

Lecture 2

The Middle Ages

Now begins a series of lectures on the intellectual history of the modern age, that is, from the time of the Schism of Rome. This will not actually be a history of the intellectual currents. It will be a noting of the tendencies and movements which are of historical significance, which are symptomatic of the spirit of the age and point to future developments. We will try to distinguish the essential points from incidental ones, that is, the features which are characteristic of the underlying philosophy of the times which endure from age to age, from other views which simply depend on passing events. For example, we are not interested that some of the Franciscan spirituals thought that Frederick II was Antichrist or the world would end in 1260, or that in the nineteenth century William Miller thought the end of the world would occur on a certain day in 1844; but the chiliastic views which underlie these very foolish views *are* what we will be discussing and talking about, because these are the views which help to determine our outlook today.

I will repeat something I said in the introductory lecture that the reason we are doing this is not just to have a view of what is true and what is false, and throw out everything which is false and keep everything which is true, because everything I'm going to be talking about is false. But it will be extremely important for us to understand why it is false and how it went away from the truth. If we understand that, we have some idea of what goes on in the world today, and what is the intellectual structure against which we must fight.

Although, while saying that everything I'm going to talk about is false, I mean it's false from the strictly Orthodox point of view. There, the whole, of course, is relative compared with what happens in the world today. All of these movements we talk about -- Thomas Aquinas to Medieval art, to European Renaissance art and so forth -- they all are very much more valuable than anything that has been happening in the world today. Nonetheless, there is a whole underlying world-view which produced these things, and we can see how it was departing from Orthodoxy.

The history of the West from the Schism of Rome is a logical and coherent whole, and the views which govern mankind today are a direct result of the views held in the thirteenth century. And now that the Western philosophy dominates the entire world, there is no other philosophy except the Orthodox Christian philosophy which has any strength to it, because all civilizations have been overwhelmed by the West, this means that what happened in the West in these last nine hundred years is the key to understanding what is happening in the whole world today.

The very term "Middle Ages" is an interesting one because it exists only in the West. All other civilizations, whether Christian, such as Byzantium or Russian, or non-Christian, such as the Chinese or Indian, can be divided into two periods, that is, the ancient period when these civilizations were governed by their own native philosophy, world-view, tradition, and the modern period when they became overwhelmed by the West. And there's no noticeable shading from one to the other. It's merely a matter of one being overwhelmed by the other.

But in the West, something special happened in the period called the Middle Ages, which is the transition between antiquity, that is, Christian antiquity, and the modern age. And the study of what happened when these changes were occurring, especially around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, gives the key to what is happening in the present time. And we will try to see now how the modern world-view developed out of Orthodoxy, out of Christianity.

The root of the whole of modern history lies, as we have said, in the Schism of the Church of Rome, about which Ivan

Kireyevsky speaks very nicely because, having himself been a son of the West and gone to Germany to study with the most advanced philosophers, Hegel and Schelling, he was thoroughly penetrated with the Western spirit, and then became thoroughly converted to Orthodoxy, and therefore saw that these two things cannot be put together. And he wanted to find out why they are different and what is the answer in one's soul, what one has to choose.

So he says, first of all, that of course Rome was once a part of the universal Church of Christ, and throughout the early centuries there's no doubt the Roman Patriarchate is a perfectly legitimate Orthodox patriarchate, and even has a primacy of honor which is the same as the Patriarch of Constantinople had until recent times, and would have today if he were still Orthodox, which does not mean that he is some kind of Pope, but only that he is the chief among equals; that is, he presides over meetings of bishops and so forth.

But, as Kireyevsky says, now I quote: "Each patriarchate, each tribe, each country in the Christian world has not ceased to preserve its own characteristic features while at the same time participating in the common unity of the whole Church. Each people, as a result of local, tribal or historical circumstances, has developed in itself some one aspect of mental activity, so that it is quite natural that in its spiritual life and in the writings of its theologians it should hold to this same special characteristic, however enlightened by a higher consciousness," that is, the world-view of Orthodoxy. "Thus the theological writers of the Syrian lands turn their attention chiefly it seems to the inward contemplative life detached from this world. The Roman theologians, on the other hand, were especially occupied with aspects of practical activity and the logical connection of concepts. But the spiritual writers of enlightened Byzantium, more than the others, were interested in the relationship of Christianity to the separate sciences which flourished around it, and at first made war against it, but then submitted to it."

