

The Birth and the Development of an Orthodox Ethos. The Creation of Tradition

When St. Francis of Assisi wanted to write his Rule, one of his disciples asked him, "Where do we begin?" And St. Francis replied, "From where it all began, from the Gospel!"
From the Gospel I would like us to begin ☺

1. The existence of plural insights in the Gospel and in the apostolic era

Mark, Matthew and Luke -> a Triple Tradition

John -> the fruit of a Johannine community, comes to correct the previous so-called *Triple Tradition*

Apostle Andrew

Mk. 1,16-18 -> simply called together with no further details

Lk. 5,8-11 -> the name of Andrew is not even mentioned

However, we must consider that Luke, an indirect disciple of Peter, is the spokesperson for Peter's sermon, of the Petrine tradition. Maybe there were certain tensions between brothers, between Petrus and Andrei.

Jn. 1,25-44

- This Gospel corrects and tends to balance the centro-Petrine tradition,
- also in other respects not only issues linked to Peter
- This Gospel is a critique to Peter; Peter is put in situations that tend to present him lower than Andrew or Mary Magdalene
- the counterbalancing of the Petrine tradition is done by the mention of *protokletos* Andrew. Andrew was the first to see and hear Jesus, he brings Peter and the same Andrew also „fishes” Philip.

Peter ←-----→ Andrew

a Christianity suffocated by centro-Petrism

- ➔ In the Apostolic era some Some Gnostic writings appear that present Andrew (*Acts of Andrew*) at the head of a community that practices extraordinary asceticism. Eschatology was seen as something imminent, so marriage is meaningless. The inner man was important, not the outer. According to this kind of Christianity, called Encratist, celibacy was imposed on all converts. After the 3rd and 4th centuries, this kind of Christianity faded away.

Mary Magdalene

Lk 8,1-5 -> We find Mary alongside other women from good (economically powerful) families who not only followed Jesus, but economically supported his work and mission.

→ donor status

Mt. 27, 55-56 -> on Golgotha and the resurrection episode

Jn. 20 -> things are changing!

→ only in John do we learn that Mary Magdalene is the **first witness of the resurrection**

→ The fact that Mary is a witness to the resurrection is a defiance of Jewish tradition, which holds that a woman cannot be credible.

→ Not only a credible witness but: *Apostola Apostolorum*

Peter ←-----→ Andrew

a Christianity suffocated by male-centrism

→ Some modern currents, which go towards an interpretation of the Gospel from John in a key of feminist theology, claim that the mentions of Mary Magdalene in this Gospel would be only a remnant, that they would have been much more, much more important from the point of view of theological view. Also, that there would have been a Christian community led by Mary Magdalene, and the beloved Apostle....maybe she/he was exactly Mary Magdalene. (a try to forcethe understanding of the Gospel in a feminist key)

⇒ There were a lot of imputes and intuitions in the Gospel and inside the community of the first centuries. The history of different Churches is actually the history of how some of these intuitions became institutionalized.

⇒ Or the other way: Institutions became based on some intuitions of the Gospel.

⇒ The history of the Church has blocked, filtered or decanted certain intuitions, ideas, movements. Some survived, others changed, some were blocked.

⇒ Following the ethos of a certain Church means following how certain

2. The first 3 centuries. The persecutions

→ refusal of the worship of the emperor => The Emperor= Antichrist

→ Eschatological tension => The imminence of the end

→ The cult of martyrs

→ Local Churches that communicate from time to time

→ There was no emphasis on dogma

3. IV-VIII centuries

- The crisis of the delay of the *Parousia*, will lead to the willingness to try to understand both the political context and Christianity different
- Paradigm shift *Eschatology* – *Emperor*.
- The era of writing Christian dogma under imperial supervision

3.1. Reinterpreting the imperial cult

- Emperor and Empire => integration process in theology and liturgy.
- "Christianization" of imperial symbols
- The growing importance of bishops
- The Church organized according to administrative/ territorial division of the Empire
Administrative Diocese -> Christian Diocese
- Abasement (demotion) from "god" to "saint"

SAINT => DUE TO THE MARTYRS (AND MONKS) of the first III centuries, THEOLOGY HAD something already PREPARED TO GIVE TO CONSTANTINE

3.2. The growing importance of bishops

- The office of a bishop becomes an imperial office,
- bishoprics organized according to organization imperial regions.
- The liturgical celebrations and worship will have signs of the liturgical centrality of bishops

4. NICAEA

THE ABSOLUTE NOVELTY OF NICEA IS THE POLITICAL SUPPORT

4.1. Politicization of the Synod

- to the goddess Victoria replaced by the Bible
- Placement as in the Roman senate
- Majority voting.

