

The Dog Delusion

and Other Essays



Archbishop Chrysostomos

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST ORTHODOX STUDIES

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THE DOG DELUSION and Other Essays

*Confronting Science and Contemporary
Scholarship in a Traditionalist Context*

Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna

“Men despise religion; they hate it and fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true.”

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*



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About the Author

Archbishop Chrysostomos is a Senior Scholar at the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies. He received his doctoral degree at Princeton University, where he taught as a Preceptor in the Department of Psychology. He has held professorial posts at the University of California and Ashland University and visiting professorships at the Ashland Theological Seminary and the Theological Institute of Uppsala University in Sweden. As a Fulbright Scholar and professor in Romania, he taught Byzantine history, historical theology, the psychology of religion, business ethics, and the theology of Orthodox Church art and architecture at the University of Bucharest, the Alexandru I. Cuza University in Iași, and the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest. He later served as Executive Director of the United States Fulbright Commission in Romania. His Eminence has been a Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities and a Visiting Scholar at the Harvard Divinity School, the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, as well as the David B. Larson Fellow in Health and Spirituality at the John W. Kluge Center of the U.S. Library of Congress.

Preface

This book was compiled at the invitation of the distinguished Romanian scientist, Professor Basarab Nicolescu, whom I met while I was a Fulbright Scholar in his native Romania. Dr. Nicolescu, in addition to holding a professorial chair at one of Romania's leading universities (the Babeş–Bolyai University in Cluj–Napoca), teaches and conducts research at the Pierre and Marie Curie University, in Paris, France, where he is a theoretical physicist for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (C.N.R.S.), France's largest governmental research organization. He is also an internationally-recognized figure in interdisciplinary studies, President of the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research and Studies (CIRET), and co-founder of the Study Group on Transdisciplinarity at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is our common interest in interdisciplinary studies and, as Orthodox Christians, the role of Orthodox scholarship in the reconciliation of science and religion—or at a more global, if incidental, level, a better understanding of traditional Orthodox studies by Western scholars of science and the humanities—that has formed our friendship over the past few years and that led to Professor Nicolescu's request that I write this short volume.

It is almost cliché to note that for the Orthodox Christian world, acting *more maiorum*—in accord with those who have gone before, or *traditionally*—is a “given.” Western Christianity, it is often said, is living in a post-Christian era, its traditions and foundations apparently succumbing to secularism and a certain indifference to religion. To the extent that this is true—and I, for one, believe that while it is an observable and apparently intractable trend, it will prove to be a fleeting one—it separates the Orthodox world, largely confined to Eastern Europe (despite a growing presence in the diaspora), from the contemporary West. In Orthodox countries, those “hierophanies”

which, according to Eliade, offer order and coherence to the secular and profane still persist, even if historical tragedy may have dulled the more fragile *theophanies* of religious belief. If science and the humanities in the West are struggling to find, in however tortuous a process, common ground, they will not succeed in this unless they also tackle the religious traditions which are foundational to Western humanistic values.

In so doing, it seems to me that Western thinkers must turn to the Eastern witness—the witness of the Orthodox world, the “Eastern” accent of Western culture—where the same foundational religious values that underlie Western intellectual history are still very much intact and where acute thinkers have remained deaf, to some degree, to the shrill voice of adolescent anti-religious bloviation that has drowned out the voice of tradition in the West. It is not *de rigueur* in the Orthodox world, as in Western Europe and America today, for the supposedly avant-garde man of letters to dismiss religion as stupidity or as outmoded superstition. Few are so silly as to pretend that religion and its “hierophanies” have not served society and human progress or that religion is the cause, as trendy militant atheism in the West would absurdly assert, of all human suffering and social decline. One important reason for this is that most of Eastern Europe has only recently emerged from its own experiment with atheistic “enlightenment” and that crippling “science without religion” against which Einstein warned (even if militant atheists today would like to restate and reattribute his wise caveat about bifurcated knowledge—science without religion and religion without science), which social experiment ended in the near destruction of the human spirit and the actual annihilation of millions of people in the name of Marxist “hierophanies” that proved to be neither lofty nor the manifestation of anything but another case of human arrogance gone awry and of evil.