And now he speaks in particular of the West: "It seems that the distinguishing feature of the Roman mind is precisely a conviction that outward rationalism outweighs the inward essence of things. Among all the features of the Roman man and all of the windings of his activities of intellect and soul, we see a single common feature, that the outward order of his logical concepts was for him more real than reality itself, and that the inward balance of his existence was known by him only in the balance of his rational conceptions or outward formal activity."

Then he speaks in particular of Blessed Augustine: "No single ancient or modern Father of the Church showed such love for the logical chain of truths as Blessed Augustine.... Certain of his works are, as it were, a single iron chain of syllogisms, inseparably joined link to link. Perhaps because of this he is sometimes carried too far away, not noticing the inward one-sidedness of this thinking because of its outward order; so much so that, in the last years of his life, he himself had to write refutations of some of his earlier statements."

And we know, of course, that Augustine did go off on the question of free will because he himself felt so strongly the action of grace in his conversion that he did not fully appreciate the Orthodox Fathers' patristic teaching on free will which John Cassian in the West did appreciate and taught.

Again Kireyevsky says: "Since the Roman mind's special attachment to the outward chain of concepts was not without danger to the Roman theologians, even when the Roman Church was still a living part of the Ecumenical Church, when the common consciousness of the whole Orthodox world restrained each special characteristic in a lawful balance, it is understandable that after Rome separated from the Orthodox Church, this particular trait became decisive and dominant in the quality of the teachings of Roman theologians. It may even be that this attachment to rationality, this excessive inclination

towards the outward thinking of concepts, was one of the chief reasons for the very falling away of Rome. In any case, the pretext for the falling away is not subject to doubt. The Latin Church added a dogma to the original symbol of faith, the Creed: an addition which was contrary to ancient tradition in the common consciousness of the Church and was justified solely by the logical deductions of Western theologians."

And again he says, "It is quite clear to us why Western theologians with all of their logical scrupulousness could not see the unity of the Church in any other way but through the outward unity of the episcopate." End of the quote from him.

Now again, he talks about another point: "And this also explains why they could assign an essential worthiness to the outward works of a man; why, when a soul was inwardly prepared but had an insufficiency of outward works, they could conceive of no other means of his salvation than a definite period of purgatory; why, finally, they could assign to certain men even an excess of worthy outward deeds and give this worthiness to those who had insufficient outward deeds." This means the whole Latin system of indulgences and the supererogatory works of the saints of which there is a whole treasury of good deeds, which are added up like in a bank, and when they have too many for their salvation, they spill them out and the Pope distributes to other people, in a very legalistic way.

"When Rome separated from the Ecumenical Church, the Christianity of the West received into itself the embryo of that principle which was the common feature of the whole of Greco-pagan development: the principle of rationalism. The Roman Church separated from the Eastern Church by changing certain dogmas which had existed in the tradition of all of Christianity, for other dogmas which were the result of mere logical deductions."

The result is the Middle Ages, that is, Scholasticism. And about this Kireyevsky says, "Such an endless wearying play of conceptions for the duration of seven hundred years. This useless kaleidoscope of abstract categories which ceaselessly whirled before the mental gaze inevitably had to produce a general blindness towards those living convictions which lie above the sphere of reason and logic. For a man ascends to convictions not by the path of syllogisms; but, on the contrary, when he strives to found his convictions upon syllogistic deductions, he only distorts their truth if he does not annihilate them altogether. And thus, the Western Church, even in the ninth century sowed within itself the inevitable seed of the Reformation which placed this same Church before the judgment of this same logical reason which the Roman Church had itself exalted. Even a thinking man could already see Luther behind Pope Nicholas I," the Pope who was excommunicating St. Photius, and pretending to be the head of the Church in the later sense of the Popes. "Just as in the words of Roman Catholics, a thinking man of the sixteenth century could foresee behind Luther the Protestant rationalists of the nineteenth century."

