

The Body at Ceaseless Prayer – Real Union with Christ according to St Maximus the Confessor and St Gregory Palamas

Father Maximus Lavriotes

Saturday 20th October 2012 from 10am – 1pm

Falling victim to "spiritual" temptation is as old as Christianity itself. Indeed thinking much of spiritual realities while holding in contempt everything material has always been trendy amongst religious people of any persuasion. There is a very long history of consent to this practice beginning with the controversy surrounding the bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The great majority of Early Christians rendered great attention to the soul or spirit of man and disregarded almost completely the human body. For them a bodily resurrection became an unacceptable destiny and invented Docetism to explain away not just the Resurrection of Jesus but even His Incarnation. From the Gnostic theologian Cerinthus(circa 100AD) to the eminent Catholic Karl Rahner (Spirit in the World,1939) Dualism has remained the earliest and most enduring heresy in the course of Church history. Although Biblical anthropology is crystal-clear in defining mankind a clay-artefact made by God, the concept of "humanity" had gradually been reduced to mean just pure intellect since St. Augustine's time.

Platonic idealism already happily married with Jewish_Mysticism had produced an amazing offspring: Philonic spirituality. According to a greatly influential Jew, the theologian Philo of Alexandria, the quintessence of the spirituality of such great figures of the Bible as Abraham and Moses consisted of the mere fact that they had attained to immateriality by getting rid of their own God-made clay while still alive in order to assimilate themselves with their Creator.

In this session I shall examine the grave consequences for Christianity falling under the spell of spiritualistic ideology down the centuries and how Eastern Monasticism provided a unique antidote to this heresy: Prayer using bodily functions as instruments for uniting the human clay with Christ's true and deified humanity. The human body found in this simple practice the ultimate meaning of its existence and making love with God has thus proven a tangible reality for all those willingly involved in a Union process whose greatest instructors have been Maximus the Confessor and his disciple Gregory Palamas.

Biography

Fr. Maximus Lavriotes of Peterhouse, Cambridge, specializes in the history of Biblical Judaism and Early Christian doctrine. After studies in Athens, London, Cambridge and research into problems of eastern Monastic history he dedicated himself to analyses of contemporary theological currents and frictions between religion and secular establishments. He has lectured and published papers on political and theological issues in English Italian and Russian which cover a broad field of scholarship from human rights of religious minorities to mutually influential cultures medieval and modern. Amongst his recent publications is *The Thanksgiving of Eastern Christendom* (quoted in a report of the Anglican Liturgical Commission) and the forthcoming *Great Joy* on the impact of the Incarnation along the Christian centuries. His study of the origins of Christian worship led him to tracing and putting together the threads of social and cultural trends underpinning the long formative period during which rites and types of common and private prayer emerged and stabilized.

He is currently semi-retired but continues lecturing in Britain and abroad on a free-lance basis.

For booking and directions to venue, contact www.contemplativespirituality.org