SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE
Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought

*Series Editors: George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou*

This series consists of books that seek to bring Orthodox Christianity into an engagement with contemporary forms of thought. Its goal is to promote (1) historical studies in Orthodox Christianity that are interdisciplinary, employ a variety of methods, and speak to contemporary issues; and (2) constructive theological arguments that, in conversation with patristic sources, focus on contemporary questions ranging from the traditional theological and philosophical themes of God and human identity to cultural, political, economic, and ethical concerns. The books in the series will explore both the relevancy of Orthodox Christianity to contemporary challenges and the impact of contemporary modes of thought on Orthodox self-understandings.
SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Edited and with an Introduction by John Chryssavgis

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way, we work within history from the privilege of the First Throne in the assembly and administration of the universal Orthodox Church—at once a privilege and a service, a witness and martyrdom, for the transformation of the whole world and for the discovery by all people of the living and saving truth.

It is the same purpose of serving the truth that is embraced by schools of library science, such as your own, which are the very archives in which knowledge and historical heritage are safeguarded. And so we feel obliged to congratulate this institute wholeheartedly for your wonderful and beautiful initiative, expressing also our sincerest wishes to all of you, faculty and students alike. We thank you once again for the invitation to us and for the opportunity to speak, invoking on everyone the boundless mercy and love of the Trinitarian God so that we may live in history, move in truth, and proceed toward the eschatological completeness of truth.

*Fordham University, New York, October 27, 2009*

The original title of this address was “Discerning God’s Presence in the World.”

**THE ECUMENICAL IMPERATIVE**

It is with sincere gratitude that we accept this invaluable honor of being received into the ranks of those who have been awarded doctorates from this esteemed Jesuit school. We welcome this privilege as recognition of the sacred ministry of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, an Apostolic institution with a history spanning seventeen centuries, throughout retaining its see in Constantinople. Yet our Church is no worldly institution; it wields no political authority. Instead, it leads by example, coordinating pan-Orthodox Christian unity by virtue of a primacy of honor—a ministry emanating from its supranational authority. This universal consciousness gave rise to the first seven ecumenical councils, to the articulation of the “symbol of faith” (or Nicene Creed), and to the establishment of the New Testament canon; it also gave birth to churches from the Caspian to the Baltic and from the Balkans to Central Europe; today, its jurisdiction extends to the Far East, Western Europe, Australia, and America.
Of course, this ecumenicity constitutes both an ancient privilege and a lasting responsibility, demanding an open ministry within our own communions and among other Christian confessions as well as toward the world’s faith communities. Within our ecumenical initiatives, the international theological dialogue with our “sister Church” of Rome—instituted in the 1960s as the “dialogue of love” and continuing today as the “dialogue of truth”—constitutes our foremost encounter of “speaking the truth in love.” A concrete example of this encounter here at Fordham is the Orthodox Christian Minor Studies Program, which is the first of its kind at a major university in the United States. This program complements both the annual lecture series “Orthodoxy in America” and the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, and it demonstrates a practical synergistic spirit, modeling for Orthodox and Roman Catholics everywhere a shared a common purpose based in truth and in love.

Our purpose this evening, though, is not to outline for you how the ecumenical imperative defines our Church but, rather, to inspire in all of you the primacy of ecumenicity, the value of opening up in a world that expects us “always to be prepared to give an answer to everyone that asks us to give the reason for the hope within us” (1 Pet. 3:15). In this regard, we would like to draw your attention to three dimensions of “opening up,” or “ecumenical consciousness”—opening up to the heart, opening up to the other, and opening up to creation.

OPENING UP TO THE HEART: THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT

As faith communities and as religious leaders, we have an obligation constantly to pursue and persistently to proclaim alternative ways to order human affairs, rejecting violence and reaching for peace. Human conflict may well be inevitable in our world; but war certainly is not. If the twenty-first century will be remembered at all, it may be for those who dedicated themselves to the cause of tolerance and understanding. Yet the pursuit of peace calls for a reversal of what has become normal and normative in our world. It requires conversion (metanoia) and the willingness to become individuals and communities of transformation. The Orthodox Christian spiritual classics emphasize the heart as the place where God, humanity, and the world may coincide in harmony. Indeed, the Philokalia underlines the paradox that peace is gained through sacrifice (martyria), perceived not
as passivity or indifference to human suffering but as relinquishing selfish desires and achieving greater generosity. The way of the heart stands in opposition to everything that violates peace. When one awakens to the way within, peace flows as an expression of gratitude for God’s love for the world. Unless our actions are founded on love instead of on fear, we will never overcome fanaticism or fundamentalism.

In this sense, the way of the heart is a radical response, threatening policies of violence and politics of power. This is why peacemakers—whether Jesus Christ, or Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), or Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68)—threatened the status quo. Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount shaped the pacifist teaching of Leo Tolstoy, whose work The Kingdom of God Is Within You was influenced by the writings of the Philokalia and in turn profoundly influenced both the nonviolent principles of Gandhi and the civil-rights activism of King. Sometimes, the most “provocative” message is “loving our enemy and doing good to those who hate us” (Luke 6.27). Some may announce “the end of faith” or “the end of history,” blaming religion for violent aberrations in human behavior. Yet, never was the peaceful “protest” of religion more necessary than now; never was the powerful “resistance” of religion more critical than today. Ours is the beginning, not the end of either faith or history.

