

Authority is Experience (Protopresbyter George Metallinos)

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The antithesis and consequent collision of faith and science is a problem for Western (Franco-Latin) thought and a pseudo-problem for the Orthodox patristic tradition. This is based on the historical data of the East and the West.



Plato and Aristotle

Problem or Pseudo-Problem?

The (supposed) dilemma of faith versus science appears in Western Europe in the seventeenth century with the simultaneous development of the positive sciences. At about this same time, the first Orthodox positions on this issue appear. It is important that these developments in the West were happening without the presence of Orthodoxy. In recent centuries, a spiritual estrangement and differentiation between the (rational) West and the Orthodox East has developed. This fact is outlined by the de-orthodoxiation and de-ecclesiastication of the Western European world and the philosophication and legalization of faith and its eventual formation as a religion in the same area. Thus, religion is the refutation of Orthodoxy and, according to Father John Romanides, the illness of the human being.

Therefore, historically Orthodoxy remained a nonparticipant in the creation of

present Western European civilization, which is also a different size than the civilization of the Orthodox East.

The turning points in Western Europe's course of alteration include: scholasticism (thirteenth century), nominalism (fourteenth century), humanism and the Renaissance (fifteenth century), the Reformation (sixteenth century), and the Enlightenment (seventeenth century). These developments constitute a series of revolutions and, simultaneously, breaches in the structure of Western European civilization, which were created by the dialectic of faith versus science.

Scholasticism is supported by the adoption of the Platonic *realia*. The world is conceived of as an image of the transcendent *universalia* (realism, archetype). The instrument of knowledge is the mind-intellect. Knowledge, including knowledge of God, is accomplished through the penetration of logic into the essence of beings. This is the foundation of metaphysical theology, which presupposes the *Analogia Entis*, the consecutive ontological relation between God and the world, the analogy between the created and Uncreated.

Nominalism accepts that the *universalia* are simply names and not beings as in realism. It constitutes the struggle between Platonism and Aristotelianism in European thought. However, nominalism turned out to be the DNA, so to speak, of European civilization, whose essential elements are philosophical dualism and social individualism (eudomenism). Prosperity will become the basic quest of Western man, based on the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages. Nominalism (dualism) is the foundation of the scientific development of the Western world, that is, the development of the positive sciences.

The Orthodox East experienced a different spiritual evolution under the guidance of its spiritual leaders, the saints, and of those who followed them, the true believers—who remained loyal to the prophetic-apostolic-patristic tradition. This tradition stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from scholasticism and all the historical spiritual developments in the European world. In the East, hesychasm, based on the “prayer of the heart,” dominates and is the backbone of patristic tradition. It is expressed with the ascetic-experienced participation in the Truth as communion with the Uncreated. Faith in the possibility of the union of God and the world (the Uncreated and the created) within history is preserved in the Orthodox East. This, however, means the rejection of every form of dualism. Science, to the degree that it developed in Byzantium/Romania, developed within this framework.

The seventeenth century scientific revolution in Western Europe contributed to the separation of the fields of faith and knowledge, resulting in the following axiomatic principle: The new (positive) philosophy accepts only those

truths that are verifiable through rational thought; it becomes the ultimate authority for Western thinking. The truths of this new philosophy are the existence of God, the soul, virtue, immortality, and judgment. Their acceptance, however, only takes place in the theistic enlightenment, since we also find that atheism is a structural element of modern thought. The ecclesiastical doctrines that are rejected by rationality are the Triune nature of God, the Incarnation, glorification, salvation, and so on. This “natural,” logical religion, from the Orthodox viewpoint, not only differs from atheism but is much worse—atheism is less dangerous than its distortion!

Orthodox Gnosiology



Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite

It has been said that in the East the antithesis between faith and science is a pseudo-problem. Why? Because gnosiology or epistemology in the East is defined by the *object* to be known, which is twofold: the Uncreated and the created. The Uncreated is only the Holy Trinity. The universe (or universes) in which our existence is realized is the created. *Faith is the knowledge of the Uncreated, and science is the knowledge of the created.* Therefore, they are two different types of knowledge, each having its own method and tools of inquiry.

The believer, moving within the territory of the supernatural, or knowledge of the Uncreated, is not called to learn something metaphysically or to accept something logically, but to experience God by being in communion with Him. This is

accomplished by introducing him to a way of life or method that leads to divine knowledge.

It has been correctly stated that if Christianity were to appear for the first time in our era, it would take the form of a therapeutic institution, a hospital to reinstate and restore the function of man as a psychosomatic being. That is why Saint John Chrysostom calls the Church a “spiritual hospital.” Supernatural-theological knowledge is understood in Orthodoxy as *pathos* (experience of life), as participation and communion with the transcendent, and not as an unreachable personal truth of the Uncreated—and certainly not as a mere exercise in learning. Thus, Christian faith is not an abstract contemplative adoption of metaphysical truth, but rather, an experience of seeing True Being: the experience of the Supersubstantial (superessential) Trinity.

