

# Basil Lourié, Andrew Schumann

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## The Christian Orthodoxy in the Modern World

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## The Christian Orthodoxy in the Modern World



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*Andrew Schumann:* It is usual to think that Eastern Christianity is not rational, but it is mystic – in its doctrinal and theological studies there is no logic at all. Whether this view corresponds to the reality? Is it true that there is no logic in Orthodoxy? If the Orthodox logic exists, then how it is expressed and in what?

*Basil Lourié:* I would like to avoid such terms as “Orthodox logic” or any other term making logic a part of the religious beliefs of the Orthodox Christianity. Logic is simply a mean to explain the contents of these beliefs. Indeed, the applicability of the classical logic to this purpose is severely limited: it is useful for some minor points only. The same can be repeated about even non-classical logics respecting the principle of explosion *ex contradictione quodlibet*. This is why many people think that the Orthodox dogmatics is basically illogical, although it does use logics for its peripheral technical issues. I think that this conviction is absolutely wrong. When the Fathers of Church were elaborating a logical language for explanation of the realities of their faith, they had to develop a paraconsistent logic, that is, a non-classical logic where the principle of explosion does not work. This logic not only tolerates contradictions but relies on them. Its very basic structures are contradictory and not only contradictory but contradictory. The most of the paraconsistent logics developed during the twentieth century are based on the contrary contradictions without permitting the contradictory ones. Only the so-called dialethical paraconsistent logic developed especially by Graham Priest, which is based on the contradictory contradictions, has something to do with the basic logical structures of the Orthodox dogmatics. There is a patristic textbook on such logic, the works attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite (second half of the fifth cent.), especially his *De divinis nominibus* and *De mystica theologia*. It is interesting to trace (as Carlos G. Steel once did) how Dionysius’ dialethic logic is “rectified” to become a usual logic respecting the principle of explosion under the pen of his major Latin Scholastic commentator Albert the Great. Nicholas of Cusa partly noticed this incorrectness of Albert and criticized him, but Scholasticism in general and its Western heirs remained unsusceptible to this very core of the logic of Dionysius and Byzantine

Patristics in general. Long before these Western opponents, the patristic logical dialethicism met its opponents in the East (e.g., Eunomius, Nestorius, John Philoponus...).

*Andrew Schumann:* From the structuralism position it is possible to assume that there exists someone who possesses Orthodox thinking (i.e. follows the Orthodox logic), but he does not declare Orthodox values, e.g. he does not say the concise statement or does not take communion. Nevertheless, there are also opposite cases: someone declares himself Orthodox, but he does not possess Orthodox thinking. What is it more important for the Orthodox Church either to proclaim himself Orthodox, but not to follow the Orthodox logic, or to follow the Orthodox logic, but not to be Orthodox in words?

*Basil Lourié:* Logic is only a way of thinking, but the human personality as a whole and even its cognitive sphere are larger than any given aspect of its functioning. Thus, there is no single way of thinking or way of action which would be enough to be a true Orthodox believer. To be an Orthodox, you have, first of all, to have a direct understanding of some reality, which exists regardless of our faith but can be understood with the faith only. You can have a right (“dialethic”) way of thinking but avoid recognising this reality. Of course, you can recognise this reality but have no right way of thinking. In the latter case, you can be an Orthodox if you are either incapable/unwilling to rule yourself by a philosophical reflexion or very critical to your logical capacities in this particular (religious) sphere. Otherwise, you will invent an “Orthodoxy” of your own. Needless to say that this is the main source of the heresies.

*Andrew Schumann:* Please tell us about the Orthodox Church you belong to. Why isn't it the Russian Orthodox Church headed by the Moscow Patriarchate?

*Basil Lourié:* Our Church is an heir of the so-called Catacomb (that is, illegal) Church of the Soviet period. She was formed in the late 1920s and the early 1930s by those neo-martyrs and confessors of Orthodoxy who did not follow the way of apostasy of the officially recognised Soviet Church. We don't agree with the major point of faith of our Soviet colleagues that “to save the Church” means the same as “to preserve the Church buildings in our possession” and to preserve legal permission for administration of rites. This basic difference resulted in many differences in canonical and dogmatic matters. Thus, we don't consider them as Orthodox, and they, whereas considering us as being Orthodox by faith, take us as schismatics.

*Andrew Schumann:* Which cultural and political differences of Russian Orthodoxy from other forms of Orthodoxy can you define?

*Basil Lourié:* I think that the Russian Orthodoxy is, from a cultural point of view, basically twofold: it is divided into two traditions, that of the Muscovite Church and that of the Kievan metropolis of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but these traditions were never separated, whereas they were always (from their formation in the fourteenth century) different. Both branches are not self-sufficient. The Muscovite branch was formatted and deformed under the pressure of the very strong Muscovite state. The Kievan branch was formatted and also deformed in the atmosphere of chaotic competition of many different religious and political forces...

*Andrew Schumann:* In respect to Russian Orthodoxy there are a lot of mass-media scandals: the Patriarch clock, the Patriarch apartment, etc. Why is the image of Russian Orthodox Church so negative in liberal mass-media? Can it be improved? And how?

*Basil Lourié:* I have to recall that the Patriarchate of Moscow and its image have an only remote relation to the Orthodoxy. I am sure that this critic is justified. The media-scandals around the

Patriarchate of Moscow were developing according to the known rules of dissimulation and perception of the information which was, at first, very unfamiliar and, probably, unwelcome. Such processes could be described in the catastrophe theory as one of the elementary catastrophes, namely, the cusp catastrophe. The year 2012 became the point corresponding to the quick transition from one edge of the cusp to another, that is, to a spurt of negative information after a period of its suppression. My prognosis is that the Patriarchate of Moscow will never regain the credit of confidence which it had in the early 1990s and will continue to be appreciated as a part of the government bureaucracy.

*Andrew Schumann:* The largest scandal of the last years connected with Russian Orthodoxy has happened to the group Pussy Riot. This scandal strongly polarised the Russian society. Please tell us about your position concerning this event. Whether there was a blasphemy indeed? Who became an interested person in such an impressive international resonance?

*Basil Lourié:* I consider the Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina (two Pussy Riot's members who are now in jail) in their action in the "Pussy Riot church" (new popular name of the place of their action) as true Russian "fools for Christ" and their action itself as a genuine act of faith and a genial work of art. It was only one beat but precisely in the solar plexus of the monster of a pseudo-Church hybridized with a pseudo-religious state ideology. The monster began to howl with pain and created himself "an impressive international resonance".

*Andrew Schumann:* What has determined your choice of mission to be the Orthodox priest? Why have you seen in Orthodoxy a special power source and energy for you?

*Basil Lourié:* Of course, Orthodoxy considered as the Orthodox Christian faith together with the corresponding practice is "a special power source and energy". This is simply a matter of fact. Why? — I cannot answer better than it is answered in the gospels and in the writings of the Fathers, especially in monastic literature. But, according my own choice, I would prefer to be a monk but not a priest. I was obliged to become a priest when our parish lost its rector and, then, its only priest (our former rector, Fr Alexander Zharkov, was shot down in 1997, when he prevented grabbing of our church building by the Patriarchate of Moscow).