"The Roman Church fell away from the truth only because it wished to introduce into the faith new dogmas unknown to Church tradition and begotten by the accidental conclusions of Western logic. From this there developed Scholastic philosophy within the framework of faith, then a reformation in the faith, and finally philosophy *outside* the faith. The first rationalists were the Scholastics; one might say the ninth and the last rationalists are the Hegelians of his day, one might say that nineteenth century Europe finished the cycle of its development which had begun in the ninth."

That gives a very precise view which is a very plausible explanation of the mechanism by which Rome left the Church and developed the whole of the modern world-view which is so anti-Orthodox.

It's very difficult to go deeper than that, to find any sort of

deeper reasons because those things are hidden to us. The devil is constantly working. It may well be that the devil was trying time after time and when he found the Egyptians ready to go into the Monophysite Schism, perhaps he had plans to make them into the instrument he would use to form the apostasy, or maybe the Armenian mentality, and so forth; but it happened that it was the Roman mentality which worked, because once having taken it away from Orthodoxy, free to develop according to its own principles, it became a source of a whole new philosophy which had a power to overwhelm the world, which it did finally in our time.

So with the Schism which became final about, we say, with 1054, the excommunications of Rome and Constantinople, Roman logicalness is placed above the unity of the Church, above the consciousness of the Church, so that the Holy Spirit no longer guides it, as in the Orthodox Church, but now there is an outward authority, the Pope. And the Western historians themselves make it quite clear that at this time something *new* entered into the Church, into the West. Before this there were temporary estrangements between East and West, [which] we see the time of St. Photius and Pope Nicholas I; there were even excommunications, but then a restoration of communion. Charlemagne himself, in making a rival empire in the West, also was the cause of friction; but it wasn't until this eleventh century that the estrangement became now a separation.

And at that same time, there entered into the West this new principle which is described in the book by a Dominican ecumenist, Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years*, talking about the possibilities of uniting with the East. He mentions precisely this as one of the things which will have to be overcome before there can be union. He says: "A Christian of the Fourth or Fifth Century would have felt less bewildered by the forms of piety current in the Eleventh Century than would his counterpart of the Eleventh Century in the forms of the Twelfth," that is, in the West. There was such a change already in this one century, the eleventh century, the century of the Schism and the twelfth, the height of the Middle Ages. "The great break occurred in the transition period from the one to the other century. This change took place only in the West, whereas sometime between the end of the Eleventh and the end of the Twelfth Century, everything was somehow transformed. This profound alteration of view did not take place in the East where, in some respects, Christian matters are still today what they were then -- and what they were in the West before the end of the Eleventh Century."

And here he thinks we have come to the very core of our subject. "In the period between the end of the Eleventh Century and the end of the Twelfth, a decisive turning point was reached in the West. It was a time characterized by several transitions. There was first, the transition from a predominantly essential and exemplarist outlook to a naturalistic one, an interest in existence. This is a transition from a universe of exemplary causality, in which the expressions of thought or of act receive their truth from the transcendent model which material things imitate, to a universe of efficient causality in which the mind seeks for the truth in things and in their empirical formulations. Secondly, there was the transition 'from symbol to dialectic,' or, as one might say with a greater precision, from a synthetic perception to an inclination for analysis and 'questions.' Here we have the beginning of Scholasticism.... The difference between the two worlds is the difference between the attitude of synthetic perception in quest of the relation of the parts to the whole, and an analytical attitude," that is, which takes things apart and analyses them. "Basically," he says, "was it not against this analytical attitude of Catholics that the Slavophile religious philosophy aimed its criticism of Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century?" And here he means precisely Khomiakov and Kireyevsky.