This statement clearly expresses that in Orthodoxy, authority is experience: the experience of participating in the Uncreated, as seeing the Uncreated (as expressed by the terms *Theosis and glorification*), and is not based on texts or on the Scriptures. The tradition of the Church is preserved not in texts but in persons. Texts help, but they are not the bearers of the Holy Tradition. Tradition is preserved through the Saints; human beings are the bearers of the Gospel. The placing of texts above the actual experience of the Uncreated (an indication of the religionizing of faith) leads to their *ideologiation* and in fact to their *idologiation*. This in turn leads to the acceptance of the texts as the absolute (fundamentalism) and all the well understood consequences.

The presupposition of the function of knowing the Uncreated for Orthodoxy is the rejection of every “analogy” (Entis or Fidis) in this relation of the created and the Uncreated. Saint John of Damascus summarizes this previously existing patristic tradition in the following manner: “It is impossible to find, in creation, an icon that would reveal the way of existence of the Holy Trinity. Because, how could it be possible for the created, which is complex and changeable and describable and has shape and is perishable, to clearly reveal the superessential divine Essence, which is free of all these categories?” (P.G. 94,821/21).

Therefore, it becomes apparent why school education and philosophy more specifically, according to the patristic tradition, are not presuppositions of divine knowledge (*theognosia*). Along with the great “scientist” Saint Basil the Great (+379), we honor as equally great the not wise (by worldly standards) Saint Anthony the Great (+350), both of whom are teachers of the faith. Both witness *theognosia*, Saint Anthony as uneducated and Saint Basil as even more educated than Aristotle. Saint Augustine (+430) differs (something that if the West knew, it

would find very painful) from the patristic tradition at this point when he ignores the scriptural and patristic gnosiology, by essentially being a Neo-Platonist! With his axiom “credo, ut intelligam”(I believe in order to understand), he introduced the principle that man is led to a logical conception of Revelation through faith. This principle gives priority to the intellect (the mind), which is considered by this knowledge as the instrument or tool of knowing *both the natural as well as the supernatural*. God is considered as a knowable “object” that can be conceived of by the human intellect (mind) just as any natural object can be conceived. After Saint Augustine, the next step in the evolution (with the intervention of the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas +1274) will be made by Descartes (+1650) with his axiom “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am), in which the intellect (mind) is declared to be the main basis of existence.

The Two Types of Knowledge



Saint Gregory Palamas

The Orthodox Tradition ends this theoretical collision within the field of gnosiology by differentiating the two types of knowledge/wisdoms, the “divine” or “from above” from the “lower” or “from outside.” The first knowledge is “supernatural” and the second is natural; this corresponds to the clear distinction between the Uncreated and the created, between God and creation. These two types of learning require two different methodologies. The method of divine wisdom is that knowledge is the communion of man with the Uncreated energy-action of God in the heart of man. The method of secular wisdom is that knowledge is science; it is accomplished by exercising the intellectual/logical power of man. Orthodoxy establishes a clear hierarchy in the two types of knowledge and their methods.

The method of supernatural gnosiology in the Orthodox Tradition is called *hesychasm* and is identified with *nepsis* and *katharsis* (watchfulness and the cleansing of the heart). Hesychasm is identified with Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy

outside its hesychastic practice is, patristically speaking, inconceivable. Hesychasm, in its essence, is the ascetic-therapeutic practice of cleansing the heart of passions in order to rekindle the noetic faculty within the heart. It must be noted at this point that the method of hesychasm as a therapeutic practice is also scientific and positive. Therefore, theology, under the proper conditions, belongs to the positive sciences. Theology's academic classification into the theoretical sciences began in the twelfth century in the West and is due to the shift of theology into metaphysics. Therefore, those in the East who condemn Orthodox theology demonstrate their Westernization, since they essentially condemn and reject a disfigured caricature of what they regard as theology. But what exactly is the noetic operation?

In the Holy Scriptures, the distinction already exists between the spirit of man (his *nous*) and the intellect (the logos or mind). The spirit of man in patristics is called *nous* to distinguish it from the Holy Spirit. The spirit, or *nous*, is the eye of the soul (see Matt. 6:22ff).

