

Man as Homo Adorans

Inga V. Leonova

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In the wake of the protracted crisis of our autocephalous Church, having just elected, by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, a new charismatic and dynamic leader, we are talking about redefining our vision, and reaffirming our mission. If we put aside the secular terminology of “strategic planning”, what we are struggling with is the never-ending task of defining our ecclesiology in the face of the challenges of our environment. Among other things what appears to be taking hold is the spirit of *theopraxis*, the theology of *doing*, of *action*, of the work of the Church being manifested to the world through its good deeds.

While it would be hard to dispute the virtues of the good and charitable works, they must nevertheless be put in the context of the totality of life of a Christian being as *homo adorans* – a worshipping person. Defining the human person in terms of our relationship to God as a relationship of worship is one of the foundations of Christian anthropology. See, for example, the well-known passage from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s *For The Life of the World*:

“...in the Bible to bless God is not a “religious” or “cultic” act, but the very way of life. ...All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. “Homo sapiens”, “homo faber”...yes, but first of all, “homo adorans”. The first and basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands at the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God...”

Taken broadly this means that the entire human life should be the embodiment of the worshipping spirit, and that we should “walk in the Lord”, so that our every action, every deed is the expression of our communion with God, the response of creation to the Creator being a selfless response of Abel. In this context “the good works” fulfill the task of actualizing our Christian life to serve the needs of the other, and of being a means of denying oneself for the other.

Yet in Orthodox Tradition we attach great importance to our liturgical life, having throughout the centuries created a cycle of liturgical worship which, if realized in full, would take up most of our waking hours. The scripture tells us how, after the Ascension, the apostles “were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk 24:53); how they “all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14); and how they “continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:46-47) That scriptural norm of continual life “with one accord in the temple” became the ideal image of sanctity, as we can see in the lives of saints beginning with the Theotokos. Similarly, living in constant and uninterrupted prayer became the characterizing mark of the desert fathers and columnar ascetics (such as

St. Symeon the Stylite.) The Orthodox are often enough criticized by some Protestant or secular groups for spending so much of our “productive time” in the church, doing nothing “useful”. It has also been one of the favorite taunts of the Bolshevik anti-religious propaganda that churchgoers were essentially lazybodies, spending hours singing and standing about in church while they could and should be tending to the needs of “the society”.

Exalting practical deeds above the attendance at the services puts the emphasis in the Gospel story of Martha and Mary on Martha, the dutiful servant, while the tradition of the Church follows the rebuke of Jesus, “one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk 10:42)

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh in his book on prayer says that for one to learn how to pray, the first step is to try to spend five minutes in a quiet room thinking of **nothing**. He accurately discerns that this task may be insurmountable for many at first. “To lay aside our earthly cares” and to turn our mind to the Lord, to stand “pondering nothing earthly minded” is something that a modern person who is daily embroiled in the cares of our high-paced life may find harder to do than to spend hours toiling in charitable work.

This is an effort that defines the original meaning of the liturgy as *leitourgia*, the work of the people. In his article *A Century on Liturgical Asceticism*, David Fagerberg expands on this concept:

“*Leitourgia* meant a kind of public service, in such a way that paying taxes was one’s *leitourgia* to the city. It meant the work of a few on behalf of the many. ...The work (*ergia*) of the people of God (*laos*) is Christ’s own work perpetuated in history.”

Fagerberg also discusses the notion of *liturgical asceticism*, which puts liturgical worship into greater focus. The discipline of our liturgical services helps foster the ascetic rhythm of our lives which draws us into the communion with God, from whom we are separated by layers of our everyday follies, and realize the zeal for (borrowing the words of St. Seraphim) the *acquisition* of the Holy Spirit.

Without this ascetical, liturgical effort, without cleansing our minds of all thoughts that are not focused on the person of the living God, without seeking after the joy of communion with Him, our “good works” in the world run the risk of becoming things in themselves, self-serving and divorced from the real work of the Church. Only by re-acquiring his original created purpose as *homo adorans*, a worshipping being, can man truly assume the rank of the royal priesthood bestowed on him. Man’s “offering the world to God”, his stewardship of creation will then be in reaching out to the others and offering himself in love and *service* to his neighbor.