In serving the West, however, Orthodox Christianity must come to grips with its own faddish demons, which often offer

an inchoate and thoughtless response to the “de-traditionalizing” West. At times, Orthodox scholars (and especially those with a closed religious or theological outlook) act as though tradition, which they call sacred, were a value unto itself, rather than a composite statement about authentic “hierophanies”—and theophanies, for that matter—that needs no explanation or examination. As T.S. Eliot once so correctly observed, “a tradition without intelligence is not worth having.” And in the Orthodox world, too, if we are to respond to the West and contribute positively and constructively to the rapprochement between science and the humanities (and science and religion), we must speak intelligently from within our tradition, confronting what is foreign with critical exactitude and addressing every form of human knowledge, not as something inimical to or necessarily destructive of tradition, but as something which our traditions can perhaps embrace and transform, giving light to what is dark and drawing, when possible, energy from those things that might brighten our own light. We must avoid, in sharing our understanding and experience, confrontation and parochialism just as assiduously as we must avoid contaminating our healthy traditions with the doubts and deleterious nontraditional spirit that have captivated the West.

In the essays below, then, I have attempted to strike a balance between a dead, dogmatic presentation of Orthodox traditionalism (since tradition, or the handing-down of wisdom and knowledge, is a vital, active, and constant process) and that accommodation to non-traditional thinking, lacking a resoluteness of spirit and firmness of logic, which compromises the integrity of traditionalism, seeking to pretend that the traditionalist does not, in fact, have a superior witness of the kind that wholeness entails—whether wholeness in bringing human knowledge into that kind of hale intellectual vigor that one finds in interdisciplinarity or wholeness in joining the heights of human knowledge to the ineffableness of Divine wisdom. These essays, all of which have appeared in print, but which are here

presented in an extended and revised form, are meant to illustrate how Orthodox intellectuals, working within a traditionalist context, can contribute much to the reconciliation of science and the humanities or science and religion in the contemporary world. They should not be misunderstood as exemplars of religious advocacy, even if they argue from the Orthodox spiritual tradition. Nor should they, despite the strong suggestion that Orthodox spirituality (theology, in a sense), cosmology, and anthropology are more encompassing and more amenable to interdisciplinary understanding and the marriage of science and spiritual issues, be read as though they were meant to denigrate other religious traditions. Such aims, if perceptible to some readers, are not intentional and are foreign to my scholarly approach.

In each essay in the following chapters, I have very specific goals. In Chapter One, I address the rise of militant atheism, which is not only anti-intellectual in its tone but which thwarts, in its practical consequences, necessary exchanges between scientists and religious thinkers, as well as philosophers and humanists in general. In making my arguments, I clearly point out that militant atheism of the recent kind fails to address religion as the Eastern Orthodox Christian sees it and, by extension, fails to address the fundamental assumptions of Christianity—which has clear Eastern roots—at a wider level, too. In Chapter Two, I speak to the notions of unknowability and the discovery of truth in paradox, issues of immense importance for a proper understanding of religion and the profounder aspects of scientific theory. In Chapter Three, turning to the problems of “unintelligent” tradition and religious anti-intellectualism, I observe that many ideas that seem to impede a constructive rapprochement between science (or human knowledge) and Eastern Orthodox religious beliefs are, in fact, misrepresentations of Orthodox belief and foreign to its actual spirit. And finally, in Chapter Four, I offer critical comments about how poor scholarship, fundamentalistic thinking, and Western

historiographical conventions have, in concord, served to distort and misrepresent the witness of Eastern Christianity and to obfuscate the vital role that it has to play in intellectual debates and in interdisciplinary efforts to bring human knowledge into a wholeness of expression and to reconcile science, religion, and the humanities in a way that will expand our conception of man, his world, and the universe.