The *noetic faculty* is called the operation of the *nous* within the heart and is the spiritual function of the heart; its parallel operation in the heart is as the organ that pumps the blood throughout our bodies. This *noetic faculty* is a mnemonic system that exists with the brain cells. These two things are known and are detectable by human science; however, science cannot conceive of the *nous*. When man is illumined by the Holy Spirit and becomes the temple of God, self-love changes to unconditional love, and it then becomes possible to build real social relations supported by this unconditional reciprocity (a willingness to sacrifice for our fellow man) rather than by a self-interested claim of "individual rights" according to the spirit of Western European society.

Thus some important consequences are understood: first, that authentic Christianity is the transcendence of religion and of the conception of the Church as merely an institution of rules and duties. Furthermore, Orthodoxy cannot be conceived of as an adoption of some principles or truths imposed from above. This is the non-Orthodox version of doctrines (absolute principles, imposed truths). Conceptions and meanings in Orthodoxy are examined through their *empirical* verification. The dialectical-intellectual style of thinking about theology, as well as dogmatism, is alien to the authentic Orthodox Tradition.

The scientist and professor of knowledge of the Uncreated, in the Orthodox Tradition, is the Gerontas-Staretz, or Spiritual Father, the guide or "teacher of the desert." The recording of both types of knowledge presupposes empirical knowledge of the phenomenon. The same holds true in the field of science, where

only the specialist understands the research of other scientists in the same field. The adoption of conclusions or findings of a scientific branch by nonspecialists (that is, those who are unable to experimentally examine the research of the specialists) is based on the *trust* of the specialists' credibility. Otherwise, there could be no scientific progress.

The same holds true for the "science" of faith. Empirical knowledge of the Saints, Prophets, Apostles, and Fathers and Mothers of all ages is adopted based on the same trust. The patristic tradition and the Church's Synods function on this provable experience. There is no Ecumenical Synod without the *theoumenoi* (the glorified or deified), those who see the divine (and this is the problem of the synods of today!). Orthodox doctrine results from this relationship.

Therefore, Orthodox faith is as dogmatic as science. Those who speak of "bias" in the field of faith must not forget the words of Marc Bloch, who said that all scientific research is "biased" from the beginning, otherwise research could not have been possible. The same holds true for faith. By distinguishing between the two types of knowledge (wisdoms), faith and science, as well as their methods and tools, Orthodoxy avoids any confusion between them as well as any conflict.

The road remains open to confusion and conflict only where the conditions and essence of Christianity are lost. However, in the Orthodox environment, some illogical analogies exist: someone may excel in science but remain a child spiritually or in divine knowledge, and the inverse, someone may be great in divine knowledge yet completely illiterate in human wisdom, such as the aforementioned Saint Anthony the Great. However, nothing precludes the possibility of possessing both types of wisdom/knowledge, as is the case of the Great Fathers and Mothers of the Church. This is exactly what the Church hymns for the third-century mathematician Saint Ekaterina (Katherine) the Wise, who possessed both types of knowledge: "The martyr having received *God's wisdom* since childhood, learned well all of the *outer wisdom* . . ."

God-Man Dialectic

Thus the Orthodox believer experiences a god-man dialectic in the correlation of the two knowledge/wisdoms. To use Christological terminology, every knowledge must remain within its limits. A problem with the limits of each kind of knowledge is that the surpassing of those limits leads to the confusion of their functions and finally to their conflict. In accordance with this principle, the Holy Fathers defended the correct use of science and education. Saint Gregory the Theologian states: "Education should not be dishonored." The same Father in his second Theological Oration also gives the limits of both kinds of wisdom. Saint Gregory states that the

ancient wise man (*Plato in Timaios*) said: “It is difficult to know God and impossible to express Him.” However, this same Greek and Christian Saint Gregory understands that “it is impossible to express (describe) God with words; moreover, it is absolutely impossible to understand Him!” That is, Plato already points out the limits of human reason, and it is important to add that there is no *rationalism* in ancient Greek philosophy. Saint Gregory also demonstrates the impossibility of surpassing the limits of reason and the conception of the Uncreated by means of the knowledge of the created.

The distinction between and simultaneous hierarchy of the two types of knowledge was pointed out by Saint Basil the Great when he stated that faith must prevail in words concerning God and the proofs made by reason. Faith originates in the action and energy of the Holy Spirit. For Saint Basil, faith is the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the heart (P.G. 30, 104B–105B). In his *Hexameron* (P.G. 29, 3–208), Saint Basil also gives a classic example of the Orthodox use of scientific knowledge. He repudiates the cosmological theories of the philosophers on the eternity and self-existence of the world and proceeds to synthesize Biblical and scientific facts by means of which he surpasses science. Furthermore, by rejecting materialistic and heretical teachings, he arrives at the theological (yet not metaphysical) interpretation of the nature of creation. Saint Basil’s central message here is that the logical support of dogma is impossible if based only on science. Dogma belongs to another sphere. It is above reason and science, yet within the limits of another knowledge. The use of dogma in the world’s knowledge leads to the transformation of science into metaphysics, whereas the use of reason in the domain of faith proves reason’s weakness and relativity. Therefore, Orthodox gnosiology does not teach to “believe and do not search,” but rather, to search each field, science and divine knowledge, with its own presuppositions.