"Another transition was that from a culture where tradition reigned and the habit of synthesis became ingrained, to an academic milieu where continual questioning and research was

the norm, and analysis the normal result of study. The East followed the road of tradition, and we have shown how one of the principle differences among the various peoples of the Orthodox faith is in fact that they are not trained, as are the Latins, by the schools. The Latin theologians, inured to Scholasticism, have often been baffled at seeing the Greeks refuse to yield to their compelling arguments from reason, but instead taking refuge in the realm of Patristic texts and conciliar canons,..." which was the way all Christians reasoned before the Schism. "But this remained foreign to the East which knew no Scholasticism of its own and was to experience neither the Reformation or the 16th-18th-century rationalism. In other words, the East remained foreign to the three influences that shaped modern Catholicism." And that's scholasticism, reformation and rationalism.

In "the first half of the Thirteenth Century, a new kind of theological teaching and study appeared and established itself in the West. Until this time, the dominant type of teaching or study had been of a contemplative or monastic nature, linked with the liturgical life of the abbeys or cathedrals. Now, there was added a new type of teaching and study, of an academic and rational nature which was soon to take the place of the former.... In the East, on the other hand, the teaching and studying of theology, and even of philosophy, kept its religious status."

Now we will now try to examine now some examples of what he means. He speaks about a new spirit: a new spirit of interest in the world, of wanting to analyze, a whole new technique of study, dependence upon human reason, which the East never had. So we will examine now first of all the question of Scholasticism.

Scholasticism

And poor Thomas Aquinas has been so much beaten by us Orthodox that we should really read him to see what he has to say in particular, because just reading a little bit of him reveals quite clearly the underlying world-view he has, what kind of questions he asks, how he answers them, and the way he reasons. He, of course, has a tremendous big book, of which I think the whole thing now is in English, in twenty volumes or something: the *Summa Theologica*, in which everything is supposed to be put: about God, about man, about the devil, the world, the end of the world, the beginning of the world, everything about which man has to know. And he has it all divided up into different questions, in categories.

And here is an example of how he reasons. For example, he asks the question: "Whether the devil is directly the cause of man's sinning?" We know that the devil acts on us and a man goes into sin, and he's asking all kinds of questions about how this happens. And therefore he asks the specific question whether the devil is directly the cause of man's sinning. Of course, an Orthodox writer would say, of course, we have to fight; the devil tries to tempt us, but we can't be tempted against our power. We have many texts which can show that: Holy Fathers, the Scriptures and so forth. We know we are going to have now a systematic approach to this question.

First of all, in the Scholastic method you have to have objections, just like in canonizing saints, you have to have a devil's advocate, who gets all the dirty, the news he can get about the saint, makes up things and tries to overwhelm the evidence. And that way supposedly by having both the positive and negative, you'll be objective and come finally to the truth.

So we have "Objection One. It would seem that the devil is directly the cause of man's sinning." We have this objection because that's exactly the opposite of the answer he wants to give. "For sin consists directly in an act of the appetite, but Augustine says that the devil inspires his friends with evil desires; and Bede, commenting on that, says that the devil draws the mind to evil desires. And Isidore says that the devil fills men's hearts with secret lusts. Therefore, the devil is directly the cause of sin."

Of course, this evidence can get thrown out because he's quoting these people who said it didn't even intend to mean what this objector wants to say. So already you see that you have to twist yourself and make a one-sided reasoning. And he allows it; he puts that in there as an argument, in order to refute it.

Then we have another objection: "Objection Two: Further Jerome says that as God is the Perfecter of good, so is the devil the perfecter of evil. But God is directly the cause of our good; therefore the devil is directly the cause of our sins." It's very logical: you have God on one hand; but, of course, we do good of our own besides having the help of God. So this is ridiculous.

But we'll go on to a third objection: "Further, the philosopher says," philosopher is the great authority, Aristotle, "in a chapter of *The Ethics*: 'There must needs be some extrinsic principle of human counsel.' Now human counsel is not only about good things, but also about evil things. Therefore, as God moves man to take good counsel and so directly is the cause of good, so the devil moves him to take evil counsel and consequently is directly the cause of sin."

And now he is going to sweep everything aside and show what the truth is. So he says, "On the contrary, Augustine proves that nothing else than his own will makes man's mind a slave of his desire. Now man does not become a slave to his desire except through sin; therefore, the cause of sin cannot be the devil, but man's own will alone."

