not the looking at the glass of water and defining it but -- and he takes the glass of water and pours it out on the stage, very dramatic -- that's what Zen Buddhism is, it's the answer; it's "IT."

Of course throughout the perspective of many years, we can see that this poor man is simply a very clever man. He was very much in contact with the way people were thinking; and he got onto one little sort of channel and followed it all the way and made his career out of it, made lots of money, got people as his sort of followers; and simply taught them. There were lots of things he said which were true, especially the negative part about what's wrong with contemporary civilization. But in the end he just gave them some pitiful little shred of truth combined with a lot of his own opinions and in the end a great system of lies; and he destroyed souls including his own undoubtedly.

But Orthodoxy is not like one of these currents, systems of thought; it is not simply one among many. And that is why some might think, especially the newly converted will say, "Why haven't I heard of Orthodoxy before, why isn't it on television? Why can't I hear it? Why aren't there radio programs and newspaper articles and everything like that?" Well, if you look at the newspaper articles which there are about Orthodoxy, which happened occasionally -- like when the weeping icons came to some cities, there were articles; or when even when Archbishop John died in San Francisco there was an article, various sort of events which stand out, become a part of the history, the whole event in the city, and look at what kind of newspaper articles are written -- the view of Orthodoxy there is adapted to the readers. That is, this is a sect which is very colorful; it is like the Mormons or the Seventh-Day Adventists or something else. It's different, it's colorful. And if you read descriptions of the Pascha services, they will always say something like, "Amid clouds of incense and flowing robes and long beards," and everything which is exotic and different from what the ordinary the American sees; that's about what Orthodoxy is for them. That is, in that kind of view Orthodoxy is some kind of a Christian philosophy which is mainly characterized by some kind of exoticness. If you want the exotic, you go there. But that is not what Orthodoxy is.

If you give your heart and soul to one of these teachings, the various Christian or non-Christian teachings, you will get from your sect -- because all of them are sects, including Roman Catholicism -- you will get from your sect what they think probably is a philosophy of life, they will give you the answers to many questions. They will give you answers which you will accept

if you are on their wave-length -- usually depends upon your background, your psychological strivings, how much education you've had. There're all kinds of factors which enter in, which make you click, respond to the particular sect.

Once you give your heart and soul there, or at least part of them, you will begin to accept whatever they teach you, and form yourself on that basis. And then when somebody comes to you and asks why you believe, you give answers the way you've learned them. And a person from outside will look at those answers and be astonished at how a person can give such answers. It's obvious they are a "party line." They will quote you Scriptures in accordance with a interpretation which seems very far-fetched, and they will think that this is logical, the ordinary explanation. You talk to the Seventh Day Adventists who are our neighbors here, and you begin to ask them what they believe, and why they believe, and it turns out that the commandment about Saturday is the most important of all the commandments, the one that distinguishes the real people, the real church from everybody else. How can they get that, and how can they explain the fact that Christ always appears on Sunday, the first day of the week? He rose from the dead on Sunday. After His Resurrection, it was early on Sunday -- how it is that the Church didn't believe this for two thousand years? And they will even tell you that there were Adventists and the Seventh Day people all the time. And they can even build up some kind of tradition for it, some kind of [saying something like], "Well, maybe this sect did exist throughout the centuries." But what they will give you will not be a world-view, a philosophy. What they will give you will be a *sectarian* view.

A sectarian view is, like the name implies, sect: it is something which is cut off. They will give you a piece of reality according to their interpretation. When it comes to any complicated issue, they will give you a very simple answer which is not satisfying to somebody who's capable of thinking very much. They will, if anything comes up which seems to disprove their position or make it foggy, they will say, "Devil's work" or, "That's evil," or [if] you ask them how they interpret the Scriptures, "literally." They will give you extremely simple answers to questions which are very complicated. And you have to already be in that channel in order to accept it. And you will become -- as we indeed associate with sectarians -- some kind of group cut off from the rest of society, keeping your own little view point, preserving yourself from everybody else, having your own schools and thinking that you are in the truth. But you will not have some kind of philosophy, world-view, which will enable you really to understand what goes on in the world, to explain those phenomena around you in a way which does not do violence to reason, is not just an interpretation according to a very whimsical interpretation of Scripture, but is something which is solidly based, and is perhaps not convincing right off to everybody, but at least respects reason which God gave us, and does not have an overly-simplified view of whatever is happening in the world, [a view that] whoever does not agree with my philosophy is either a devil or a person who's completely deceived.