OPENING UP TO THE OTHER: THE WAY OF DIALOGUE

This is why the interreligious gatherings initiated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate are crucial for paving the way toward peaceful coexistence among the world’s peoples. Such dialogue draws people of diverse religious beliefs and cultural traditions out of their isolation, instituting a process of mutual respect and meaningful communication. When we seek this kind of encounter, we discover ways of coexisting despite our differences. After all, historical conflicts between Christians and Muslims are typically rooted in politics, not in religion. The tragic story of the Crusades is a telling example, bequeathing a legacy of cultural alienation and ethnic resentment.

To speaking, then, of an inevitable and inexorable “clash of civilizations” is incorrect and inappropriate, especially when such a theory posits

religion as the principal battleground on which such conflict is doomed to occur. National leaders may provoke isolation and aggression between Christians and Muslims; or else demagogues may mobilize religions in order to reinforce national fanaticism and hostility. However, this is not to be confused with the true nature and purpose of religion. Christians and Muslims lived alongside each other during the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires, usually supported by their political and religious authorities. In Andalusian Spain, believers in Judaism, Christianity and Islam coexisted peacefully for centuries. Such historical models reveal possibilities for our own pluralistic and globalized world.

Moreover, any theory about "the clash of civilizations" is invariably naive, inasmuch as it oversimplifies differences between peoples, cultures, and religions. How ironic that religion promotes a more "liberal" position than does the "realism" of a political scientist! The visit by Pope Benedict XVI to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul in November 2006 was historical not only for relations between the Eastern and Western Churches but also for Christianity and Islam. The then newly elected pope continued a tradition established by his predecessor, the late Pope John Paul II, who visited the Phanar immediately after his election in 1978.

We affectionately recall how Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (1886–1972), an extraordinary leader of profound vision and ecumenical sensitivity, a tall man with piercing eyes, would resolve conflict by inviting the embattled parties to meet, saying to them, "Come, let us look one another in the eyes." This means that we must listen more carefully, "look one another" more deeply "in the eyes." St. Nilus of Ancyra wrote, "You are a world within the world; look inside yourself and there you will see God and the whole creation."

Opening up to creation: the way of the earth

Speaking of icons when it comes to God and creation leads us to our final point. For nowhere is the sense of openness more apparent than in

the beauty of Orthodox iconography and the wonder of God’s creation. In affirming sacred images, the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787) was not primarily concerned with religious art but with the presence of God in the heart, in others, and in creation. For icons encourage us to seek the extraordinary in the ordinary, to be filled with the same wonder expressed in the Genesis account, when, as we read, “God saw everything that He made and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1.30–31). The Greek word for “goodness” is kallos, which implies, both etymologically and symbolically, a sense of “calling.” Icons are invitations to rise beyond trivial concerns and mundane reductions. We must ask ourselves: Do we see beauty in others and in our world?

The truth is that we refuse to behold God’s Word in the oceans of our planet, in the trees of our continents, and in the animals of our earth. In that, we deny our own nature, which demands that we stoop low enough to hear God’s Word in creation. We fail to perceive created nature as the extended Body of Christ. Eastern Christian theologians always emphasize the cosmic proportions of divine incarnation. For them, the entire world is a prologue to St. John’s Gospel. And when the Church overlooks the broader, cosmic dimensions of God’s Word, it neglects its mission to implore God for the transformation of the whole polluted cosmos. On Easter Sunday, Orthodox Christians chant:

Now everything is filled with divine light: heaven and earth, and all things beneath the earth. So let all creation rejoice.  

The principal reason for our visit to the Unites States this month was the organization of an environmental symposium along the Mississippi River, focusing on its impact on New Orleans; this journey was also a personal pilgrimage after our original visit to New Orleans after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The symposium was the eighth in a series of international, interfaith, and interdisciplinary conferences, at which scientists and theologians, politicians and journalists gather in an effort to raise awareness on regional environmental issues that have a global impact on our world. After all, we are convinced that recalling our minuteness in

23. From the canon of Easter matins.
God’s wide and wonderful creation only underlines our central role in God’s plan for the salvation of the whole world.

DISCERNING GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Opening up to the heart; opening up to the other; and opening up to creation. Our age demands no less than openness from all of us. We hear it often said that our world is in crisis. Yet never before in history have human beings had the opportunity to bring so many positive changes to so many people simply through encounter and dialogue. The interaction of human beings and ethnic groups is today direct and immediate as a result of technological advances in telecommunications, mass media, and means of travel. While it may be true that this is a time of crisis, it must be equally emphasized that there has also never been greater tolerance for respective traditions, religious preferences, and cultural peculiarities.

The human heart, the other person, and the natural creation each constitute profound icons of the living God. May you always remain open to the heart, to others, and to creation. This is the only way to discern the presence of God in our world.

Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., November 3, 2009

This address, “A Changeless Faith for a Changing World,” was delivered at Georgetown University in response to an invitation by the Center for American Progress.

A CHANGELESS FAITH FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Thank you very much, Professor James J. O’Donnell, provost of Georgetown University, and John Podesta, president of the Center for American Progress. I am also especially grateful to the students who are present with us today, and grateful for their interest. Progress is often equated with change. So let us acknowledge this: It may appear strange for a progressive think tank to sponsor a lecture by the leader of a faith that takes pride in how little it has changed in two thousand years. The fact is that our first instinct in Orthodoxy is to conserve the precious faith that has been handed down to us in an unbroken line from Jesus Christ.