4.2. Solving the doctrinal conflict

- By introducing new terms from Greek philosophy
- *New* at that moment meant not from the Bible
- Sin I => homo-ousios (term sustained by St. Athanasius of Alexandria)
- Sin II => persona, *Prosopon*

4.3. Solving the Easter issue

→ finding a formula to be applied throughout the empire

computes:

*the first Sunday after the first full moon falling on or after 21 March (Spring Equinox)
(in case it coincides with the Jewish Passover -> one week later)*

→ The Church of Alexandria will appeal to astronomers from the capital of the East at that time (the highest scientific discoveries of those times)

4.4. Monasticism and the Council of Nicaea

- monasticism is another form of solving the crisis of the delay of the *Parousia*
- after the end of the persecutions, an option for those wanting a radical Christian life
- the decanting of an *enchratic* Christianity

4.5. Saint Anthony the Great – influencing the Council from the Desert

Aprox. 250-356!!!

- **Phase 1:** hut on the edge of the village
 - listening and obeying another old monk from the region, older and more experienced (there was already a monastic tradition, "the idea that faith was deeper before, now it has been lost")
- **(fighting the passions of the body)**

- **Phase 2:** In an abandoned tomb
 - **(fight fear, fight thoughts he interprets as demons, until he realizes they have no power over him)**

- **Phase 3:** an abandoned fortress on the edge of the desert
(fighting depression, sadness)

- Phase 4: In the deep desert

- (phase of spiritual paternity, extraordinary monastic development in the desert)

- Saint Athanasius his disciple writes his life

Struggle with fear and thoughts interpreted as a struggle with demons

What important elements for the Orthodox ethos and Doctrine emerge from his isolated life devoted to the struggle with thoughts, with the passions of the body?

Homo-ousios is possible because of Theosis

For Athanasius, who attends Nicaea, Antony, his spiritual teacher is the **typos** of the Nicene faith and the confirmation that the incarnation is indeed possible.

Conclusion

What important elements for the Orthodox ethos emerge from his isolated life devoted to the struggle with thoughts, with the passions of the body?

a) I talked about this **theosis, deification**. The process in the spiritual life of obtaining the grace of God in the human being. This idea is perfectly compatible with the **Nicene homoousios teaching**.

b) The success in the ascetic life that Athanasius sees in his spiritual master, St. Anthony, clearly imprints on his mind the idea **that theosis is something possible**. St. Anthony fights with thoughts (understood as demons), with depression, with fear, with the temptations of the body and manages to reach a balance in everything. A balance between outer life (relating to people) and inner balance. This idea that you can gain control through asceticism (exercise) over the mind and over the body will confirm the idea of God's presence in the human being => leads to the reality of the incarnation, the reality of the process of theosis. God became man => Jesus Christ is homo-ousios with the Father, true God, not a demigod.

c) For Athanasius, who attends Nicaea, **Antony, his spiritual teacher, is the typos of the Nicene faith** and the confirmation that the incarnation is indeed possible.

d) Through the **political victory of Constantine, the success of Christianity in the political life of the empire** => the victory of Christianity in general. But, through the spiritual victory ascetic, of the ascetic in the desert => **the victory of the correct, orthodox faith**.

e) The idea that not every kind of Christianity is good, **DOCTRINE matters**.

f) After the Council of Nicaea, **the dogma (what is professed by Constantine) becomes more important than his personal life (how Constantine lives)**. Basing canonization not necessarily on the **"quality" of Christian life, but on "orthodoxy"**

the faith he professed and supported politically.

- The Nicene incarnation idea led to the idea that everything that belongs to man **can be Christianized: human culture, political life, all aspects of society**. Therefore, liturgical life will also evolve under imperial supervision and will clearly include elements that refer to the sacredness of the emperor.

g) By introducing new terms to explain the faith, it is shown that **The Bible was not the first and last criterion for the Church Fathers of that period**. The Bible had an important place, equal, however, to the liturgical hymns that had already died down, probably with some oral tradition that was now beginning to be written down and constitute the Tradition with a capital T.

h) The success of Athanasius of Nicaea was also the success of monasticism, which began to have an important place in the life of the Church. **The monastic tradition will be seen as a "recipe for success", henceforth Tradition with a capital T will also mean the totality of proven spiritual techniques that have been successful**. Anthony (so monasticism) is the recipe for success that leads you to orthodoxy (the right faith)... The good reputation of the monks after Nicaea will lead to the century VII-VIII in the East to slow down the custom of each city bringing a monk from the desert to become their bishop.