On the contrary, many things which happen in the world have their power: ideas have their power, political systems have their power, even art movements have their power because there is some seed of truth in them. And if you don't understand what that seed of truth is and how it got mixed up with error, what in it is genuine, what in it is fake, you will not be able to be living in the world today; and a Christian lives in the world. You must understand, that a sectarian saves himself, and he saves anybody he can keep away from reality, keep in his little corner some place. But if that person goes out in the world and starts asking questions, he loses his sectarian views because it's not plausible. He has to keep his sectarian faith in a little corner someplace, a piece of society.

An Orthodox world-view is not like that. Today, the true Orthodox Christians are very few. And therefore we are called by some, like Schmemmann and the people who are up-to-date and want to be in step with Catholics and Protestants and

contemporary thought -- they will say we are a sect. Therefore we should know, are we a sect or not? If we have our Orthodoxy as something like Mormonism, that is, if we know the catechism, know the dogmas, and can expound the official teaching of faith, and everything outside of that is something hazy or given an over-simplified answer, then we are in danger of this very sectarianism. Because then Orthodoxy will be for us something which is very narrow. The path of salvation is very narrow, but Orthodoxy alone of all the religions is God's religion; and therefore it does not deny those faculties which God gave us, especially reason which is the faculty by which we understand Truth.

And so it is that Orthodoxy is the one religion because it is the true religion, God's religion, which has the answer to all, which understands everything which happens in the world. That does not mean that we have necessarily an absolute answer to everything, because that's also a characteristic of sectarian mentality: they have an instant answer and they give it to you very simplified and there's no argument. With Orthodoxy, rather, we open our minds because since we have the truth we are not afraid of whatever science may say, or philosophy or writers, artists. We are not afraid of them; we can look at them with our Orthodox understanding and with an open mind and with an open heart to see what really is positive and understand whether they are valuable or not valuable, whether they are beneficial, whether they are harmful.

And so we can look around us at any phenomenon. The sectarian will look around him and say, "That's evil: cut it off." And with many things, of course, you have to do that, because there are things which, now especially, are flagrantly inciting to sin. But even in turning away from them and not exposing ourselves to temptation as much as possible, we have to understand why they are that way, why, what is happening.

There are things which do not have an immediate answer to a person who has a Orthodox world-view. There are certain things which you cannot explain immediately just on the basis of knowing about God, the Holy Trinity and the basic teaching of the Church. For example, it's characteristic now that our times is called "post-Christian" times; it's also post-philosophical times, because there was a time when philosophy was very much alive in the West. In fact, [Ivan] Kireyevsky the nineteenth-century Russian writer says that up until the early to middle nineteenth century, philosophy was *the* current, the main current of European thought, because what the philosophers were thinking was the thing which was most exciting, most interesting, and was the thing which then went into the people. In a very short time, whatever one person had thought through in his cabinet some place in a city in Germany would, within a few years, already become the property of the whole people -- until philosophy came to the end of its rope, which was in about the middle of the nineteenth century when Kireyevsky was alive. Because it so happened that after destroying the outer universe with the philosophy of Hume and Berkeley and so forth, the philosophy, in order to find some foundation on which to base itself, finally settled on Kant who said that all there is, is the individual, and I make my own universe; we don't know what the thing in itself is, what is out there; but I am the one who puts everything in order, and if I understand myself, I can make sense of the universe. But this amounts to a very dangerous subjectivism, because in this system there's no room for truth any more. There's just room for some kind of conventional view of things. And after him there came fantastic people, Fichte and this Max Stirner and others who said that there's nothing in the world but me, the "I" alone in the universe. And even Stirner came to the point where he said, "I am alone in the universe trampling on the tomb of humanity," something to that effect. Which is sort of the logical conclusion of people who released thought from any kind of restraints and decided to find where they could think things through to. And when you think things through without any kind of traditional basis, you come to a dead end.

After that, as Kireyevsky says, the main current of the West entered politics. And that's why especially after 1848, and beginning in the French Revolution, and especially strong after 1848, the main thing that was happening in European and world history is the progress of the revolution, which we will discuss later on.