Let me, as a closing remark, note that, as a student of history, psychology, science, and religion, the matters which I discuss in this book are of immense personal importance to me. I am not writing with detachment; I am writing with fervor. Nor as an Orthodox clergyman who follows the Church Calendar (as an “Old Calendarist,” as we Orthodox traditionalists are derisively called), am I a casual observer of bigotry, whether of the kind spawned by traditionalism gone astray or atheism turned violent. I have faced these matters as they affect lives—my own included—and human relationships, as they separate one human from another, and as they assault human knowledge, impeding its integrity and the necessary interaction between different thinkers and different ways of thought. My overall interest in compiling this book, therefore, is vivid, personal, and heartfelt.

Archbishop Chrysostomos

Chapter One

THE DOG DELUSION

Some Remarks About Professor Richard Dawkins' Mordant Best-Seller, The God Delusion

His Naïve Empiricism, Atheism, and Blasphemy in Context

I am normally loath to write about serious matters under cute or catchy titles, which are often meretricious in nature and usually serve the aim of peddling poor thought with clever advertising. In this instance, however, I am putting aside my aversion for the slick, since the subject of my comments, a recent and very popular work, *The God Delusion*,¹ by Richard Dawkins, is in many ways deserving of mockery (to which I am also normally quite disinclined). I deliberately intend to have the author on the pan for the aggressive and contemptuous title of his book against religion, religious belief, and, in general, religious believers. It is not that Dawkins, who has written widely on evolutionary biology and ethology, is incapable of, or unrecognized for, good thought in his area of scientific expertise; he is an Oxford-educated scientist, taught at the University of California, holds an endowed chair at Oxford, and is a writer of note. His technical scientific writings, his widely-known book on the so-called “selfish gene,”² and his popular commentaries on evolution and biology (the latter at times provocatively unorthodox in their claims) sell well enough without egregiously cheap titles or gimmicks. Though they have made him what some journalists have dubbed the “celebrity don,” Professor

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

² *Idem*, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Chapter Two

FINDING GOD BETWEEN THE CRACKS

Reminiscences from the Princeton of Albert Einstein, Rose Rand, John Nash, and Father Georges Florovsky

I have in a number of articles pointed out that the Church Fathers, though they assuredly consider intellectual pursuits to be of secondary importance and inferior to spiritual knowledge, have never sanctioned a spirit of anti-intellectualism. Nor have they ever denied the positive rôle of secular learning, if placed in its proper context, in the human ascent to spiritual wisdom.¹ In fact, as I have demonstrated from historical examples, not only did some of the more renowned Fathers of the Church wear the two hats of “scholar” and “clergyman,” but they helped to cultivate the spiritual wholeness of many of the young people of their times by the balance which they struck between the training of the mind and the formation of the soul. It is in the spirit of this more circumspect approach to secular learning and spiritual knowledge that I would like to reflect on the impact of a number of intellectual figures on my spiritual life, focusing on my years as a graduate student at Princeton. In so doing, I do not wish to underestimate the tremendous influence of other scholars who contributed to my intellectual and spiritual growth (among others, the Church historian Jeffrey Burton Russell, the psychologist Nikolai Khokhlov, and the chemist and philosopher of science Lee Kalbus—whom I have gratefully acknowledged in a number of my books); rather, my purpose is simply to concentrate my reminiscences on a circle of people at Princeton, where I completed my doctoral studies

¹ See, for example, Hieromonk Patapios and Archbishop Chrysostomos, “The Church Fathers on Secular Knowledge,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. xxi, No. 3, pp. 33–43.

