

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (1914-2003)

Centenary Conference (15-16 November, 2014, King's College London)

Short Report by Mary Cunningham and Julia Rozumna

This conference attracted a large number of people not only from Orthodox but also other Christian Churches and denominations. The atmosphere was enthusiastic and friendly, inspired not only by a number of stimulating talks but also by lively discussion. Metropolitan Anthony, whose hundredth birthday represented the occasion for remembrance and celebration, remained throughout the conference at the heart of the discussion. In addition to the talks, we were able to watch three films about him, some of which were aired for the first time since the time of their first broadcasts.

The conference opened with a talk by the former Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams on 'Metropolitan Anthony's thought on God and Man'. Basing his discussion on a lecture that Metropolitan Anthony delivered in 1983, which was recently republished in *The Messenger*, and on his book, *God and Man* (1971), Archbishop Rowan reminded us how Metropolitan Anthony saw the Incarnation of Christ as a revelation not just of God's physical entrance into creation, but also as the fulfilment of the innate nobility of human nature. Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection involve not just humanity, but also the whole of creation, since both are transformed by God's self-emptying act of mercy and love. Archbishop Rowan went on to discuss a concept of self-abandonment and renunciation that lies not only at the heart of Metropolitan Anthony's vision of the Incarnation, but even of the Trinity itself. This is an image of love in which one Person among the three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is always 'stepping out' to make room, like the best man at a wedding feast, for the other two to come together in 'total communion, fusion, and oneness' (*God and Man*, p. 113). Archbishop Rowan ended by suggesting that Metropolitan Anthony used powerful imagery such as this in order to emphasise the extent to which the incarnate God, Christ, entered every aspect of human experience – including the desolate 'Sheol' or Hades which represents the place of complete forgetfulness of God and dereliction – in a self-emptying, but always divinely loving, way in order to save humanity, along with the creation in which we are embedded.

The second talk, delivered by Brother Adalberto Mainardi of the Monastery of Bose in Italy, began with Metropolitan Anthony's idea that we should see our neighbour through God's eyes. There are three stages of encounter that lead up to this experience: a) God encounters man; b) man encounters God; c) man encounters God in his fellow human being. Brother Adalberto suggested that we have a tendency to lose our awareness of God's presence in other human beings as we go through life. Does remembrance of our approaching death perhaps help us to live more fully again? As Metropolitan Anthony taught, we need to develop the capacity to listen and truly engage with everyone whom we meet.

Karin Greenhead then spoke to the conference about 'the community, the stranger, and the outsider'. Discussing how a sense of personal identity is formed in childhood, with the help of family, community, and Church, Karin reminded us how Metropolitan Anthony experienced life as an 'outsider' in his early years, since his family had been forced to flee from Russia and to live in the

small Russian émigré community in Paris. His deep understanding of the difficulties of those who – for any reason – stand outside mainstream society led him to value the contributions of every single member of the community, including the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. Western civilization has for a long time defined people by their intelligence or their economic productivity. ‘Madness’ or emotional instability, in Metropolitan Anthony’s view, is sometimes a mask behind which a sensitive personality may be hiding but also growing into maturity. He also believed that many of us are too ‘comfortable’ in our lives in the Church and in society. We should remember the trials faced by the early Christian community, also remembering that we are born and will die alone. Every human being, however, is unique and important to God.

Father Alexander Fostiropoulos followed this talk with some personal reminiscences of his formation as a deacon and priest, thanks to Metropolitan Anthony’s guidance, along with his appointment as Orthodox Chaplain at King’s College London. He reminded us, just as Karin Greenhead did, of the importance of our lives in which each of us has a history, a present and a future in the eschaton. Metropolitan Anthony’s own history was that of an outsider in the émigré Russian community in France; his ‘present’ was the period that he spent as a bishop in the Russian Cathedral in London, where he had a huge impact on all of those to whom he ministered; and his ‘future’ is the place of eternal memory that he now inhabits after death. Metropolitan’s legacy to the Deanery, according to Father Alexander, consists (among many other things) in a) his teaching that it is Christian faith that comes first, not ethnicity; b) that the language used in liturgical celebration should be that which is shared by the majority of the parish; c) that pastoral and episcopal care of the Christian community lies in meeting each person exactly where they are in personal and spiritual terms. Father Alexander also used the vivid image of a chess game: as we play the game of life, we must constantly be planning and thinking several moves ahead. The only difference, if we extend this analogy to life in its widest sense, is that God is playing with us *from the other end*, bringing us forward towards eternity.

This talk was followed by a stimulating – even dramatic – presentation by Suzanne Sklar. She described how, when she first met Metropolitan Anthony, she told him that she could not reconcile the suffering that exists in the world with a good and benevolent God. He answered quietly that she would come to realise one day that the glory of God, as revealed in the Person of Christ, is much greater than all of the evil that we see in fallen creation. She was initially angered by this statement, but later came to realise that it is true. Indeed, as Metropolitan Anthony stated, it is through the darkness, the pain of the cross, that we arrive into glory. Eternal bliss is infinitely larger than damnation; the glory of God goes far beyond the qualities of good and evil.