So a person who wants to have an Orthodox understanding must be prepared to look with an open mind and heart at what goes on in the world and use his mind to find out what is responsible for it, what underlies this. And we must do that now that the age of philosophy is passed and the views are very practically oriented. It's amazing how even in universities, the mind is not used at all. Art criticism becomes just an excuse for your subjective taste; there's no objective criteria left at all. In this kind of world, new philosophical beliefs and very dangerous ideas are presented no longer as some kind of truth which you can easily understand as being false, but they are presented as something else.

For example, people who take drugs will tell you: "I am uncovering new areas of reality. Are you against new areas of reality? Are you against the deeper area of the mind?" Actually, Holy Fathers talk about [the] deeper area of the mind -- and what are you going to say to that? He's not giving you some kind of new truth to which you can say, "That's false"; he's giving you some kind of new outlook. And you have to stop and think, well, what does this mean? What is the deeper area of the mind? Who is there, what's going on? You have to be able to evaluate what is behind this kind of statement and whether, in fact, it's a very practical thing because a person might come to you and say: "Should I stop this or go on with it?" or "Is this evil?" And you have to know why. If you just say, "No, drugs are evil, that's out," then he very likely will not be convinced, because somebody else will give him a very plausible excuse. You have to tell him -- 'course you have to tell him, "You better stop because that's very dangerous"; but [you] also have to be able to say, if you have a complete philosophy of life, *why* this is not right and where it's going to lead you.

There are also many kinds of advances in science to which there are hooked up philosophical views. For example, evolution, of course, is a big one; and it's a very complicated thing to which you do not immediately get an answer. A sectarian will say, "Well, it's against Genesis; it's against the literal interpretation." And that's very easy to just pick to pieces because if you interpret Genesis absolutely literally, like they would like to, you come to ridiculous absurdities.

Or, also there's such a thing as the idea that now we are able to govern our own future. Therefore, we will determine in test-tubes whether a child is going to be male or female and give him the brains of Einstein or something like that. You have to know if this is good or bad. What's going on? On what basis can I criticize this?

And, of course, it's very important to be able to see through what goes on in the political world because in free societies people go and vote. You have to know what value is voting or what is the whole thing behind politics. Is it worth while taking part in this? Is this good, evil? Let's have some kind of view of it. The same way with music and art -- music especially since it's so all-pervading in society; you go to supermarket and you get music. There's a whole philosophy in back of why you get the kind of music you do in the supermarket; and you have to understand what this music is trying to do to you, what is back of it. There's a whole philosophy to it.

If you ask a sectarian to give you a world-view, a whole overview of what's happening in the world, they will, again, give you a very narrow thing which has lots of points of truth in it because they read the Scriptures; and they can tell you about the end of the world, the Apocalypse, Antichrist, and give you even a plausible view of what's going on in the world. And they can tell

you that....

There's this thing called *The Plain Truth*, this magazine which -- he says, "It's plain truth. I discovered the plain truth which was hidden for two thousand years. I discovered it, sitting down in my closet and thinking it through, and nobody else thinks these things through except me. And here it is. This is where it is, just plain and simple." And he gives you a lot of hogwash, having his subjective view of things, where he can present this where it's just "plain and simple," and that's the way it is. And millions of people follow him; not all of them are his actual [followers], part of his cult, but many people take it very seriously and think it makes very great sense. And he will tell you all kinds of things: that Christ died on Wednesday and was resurrected on Saturday, according to deductions from everything -- even though it says in the Scripture "early on the first day of the week." He has an explanation to explain that away, and how it was really not Friday, but Wednesday, and how to account for three days -- not the third day, but three days, seventy-two hours. And, well, he gives you all kinds of fantastic things like that, mixed in with all kinds of true things. And if you are not capable of discerning, you can get into all kinds of trouble. Even our sectarians look very much to him because they have a very similar outlook, they are the Seventh Day Adventists. And they will tell you that he talks about the -- I forget what he calls it -- but after the first sixty years or something of this era, some thirty years after the Resurrection of Christ, there is the "missing century" or something like that. All of a sudden truth went out, underground or away or something. It didn't come back again until this Armstrong appeared.