And then he gives his answer: "I answer that sin is an action and so a thing can be directly the cause of sin in the same way that anyone is directly the cause of an action, and this can happen only by moving that action's proper principle to act. Now the proper principle of a sinful action is the will, since every sin is voluntary. Consequently, nothing can be directly the cause of sin except that which can move the will to act."

All this is not, there's no sort of Holy Father; this is his logical proving to you on ABC, syllogistic reasoning. "Now the will, as we have stated above, can be moved by two things: first, by its object in as much as the apprehended appetible is said to move the appetite; second, by that agent which moves the will inwardly to will, and this is not other than either the will itself or God, as we've shown above. Now God cannot be the cause of sin as was stated above. Therefore, it follows that in this respect, a man's will alone is directly the cause of his sin," and so forth.

He goes on and then answers objections, all showing that he's tried to split apart this question which is a very simple one about how sin acts in us. And the Holy Fathers will give you not, they won't chop it up like that; they will tell you in general the question of how a man sins, and you will not have to divide it up like that because it's a whole question; it's a very existential question. We have to know about how sin acts, and whether, how the devil works on us. But when you chop it up, then you sit back very content that you've reasoned things through: and it's quite different from the Orthodox Patristic approach. You've already asked questions which begin to split hairs quite a bit.

For example, there's a question: "Whether if Eve, and not Adam, had sinned, their children would have contracted original sin?" You know, if Eve had sinned and then Adam had not followed her, would we have fallen? Would we have original sin? Would man be immortal? It's very sort of, well, a abstract question which who would ever think about? And we have the objection: "It would seem that if Eve and not Adam had sinned, then children would have contracted original sin anyway. For we contract original sin from our parents, in so far as we were once in them according to the word of the Apostle when he says, 'in whom all have sinned.' Now a man pre-exists in his mother as well as in his father, therefore a man would have contracted original sin from his mother's sin as well as from his father's."

Again, second objection, "If Eve and not Adam had sinned,

their children would have been born liable to suffering and death, since it is the mother that provides the matter in generation as the Philosopher states," Aristotle. "And death and liability to suffering are the necessary results of matter. Now liability to suffering and the necessity of dying are punishments of original sin. Therefore, if Eve and not Adam had sinned, their children would contract original sin.

"Objection Three: Further, Damascene," St. John Damascene, "says that the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin, of whom Christ was to be born without original sin, purifying her. But this purification would not have been necessary if the infection of original sin were not contracted from the mother. Therefore, the infection of original sin was contracted from the mother, so that if Eve had sinned, her children would have contracted original sin even if Adam had not sinned."

Thomas Aquinas is going to teach the contrary, so he says, "On the contrary, the Apostle says, 'By one man sin entered into this world.' Now if woman would have transmitted original sin to her children, he would have said that it entered by two, since both of them sinned, or rather that it entered by a woman, since she sinned first. Therefore, original sin is transmitted to the children not by the mother, but by the father. I answer that the solution of this question is made clear by what has been said, for it has been stated that original sin is transmitted by the first parent insofar as he is the mover in the begetting of his children, and so it has been said that if anyone were begotten only materially of human flesh, they would not contract original sin. Now, it is evident that in the opinion of philosophers, the active principle of generation is from the father, while the mother provides the matter. Therefore, original sin is contracted not from the mother but from the father, so that if Eve and not Adam had sinned, their children would not contract original sin. Whereas, if Adam and not Eve had sinned, they *would* contract it."

And then he answers the objections in a question which is obviously beyond our say, because God made it that way, that's the way it is; it is not for us to speculate on these questions which are not for our salvation, which only show that you have time to sit in your university chairs and discuss idle questions. It's a totally useless question, and he solves it and thinks he has the answer. In the way he reasons you can see that obviously this is very, very different from the spirit of Holy Fathers who do not go from one logical chain of reasoning. It's all logic, and he comes sometimes to ridiculous conclusions simply by following logic.