The most tragic expression of the alienated Christian body is the ecclesiastical attitude in the West toward Galilee. The case could be characterized as surpassing the limits of jurisdiction, but it is much more serious, for it is the confusion of the limits of knowledge and their conflict. This loss of wisdom “from above” in the West and the way of achieving it have caused the intellect (mind) to be used as a tool of divine as well as human wisdom. The use of the intellect in the field of science leads unavoidably to the rejection of the supernatural as incomprehensible, and its use in the field of “faith” can lead to the rejection of science when it is considered contradictory to “faith.” The same way of thinking and loss of criteria are also shown by the rejection of the Copernican system in the East (1774–1821). Science in the person of Darwin, with his theory of evolution, in turn takes revenge for the condemnation of Galilee by the Roman Church.

“Transplantation” of the Western Problematicism in the Orthodox East

The European Enlightenment consists of a struggle between natural empiricism and the metaphysics of Aristotle. The Enlighteners are philosophers and rationalists as well. The Greek Enlighteners, with Adamantios Korais as their patriarch, were metaphysical in their theology, and it was they who transported the conflict between the empiricists and the metaphysicists to Greece. However, the Orthodox monks of Mount Athos, the Kollyvades hesychast Fathers, remained empirical in their theological method. The introduction of metaphysics in popular and academic theology is owed principally to Korais. For that reason, Korais became the authenticator of academic theologians as well as of popular moral movements. This means that the cleansing of the heart has ceased to be considered a presupposition of theology, and its place has been taken by scholastic education. The same problem appeared in Russia at the time of Peter the Great (seventeenth to eighteenth century). Thus the Fathers are considered to be philosophers (principally Neo-Platonists like Saint Augustine) and social workers. This has become the prototype of the pietists in Greece. Furthermore, hesychasm is rejected as being obscurantism. The so-called “progressive” ideas of Korais are inclusive of the fact that he was a supporter of Calvinistic and not Roman Catholic use of metaphysics and that his theological works are intense in Calvinistic pietism (moralism).

However, in the Fathers Orthodoxy is antimetaphysical, as it continually searches empirical “certainty” by means of the hesychastic method. For that reason, the hesychasm of the Kollyvades is empirical and scientific. Reason, according to Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite, is empirical. This is illustrated by the hesychasts of the eighteenth century in the way in which they accept the scientific progress of the West. The Kollyvades accept scientific viewpoints in the same way that Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite accepted the latest theories of his day on the functioning of the heart in his work *Symbouletikon*. Saint Athanasios Paros does not fight science itself, but its use by the Westernized Enlighteners of Greece. They regarded science as God’s work and as an offer for the improvement of man’s life. But the use of science in a metaphysical struggle against faith, as was done in the West and was transferred to the East, is rightly fought by traditional theologians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The mistake lies on the side of the Greek Enlighteners who, without having any relationship to the patristic view of knowledge (although they themselves were priests and monks), transferred the European conflict between metaphysicists and empiricists to Greece, speaking about an “unreasonable religion.” Whereas the Fathers of Orthodoxy, discriminating between the two types of knowledge, simultaneously distinguish the

reasonable from the super-reasonable.

The problem of the conflict between faith and science, apart from the confusion of knowledge, has caused the idolization of the two sides of knowledge. Thus a weak and morbid apologetic has appeared in Christianity (for example, many years ago a Greek professor of Apologetics produced a “mathematical proof of the existence of God”!). In Orthodoxy, however, this dualism is not self-evident. Nothing excludes the coexistence of faith and science when faith is not imaginary metaphysics and science does not falsify its positive character with the use of metaphysics. The mutual understanding of science and faith is helped by current scientific language.

The principle of indetermination (that there is no causality) is a kind of apophatism in science. Therefore, the return to the Fathers helps to overcome the conflict. The acceptance of the limits of the two types of knowledge (Uncreated and created) and the use of the suitable organ or tool for each one, is the element of Orthodoxy and of the Fathers that ranks “earthly” wisdom beneath “upper ” or “divine” knowledge.

In contrast, the confusion of the two types of knowledge in Western thought promotes their mutual misinterpretation and continues to foster their conflict. A “Church” that persists in metaphysical theology will always be obliged to beg the pardon of Galilee. But a Science that also ignores its limits will deteriorate into metaphysics and will deal with the existence of God (which is not its responsibility) or reject God completely.

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