And the same thing is [true] with other sectarians: Ellen White has the same kind of philosophy. There are different varieties of it. Some will say that it was Constantine who did the bad things. Usually they date it much earlier so they don't have to accept anything that comes after that. And they can't explain very well how it is that it was a Council of the Church in the second, early third century that determined the canon of Scripture. So you have to get people to understand how a Council could determine that, if the Council was already in an apostate state. But they accept that decree of the Council. It's very interesting, you can find it very illogical about that.

But for us, this is not some kind of very two-dimensional, simple thing to understand what goes on in the world. So, we must understand first of all what is world history, what are the forces that shape world history. And that is very simple, basically, because there is a God and there is the devil; and world history goes on between these two adversaries. And man, man's heart is the field on which it is played out.

If you read the Old Testament, you will find a remarkable history which is different from the history of any other country. In other countries there are rulers [who] rise and fall: there is tyranny, there are democratic paradises, there are wars, sometimes the righteous triumph, sometimes the unrighteous triumph; and the whole of history is extremely skeptical. Historians will tell you their chronicle of crimes and savagery -- and no meaning. And what happens to come out is some chance event which no one can see any meaning for. But in the History of Israel we see a very deep thing which is the history of the chosen people of God which is now following God's commandments, and now falling away; and its history depends upon how it is, whether it's following God or falling away from Him. It becomes very complicated when they are taken away from Egypt into the wilderness, and they are going at a very short distance away - which now you can do in a day and about a week, and then you could do it in a week or two -- and they spent forty years in the wilderness and went through all kinds of adventures because they were wavering between right belief in God and falling away from Him, to such an extent that when Moses was gone for a short time to the mount to receive the commandments of God and meet God Himself, the people were worshipping a golden calf.

The whole history of Israel is this history between belief and unbelief, between following God and turning away from God. And the history of Israel becomes in the New Testament the history of the Church, the new Israel. And the history of humanity from the time Christ came to earth until now is the history of the Church and of those peoples who either come to the Church or fight against the Church, or come to the Church and fall away from it. World history, from that time to this, makes sense only if you understand there is some plan going on, which is the plan of God for the salvation of men. And you have to have a clear understanding of Christianity, of what Orthodoxy is, what salvation is in order to understand how this plan is manifested in history.

The history of mankind for the first millennium of the Christian era is the history of the spread of the Gospel to various lands. Some of them accepted, some with great readiness, some less readily. Usually the simple peoples accept much more readily. And sometimes temptations come, heresies come, which are the tares sown by the devil to upset people, bring them away from the truth. And therefore we have the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers to teach us what is the right approach to truth and what is the wrong. And when there came dangerous errors, heresies, the Church condemned them. And those who were clinging to those errors against the Church were anathematized, and they went out from the Church. So very early there are groups, heresies which broke away from the Church, but the Church itself was the main group which survived even though at times it was reduced to very small numbers because of heresies. Always it came back, and for the first millennium it was the dominant belief in peoples from Byzantium all the way to Britain, and eastern -- not so strong. In the East the peoples are more sophisticated, more philosophical; they had their own beliefs; it's much more difficult to get through to them. The simple peoples accepted much more readily.

And then there was a very important event happening which determines the history of the next thousand years, but it gives a direction to it. Because, well, to understand what this is, we should look at our situation today.

Orthodoxy, according to an objective observer looking at it, is one view among many; it's a minority view and it is very much against the spirit of the times. That's why these Schmemmanns and so forth are trying to update it, bring it back into the main current so they will not be laughed at. It is something which is very much out-of-date, it makes no sense in terms of pluralism or being at home with other faiths, and simply, it is not credible. There are many other faiths which, because they are more adapted to the times, seem much more credible, when a Catholic can get along with a up-to-date Lutheran or a Baptist or even a fundamentalist much better than he can with a genuine Orthodox Christian because they have much more in common. Kalomiros notes that Orthodoxy is distinguished from all these Westerners because they all have the same background, the same formation. But Orthodoxy is different from all of them. It stands against all of them, because all the rest of them -- even though they are opposed to each other -- stand together because they are formed from the *same mentality*, the Western mentality.