So we can see that here -- and he's the pinnacle of Scholasticism -- this is a systematization of Christian teaching, and actually subordinates Christian teaching to logic. But logic itself, of course, depends on the starting point. And they thought they were starting with basic Christian revelation. We'll see soon that there are all kinds of other things entering in, which affect reason. In this Scholastic system logicalness becomes the first test of truth, and the living source of faith is placed in a secondary place. And that's why later people hated it so much because they felt it to be a completely dead framework in which there's no life left, idly discussing questions which no one is concerned about, and when you do discuss true questions, you flatten them out and deaden them. And a Western man, under this influence, begins to lose his living relation to the Truth. And thus Christianity is reduced to a system, to the human level. And this is one of the chief roots of the later errors in the West, which can actually be summed up as the attempt to make by human efforts something better than Christianity.

Dostoyevsky has a little story about this in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, *Brothers Karamazov*, in which he very acutely describes what the Popes did, that is, the whole Western Church making something better than Orthodoxy, by their own powers.

You can see this, for example, in the celebrated "Proof of the Existence of God" in Anselm, who invented the new proof of the existence of God, which, as you can see, is extremely clever and

doesn't prove a thing. He says, "What is God? God must be that than which nothing greater can be conceived." And even an atheist will say, "Well, if there is a God, yes, He must be that greater than which nothing exists or can be conceived, because there's nothing greater than God, according to those who believe in Him." So, aha! you take the first point.

Secondly, existence is certainly a positive characteristic and something which must be possessed by something which is greater than anything else that can be conceived, isn't it? And you think, well, of course, if a thing is really greater than anything else, it must have existence because that is a positive thing, and something which is non-existent will not be greater than something which is existent. Then he says, therefore, since that than which nothing greater can be conceived must have as one of these characteristics which make it greater than anything which can be conceived, existence. Therefore, it must exist. So God exists.

And as you see, you are being fooled by this man. If you already believe, you can say, aha! that's very nice. You can prove it by the laws of the mind. But if you don't believe in it, you feel you've been fooled by this so-called proof because you're not willing to concede in the first place that this thing is anything more than an imagination; and we see in this already the seeds of the later subjectivism in the West.

This is really the very same thing that Descartes tried to do when he tried to prove his own existence by saying, "I think, therefore I am"; and is also something which later on Metaxas Makrakis was to do when he said that he was the first man in the history of Orthodoxy to prove the existence of the Trinity, as though before this time all the Fathers had been wasting their time, and he was the first one to have enough intelligence and understanding of philosophy to prove what the Holy Fathers couldn't prove.

Makrakis has exactly that same mentality of, "By my own efforts, I will give you simple people who believed in sort of whatever you were told, I will give you the real explanation of things." And this is exactly what people like Anselm are trying to do. This is again the spirit of trying to improve on Christianity, trying to accept *not* as Holy Fathers accepted in simple faith, but proving by means of -- actually he's under the influence of all these new currents coming in, and especially of course Aristotle who was very influential in those times, because he seemed to have sort of the universal philosophy -- except Christianity; his view of nature was considered to be absolutely the truth.

So, this is the first point: Scholasticism, human reason, becomes the measure instead of Tradition, and that is exactly where Rome went off. But this is only part of the whole picture of what happened in the Middle Ages.

Romance

Something else happened. And that is that Orthodox tradition is not only rationalized, it also becomes mixed with romance. The element of pagan legends entering into Orthodox Lives of Saints in this time made it so that there are some Lives of Saints which we have in our Orthodox sources, if you read the same Life of a Saint in a medieval Latin source, you will be completely astonished. We'll take one example, the life of St. Christopher, which is known -- not too much is known actually about him, but his Life is known: he was a soldier and he was martyred, put to tortures. And there are a number of miracles in the Life; he has a staff that sprouts--this was in the tradition of Orthodox Lives of Saints.

But there is a book written in the thirteenth century, the very thing which exists in English, *The Golden Legend*, which is a synthesis or a compilation of lives of saints, like we have daily readings of Dimitry of Rostov, Lives of Saints which is the same thing. Every day there is Life of a Saint. *The Golden Legend*