A lively Round Table, initiated by short statements from Costa Carras, Amal Dibo, Karin Greenhead, Metropolitan John of Pergamum, and Suzanne Sklar, finished the discussions of the first day. Participants posed many questions to the speakers concerning Metropolitan Anthony’s teaching on God, the Incarnation, angels, salvation, and the role of the Church in this dispensation.

The second day opened with a fascinating talk by Metropolitan John of Pergamum on the vocation of human beings as priests in creation, especially with respect to ecology. He stressed that God placed us in creation, telling Adam to name the animals and to act as their steward. This means that our attitude towards nature should not be utilitarian, but should be both responsible and full of thanksgiving. We must remember that creation belongs not to us, but to God. And further, we should remember that, as

priests of creation, we are responsible for blessing it and offering it back to God in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Metropolitan John also emphasised that Metropolitan Anthony's Christology has a cosmic character: Christ, by taking on flesh from the holy Virgin Mary, is united with the whole of creation. Man emerges as man through relationship. He has the capacity to move in two directions: towards creation (as an animal) or towards God. It is only in relating to others, or another, that man becomes fully real or, as St Irenaeus put it, 'the glory of God is a man fully alive'. Christ is fully man because his humanity is defined in relation to God and to creation; he is the true Second Adam. And we are human to the extent that we aspire to be like Christ. As the only creatures who have the freedom to transcend nature, we are called to embrace and love nature as a beloved object. Thus, ecological problems are not a question of ethics, but rather of culture. They have resulted from the fact that man has, in the course of the last few centuries, ceased to regard nature as sacred. We are liturgical beings and it is our calling both to care for this God-given creation and to offer it back to God in thanksgiving.

Dr Elizabeth Robson, from the BBC, followed this talk with some reminiscences about Metropolitan Anthony's mission in broadcasting religious teaching and liturgical services to the USSR during the Communist era. She described how he refused ever to speak from a script and how this sometimes kept the producers on tenterhooks. Other problems included the 'jamming' of transmissions in Russia: the authorities set up radio masts which emitted loud noise that was intended to obscure the programmes delivered by the BBC and other international radio stations. Metropolitan Anthony took a great interest in his pastoral work on radio and television, even if he did not always act exactly as the producers expected him to do!

The last talk in the conference was delivered by Costa Carras on the subject of Metropolitan Anthony's teaching on the holy Trinity. In response to those who think that the Trinitarian controversies of the early Church are just too complicated, he argued that the formulation of a correct definition *was* important. Further, it is the Trinitarian nature of the Christian God that explains his love and creative energy towards creation. In being numerically Three, as opposed to One, God's being is in its very nature characterised by relationship, not necessity. Costa also suggested that we need to understand that there is a distinction between how God acts in eternity and in history. Further, we must recognise the extraordinary nature of the Incarnation of Christ, as a 'crossing-over' between divine and created modes of being. One other interesting point to emerge in this talk was Costa's suggestion that Jesus Christ, as incarnate God, refused to be a law-giver. It is a lawyer, asking the question, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life', who prompts our Lord to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. What he fails to realise is that the Kingdom cannot be earned; in fact Christ is speaking according to another frame of reference entirely. The Good Samaritan, unlike the priest or the Levite, is someone who is prepared to step out of ritual boundaries and to take risks in order to help his fellow human being. Parables such as this are not simply about eschatology; they are about life in this world. Costa ended by reminding us that Metropolitan Anthony stressed the importance of living as Christians in this world; further, he never separated the paths of faith and of action.

A final Round Table allowed participants the opportunity to direct questions especially to Metropolitan John of Pergamum, who did his best to answer a number of difficult ones. The problem of evil appeared again, expressed in a heartfelt way by more than one member of the conference and probably reflecting the difficult times in which we find ourselves. Metropolitan John reminded us, echoing Metropolitan Anthony, that without denying the difficulty of the issues that we face, we must

not lose sight of the fact that we are loved by God and called to love him in return. In recognising his glory, we may find the strength to do whatever we can in response to the political, military, ecological, and personal problems that face all of us.

One further highlight of the conference was a remarkable BBC programme, called 'The Atheist and the Archbishop', in which Metropolitan Anthony answered the penetrating questions posed to him by a well-known socialist and atheist thinker, Marghanita Laski. This short film was first broadcast in July 1970. The text of the interview can be found in the Metropolitan Anthony's book, *God and Man*, pp. 1-42, but it was a revelation to see it acted out: Metropolitan Anthony responded to Laski's doubts about the existence of God and the role of the Church in society with open-minded honesty but also unshakable faith. His remarkable presence, as a much younger man, was manifested in his dignified bearing, piercing eyes, and lucid response to Ms Laski's questions. It was a great privilege to be allowed to view this film and it is to be hoped that it will in due course be made available to a wider public.

We were also blessed by a Divine Liturgy in King's College Chapel on Sunday morning, celebrated by Father Alexander Fostiropoulos in the presence of Metropolitan John of Pergamum, and by a beautiful panikhida in memory of Metropolitan Anthony, Archbishop Gabriel, Father John Lee, and other recently departed members of our Church. The conference as a whole represented a fitting celebration of Metropolitan Anthony's life and teachings. It was masterfully organised by Kelsey Cheshire and carried out in a spirit of loving respect for the Metropolitan's blessed memory.