The Western mentality was once Orthodox. And therefore we look at the whole history of the West of the last thousand years, which seems not to have contact with Orthodoxy. We look at art and from the very beginning, there's a remnant of iconographic style, especially in Italy, but then very quickly it's lost. And Western art is something quite autonomous, and we have no contact with it in Orthodoxy, and we can't understand[? tape unclear] that there seems to be anything in common. Or, music, well, we Orthodox know our Church music. The West had a great development of secular music, sometimes religious music, but it's not that same thing as we would call religious music.

We have the history of the rise and fall of nations, of monarchies, of the principle of monarchy, of the principle of

democracy, all different political institutions, the history of Western philosophy from one system to the other. And all these manifestations of the life of Western man for a thousand years seem to have no common point with Orthodoxy. And therefore, how can we understand those things on the basis of an Orthodox point of view? What is in back of them? And this is where this important thing comes in that happened a thousand years ago, which is the Schism of the Church of Rome.

Many people in analyzing what goes on in the world today will go back to the Enlightenment period, to the French Revolution. And beyond that you can go back to the rise of science, the Renaissance, the Reformation. That seems to be more the beginning of modern times. People who think a little more deeply will go back further than that; and they will find that even at the end of the Middle Ages there are many currents and anomalies and so forth that were leading away from the Catholic synthesis, the Scholastic synthesis of the thirteenth century. But we have to go back further than that because, if you go back even then to the thirteenth century or even the twelfth century, you see something which is still quite foreign to Orthodoxy.

These Scholastic philosophers are quite different from Orthodox theologians. The art even of that time, Giotto, if you look at the paintings of Giotto who is supposed to be really primitive, as primitive as you can get almost in the West, you will see that the principles by which he paints are totally foreign to Orthodoxy, he introduces.... He paints many pictures of Francis of Assisi and introduces a element of drama, of quaintness, of cuteness, which, of course, a person educated by icons will look at it and say, "This is not serious; this is some kind of folk art or something, it's not serious." But Giotto is an artist in the best Western tradition, very much appreciated for his primitivity and closeness to Byzantium tradition and everything else. But already this anecdotal, unserious feeling of his makes him totally foreign to Orthodox icons.

And, of course, the same way with Saints; they already -- the "Western Saints" they're called -- are very different from Orthodox Saints. Already there's something entered in. It's very interesting, there's a Catholic ecumenist, Dominican, Yves Congar, who wrote a book in 1954 called *Nine Hundred Years After* about the Schism of 1054; and he said it is really unfortunate that the Orthodox Church broke away from Rome at that time, or vice versa, however he says,(tape break)

...the writings of Kireyevsky, who himself went through Western wisdom, rejected it, found Orthodoxy, and then came back, not to be Orthodox as against the world without understanding, but he found in Orthodoxy the key to understand the history of the West, and the understanding of what is happening in the West.

1. Source for this? Cf. *The Ego and His Own*, Max Stirner, "My concern is neither the Godly nor the Human, is not the True, the Good, the Right, the Free, etc., but simply my own self, and it is not general, it is individual. For me there is nothing above myself." Quoted in *The Great Quotations*, comp. by Georges Seldes, Pocket Books, 1967, p. 859.

2. Armstrong, Herbert W., *The Early Writings of Herbert W. Armstrong*, Richard C. Nickels, ed., Giving and Sharing, Neck City, Missouri, 1996, p. 140, quoting from *The United States in Prophecy*, 1945: "Whether skeptic, atheist, church member or Spirit-filled Christian, you will find here an amazing truth, long hidden. It is startling revelation. While condensed and brief, it is plain and simple, understandable, and a truth that stands PROVED. No story of fiction was so strange, so absorbing, so packed with suspense, as this gripping story of the Bible." P. 163: "This disclosure is so amazing, so different from the common conception, you probably did not really grasp it all the first reading. Much in the early pages will take on a different light when reread.... It will become twice as interesting, twice and REAL!"

3. Ibid., p. 179, quoting from *The Plain Truth* 1934 editorial: "The real TRUTH is simple and plain, not hard and difficult."

4. Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

5. Armstrong, *Early Writings*, "Which Day is the Sabbath of the New Testament?" p. 49.

6. Congar, Yves, *Nine Hundred Years After*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1959.

7. Not an exact quote, but a paraphrase of the whole theme of Congar's book.