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SCIENCE WITHIN THE SPHERE OF ORTHODOXY

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There exists the impression, which for some is a conviction that religion and science are opponents, in so much that it is believed that religion has many times condemned scientific research. All this as much and as far as it may be true, is in no way related to Orthodoxy or Orthodox ecclesiastical life. And this is so for two reasons:

According to the Orthodox Church, Christianity is neither philosophy, nor ideology, nor even just canonical law. That is to say, it is not a religion based in the meaning of the Latin word "Religare", meaning submission to rules or laws, while in the Greek language the word "thriskia" means simply ascension.

Orthodoxy practices in its ecclesiastical life the facts or truths about Christ who have been revealed. Saint Simeon, the "New Theologian", takes a characteristic stand whereby he elevates above the written word of the Bible the experience of the Christian life. As far as Orthodoxy is concerned the religious feeling created from our universe is the strongest and gentlest motive for scientific research. Research is the results or conclusions which serve man and direct him towards the truth; because truth is revealed in part and depends on how and where we look for it. The famous physicist, Robert Mayer, who is often referred to as the "Newton" of the 19th century, so aptly stated, that "truth of itself and for itself is eternal and whatever is eternal can neither be defined or proven". For the Orthodoxy, truth is Christ and actually the crucified Christ as saviour for mankind, a fact which according to Saint Paul is considered by the gentiles as foolishness and by Hebrews as scandalous. God became man in order to elevate man to a state of God, but not God.

As far as Orthodoxy is concerned there is no conflict between Orthodoxy and science. On the contrary the position of the Orthodoxy, in matters related to science and technology, is expressed at any level in the orthodox life. The book of prayers of the Orthodox Church (efkologion) is full of references to man's achievements in the scientific and technological fields. The Holy Day Pentecost is for the world the day of enlightenment and wisdom, and Jesus Christ is praised as the Master of all crafts (Pantechnimon) which means the One who inspires scientific achievements and protects, with His blessings, scientific work.

This position has theological consequence, since mankind and the universe, according to the great Russian theologian George Florovski, is the overflow of the love of God. According to the French philosopher Simone Weil "regardless of how quickly a man moves away from Christ but towards what he believes to be the truth - in reality he moves straight to Christ". Within the framework of Orthodoxy, scientific work is blessed to the extent that science probes deeply into the unknown with the purpose to help mankind understand the universe as well as man's place in it.

Given this, the German scientist Johan Madler states: "It is certain that a true scientist looking through the instruments of his universal religious feeling can see that the world has a soul, given by God, and walking to his final destination, is supported by His God's universal love. Much could be said to support the meaning and importance that the Orthodox Church gives to science, which according to the orthodox position is a gift of God. It is needed only to refer to the statement written above the door of the School of Athos in the 18th century by the Greek physicist, orthodox theologian and man of letters, Eugenios Boulgaris: "He who wishes to study geometry can enter; he will not encounter any obstacle. But the one who does not, will find the doors closed".

Bulgaris finds no conflict between theology and science. To the contrary he finds harmony between them and searches for the evaluation of their roles and importance. He does not, however, allow those who in the name of science, try to impose other dimensions on the role of science and theology. In the prologue of his book "Theologikon" he states among other things: "Are logic and philosophical doctrines discarded from theology? Of course not, because all these **serve the theologian** and, as has been proven, the Christian faith does not discount logic, nor opinion, nor suggestion, nor prohibition, since theology can cite examples from the Bible, as well as from the fathers of the Orthodox Church, showing fault in philosophical theories and various doctrines. Additionally, theology accepts statements from all the people of the world and takes that which is valuable from science and philosophy. This serves the purpose of decorating the manners of the faithful (without accepting foreign doctrines) in the same way as God ordered the Jews to decorate their Temple with the artifacts of the Egyptians".

Another contemporary of Voulgaris, Nikiforos Theotokis, physicist, mathematician and Russian Episcopo, in his famous book the "Kyriakodromion", where he tries to interpret the Sunday gospel and apostles, speaks with the confidence of a natural scientist.

This knowledgeable man uses his knowledge of physics to elevate himself and hence his parish on the sphere of the "incomprehensible". He is the man who introduced natural sciences in Greece and taught about God using the scientific technique of induction.

At this point we can remember Albert Einstein. He separated the roles, as well as the meaning of science and theology, by saying that "science without religion is lame, but religion without science is blind". Certainly Einstein is referring to a religion and not to Orthodox theology.

We could present many more examples of positions taken, such as those of Boulgaris and Theotokis from statements made by Church fathers and Russian theologians such as Boulgagov, Berdiayef, Florovski, Loski and others. We must not forget that even during the byzantine period much importance was attached to science, crafts and letters. For many researchers, the achievement of the byzantine period was the combination of the ancient Greek and Christian element, which is the basis for present day world civilization.

Even in the non orthodox world many great scientists have adopted the positions of the Orthodox Church, even without being aware of it. Indicatively, we could present the father of botany Kark Linnaeus who in the prologue of his book "System of Nature" writes:

"The purpose of creation is the miraculous knowledge of God as it is in the works of nature which only man can recognize". These words remind us of the words of Saint Paul: **"Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made"**. There is no need for further additions, if one remembers the words of Eddington and Max Planck that "the laws of nature are ways and means of expressing the will of God". The Orthodox Church does not discount logic nor scientific methods and their achievements, but distinguishes clearly the purpose. The Orthodox Church, through the Divine Liturgy and particularly Holy Communion, lives the Truth and directs man towards Holiness. It accepts that man ought to be delivered of his sins, that is his failure, since "sin" means failure in Greek.

Man as a logical being has failed to become God-like because of his own negligence. To regain his original place in the creation he must, totally free, ask for God's grace, which was made possible for him through the crucifixion of Christ.

The thesis as perceived by Auguste Comte in his theory of positivism would be the kingdom of pure logic, kingdom of the mind and the death of the heart. But one would hesitate to imagine man in his position. For all those who refuse to believe the revealed truth simply because it cannot be proven by scientific methods, the Orthodox Church repeats: "Blessed are those who believe without seeing", and those are blessed because they are not forced by proof but because of their own intention and within complete freedom.

The English scientist Sir James Simpson said: "The greatest of my discoveries was the salvation of my soul, that is, the feeling that I am a sinner and Jesus Christ is my Saviour".

The stand of science within Orthodoxy is beautifully stated on the grave stone of Isaac Newton: "Here lies Isaac Newton, tireless, genius and faithful researcher of nature, of history and of the Bible. Through his wisdom he proved the greatness of God and with his life expressed the simplicity of the Gospel".

There is probably no better way to stop, than with a paragraph of Dostoyevsky's work "The Cellar", where he asks himself and the reader:

"Man likes without any doubt to create and open new avenues. But then why does he passionately like the destruction and the chaos? Is it possible that he likes so much destruction and chaos because he is afraid to reach his goals and finish the construction of his work? Who knows? Maybe he likes to look at his work from far away and not from a near standpoint. Probably his aims on this earth, which he tries to reach, are only an endless process for success and the aims themselves. This process, of course, is nothing else than arithmetic like $2+2=4$, which means a law (of the corruptible world). If this is the case, then this is not life but the beginning of death".

Perhaps Maxwell's thoughts are like those of Dostoyevski.

Therefore in his prayers he asks God to give us **the science of mercy**.

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