Chapter Three

THE “UNCERTAIN RICHES” OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Some Comments on Unknowing, Uncertainty, and Ambiguity as Paths to Spiritual Wisdom

Addressing the issue of material wealth, the Apostle Paul warns us that we should neither be “highminded” nor place our trust in the efficacy of “uncertain riches,” but “lay up in store” for ourselves a “good foundation” that we “may lay hold on eternal life” (1 St. Timothy 6:17–19). This principle we can also apply to theological materialism; that is, to the highminded arrogance of the uncertain riches of “profane and vain babblings” that, as St. Paul himself observes—applying his words about material riches to matters of “faith” (“περὶ τὴν πίστιν” [*peri ten pistin*])—accrue to “oppositions of science falsely so called” (“ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως” [*antitheseis tes pseudonymou gnoseos*]), or, in more contemporary parlance, the “contradictions of knowledge falsely called knowledge” (verses 20–21). Any attempt to capture the subtle, nuanced, and deeply hidden mysteries of the nature of life, the human condition, the universe, and the spiritual realm that encompasses these proves futile when we seek to speak in the concrete, fixed nomenclature of fundamentalism and the inadequate language of the literalist. We succeed only in creating false impressions, limiting the unlimited and reifying that which takes true shape only in image and approximation—the enigmatic *substance* of spiritual wisdom. We forego a “good foundation” for the false security of unwholesome and nugatory affirmations that lack substance.

The dangers of unthinking and vacuous fundamentalism and literalism have been addressed in two articles that have enjoyed attention among Orthodox Christians: viz., in a critique of the fundamentalistic approach to science and contemporary

Chapter Four

SCHOLARLY IMPRUDENCE

Comments on Contemporary Trends in Orthodox Spiritual Writing and Byzantine Historiography

Imprudence is a mounting spiritual and intellectual disease in our age. With the advent of the Internet, any fool or pandrum with an opinion, to restate an old ditty, has a readily available forum to express the most absurd and detestable views—free from the peer review which is *de rigueur* in traditional publishing and wholly unconstrained by the traditional assumption that one should educate himself in a subject before offering an opinion or evaluation of it. Not only has the scholarly world suffered because of the consequent lowering of standards of excellence, but largely unlearned ideas and bold prejudices which were on the fringe of scholarship in the past now command attention and reflection, as though they were worthy of such imprudence and the relinquishment of scholarly circumspection have in many instances prevailed in areas of scholarly investigation where academic stringency and ostensive skills were once the primary lines of defense against superficiality and banality.

As a result of this lamentable trend, the mere defense of what was once conventional and careful scholarship often earns one the ugly accusation of intellectual elitism. This is largely because imprudence inevitably carries with it a corollary ill: the vexatious arrogance of those who garner self-importance through the sometimes pugnacious promulgation of their personal and unlearned opinions. I cannot say why such pride so ineluctably follows on the heels of scholarly imprudence; but a pithy remark made by the Mexican television journalist and writer, Jorge Ramos, in the introduction to his recent and fascinating autobiography, may provide a clue: “*Escribo con*

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“In each essay...[in this book], I have very specific goals. In Chapter One, I address the rise of militant atheism, which is not only anti-intellectual in its tone but which thwarts, in its practical consequences, necessary exchanges between scientists and religious thinkers, as well as philosophers and humanists in general. In making my arguments, I clearly point out that militant atheism of the recent kind fails to address religion as the Eastern Orthodox Christian sees it and, by extension, fails to address the fundamental assumptions of Christianity—which has clear Eastern roots—at a wider level, too. In Chapter Two, I speak to the notions of unknowability and the discovery of truth in paradox, issues of immense importance for a proper understanding of religion and the profounder aspects of scientific theory. In Chapter Three, turning to the problems of “unintelligent” tradition and religious anti-intellectualism, I observe that many ideas that seem to impede a constructive rapprochement between science (or human knowledge) and Eastern Orthodox religious beliefs are, in fact, misrepresentations of Orthodox belief and foreign to its actual spirit. And finally, in Chapter Four, I offer critical comments about how poor scholarship, fundamentalistic thinking, and Western historiographical conventions have, in concord, served to distort and misrepresent the witness of Eastern Christianity and to obfuscate the vital role that it has to play in intellectual debates and in interdisciplinary efforts to bring human knowledge into a wholeness of expression and to reconcile science, religion, and the humanities in a way that will expand our conception of man, his world, and the universe.”

From the Preface

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