

Moral Theology and Theological Anthropology Group

Session 2: Beyond Personalism? Re-assessing the framework for Orthodox theological anthropology

Myrrha Lot-Borodine: Theological Anthropology in Light of Deification. A New Assessment

Georgiana Huian (Institute of Old Catholic Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Bern, Switzerland)

Although she can be counted among the first and most prominent representatives of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis in Orthodox Theology in the 20th century, Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882-1957) does not receive much academic attention in discussions over theological anthropology in Orthodox scholarship. This paper aims therefore to present and analyze the methodology, the presuppositions and the main lines of the construction of a theological anthropology in the excellent studies of Myrrha Lot-Borodine published from the 1930s to 1950s, which had a great ecumenical impact on various famous theologians of the time. These studies include: « La doctrine de la déification dans l'Eglise grecque jusqu'au XI^e siècle » (1932-33), « La doctrine de la grâce et de la liberté dans l'orthodoxie gréco-orientale » (1939), « La béatitude dans l'Orient chrétien. *Mysterium spei* » (1950), gathered and published posthumously in the volume: *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs* (1970/2nd ed.: 2011).

In the first part of the paper, I will present Myrrha Lot-Borodine's methodology in configuring a theological anthropology at the intersection with a historical approach of the patristic sources and a phenomenological approach of the religious experience, close to Rudolf Otto's influential work *Das Heilige*. I will also discuss her use of ascetical and mystical resources of the Eastern tradition (Evagrius, Gregory of Nyssa, John Cassian, John Climacus, Maximus Confessor), and the erudite staging of a dialogue between the vocabulary of the Greek Fathers and the vocabulary of the Latin tradition, both informative and at times polemic. I propose an overview of the most cited Church Fathers, of the main concepts taken from them and assess anew the "synthesis" produced by those studies. I will also address her spiral-shape method of investigation, aiming to go deeper and at the same time come closer to the object of inquiry.

In the second part of the paper, I will look at the main presuppositions of such a theological anthropology, such as (1) the necessary link between the apophatic theology and the apophatic (and mystical) anthropology; (2) the understanding of fundamental notions such as "person" and "energy" in the understanding of the Trinitarian God and the human being; (3) the pneumatological notions involved in the explanation of the deification; (4) the Christological and eschatological framing of this anthropological concept.

In the third part of the paper, I present the main lines that make Myrrha Lot-Borodine's anthropological synthesis original and fruitful for further developments. I will discuss here the paradoxes of the depth of the human being meeting the deepness of the divine grace – and reassess the abyss of the human in the tension between its original destiny and "deformations" linked to the present state. I will also look at the dynamic aspect of this anthropology impregnated by the ideal of *theosis*, and analyze how this dynamic aspect is underpinned by a disposition of desire and a movement of love (*erotike kinesis*, *eros ekstatis*),

amor Dei). For this purpose, I discuss the use of texts from Symeon the New Theologian on the experience of the divine Eros and reconsider their Christological dimension. Furthermore, I claim that this anthropology offers a balanced view of the human being, connecting intellection, affectivity and volition in a vividly depicted whole. The “compenetration” of knowledge (*gnosis*) and love (*agape*), starting in the theology of the Alexandrians and identified further in the Desert Fathers and in the more speculative Byzantine theology, forms an important resource encouraging to bring together the mind (*nous*) and the heart (*kardia*) in the experience of the divine. In light of modern discussions on malleability and permeability of the human, I address Lot-Borodine’s notion of permeability of the body for the divine grace.

Finally, I intend to briefly reconsider the anthropological synthesis of Myrrha Lot-Borodine in comparison with the “apophatic anthropology” project undertaken by André Scrima in the 1950s, and to evaluate how Scrima cites and uses the insights of Myrrha Lot-Borodine in his work. Finally, I propose some conclusions on the importance of this anthropological model centered in the dynamics of human desire and divine love for the theological anthropology today.