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In God's way

When Muslims say that they are following 'God's way', they mean that they are following that which is written in the Koran and the hadiths. When we come across words about God's way in poetry, however, they do not require any explanation. This is a metaphor, and you can see behind it, in the same way that sunlight gleams with golden light on leaves or in the gold of autumn. You get a vague feeling of an elusive higher power percolating through the laws of nature, established by reason, and through the dividing lines between the pine and the birch, between me and the forest, between people and between people and God.

Whitelake. White nights.
Theluminescence of the heavens and of water.
God does not want to show us his image,
But traces of the Lord have started to shine
through.
Never-ending light, boundless evening,
The depths are growing, and so are the heights.
A great secret is beginning to be revealed to us:
Our heart is following God's way.

We might become aware of this as the presence of the Holy Spirit, blowing everywhere and joining everything with everything else with an enchanted knot. Or like an obscure Tao, a Tao that has no name and is all-embracing, which receives a name and immediately breaks into a myriad of pieces. Every culture finds its own words here, but behind the words it is possible to sense the breath of the Whole, which you feel in the forest or by the sea or in the mountains, and which you lose in the metro. The link between the Kingdom of God within us and the Kingdom of God outside us is broken; if we do not protect it, the inner depths grow dim and reality is squeezed flat. There is nothing to rely on. It is difficult for a person to remain himself without the support of the tree, the forest, the mountain, without the support of someone else, without the support of art. It is difficult to remain oneself in the confusion of life.

Nevertheless, Antoni Surozhsky challenges us to seek the way of God in places where you plainly cannot see it. He speaks of the way of God in the modern world; a way that is so complex that you cannot grasp it with science, you cannot grasp it with logic and you can only directly see scraps with nothing to hold them together. He says: "The actions of Christ spring from within deep contemplation, and the activity of a Christian can only arise from the depths of contemplation. Otherwise, it would be activity based on principles — moral, theological or other — but no matter how true, fine and just they might be, they do not correspond to the divine dynamic; the unexpected dynamic of the unimagined, the marvellous, which is precisely what characterises the action of God. We Christians are called to live at a greater depth (than the level of principles, ideas and laws — ('G. P.)), to live with a deep inner life, but not in the sense of being turned in on ourselves. We are called to go deeper than this, and this very depth (at which the boundary between us and God becomes imperceptible — G. P.) enables us to take along and calm look, with ardent purity, into the canvas of history, the canvas of life, and thanks to this contemplation,

this profound gaze, to discern in it the way of God, the thread of Ariadne, the golden thread, the red thread, which will show us where God is leading us amid the complex homogeneity of life that surrounds us. And this is where the enormous difference between wisdom and human experience lies. Experience is the result of past, accumulated human experience; it is directed towards what we have been through, to experience that is more extensive than personal experience, and it draws conclusions that are intellectually sound, precise and profound. But wisdom acts 'madly'. Wisdom consists of burying one's gaze in God (that is, in ineffable mystery, not in words about it — G. P.), burying one's gaze in life in search of that which I have just called the way of God, and acting madly, illogically, against all human reason, as God teaches us to act" (Russian translation by E.V. Maydanovich, *Kontinent*, 1996, No. 89). I shall explain straight away — and thereafter I shall develop my explanation — that the wisdom that comes from what we have been through, expressed in principles, does not negate itself but only relativises and deprives itself of primacy. This assertion and, at the same time, this denial was not understood by my then typist when I quoted Antoni in an article about the Grand Inquisitor. This young woman closed the quotation marks after his praise for experience and his praise for principles and attributed to me his words about the madness of God's way. But Scripture says that the way of Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. This was said by the apostle Paul. But this same Paul established new rules that were as firm as those of the Old Testament. The only thing that remains from the revolutionary moment of transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament is the saying: "The letter kills but the Spirit gives life." What is written is written. And the letter was generally taken to refer to the principles and laws that had been abolished, not what Paul himself had instituted. Thus Paul changed the points — and the train switched from one track to another.

Christ did not do this. He simply came off the rails without getting wrecked in the process. He walked on the water and did not sink. He did not abolish one letter of the Law of Moses, but he broke it when he found it necessary to do so. The Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath. To suggest this to the first person he met was a temptation and Christ firmly secured the right to break the law in the name of love. It was roughly for this reason that the right of pardon was not entrusted to the first person who came along but only to the king or the president.

The universal church followed in Paul's wake, but for Judeo-Christians Paul's decision was a blasphemy. And thereafter any decision by the church that conformed to the circumstances of history caused a schism. The iconoclasts remained true to the commandment "You shall not make for yourself an idol." And many people probably do not recognize that Antoni is right. He did not point out any precise, clearly visible landmarks on the way of God. He only described the inner state in which the way of God is revealed. That is, he described his own personal experience, that of sudden understanding of when to bind and when to loosen.

I want to emphasise a few individual places in Antoni's text. First, the very beginning: "From within deep contemplation ... the activity of a Christian can only arise from the depths of contemplation" — the activity of a true Christian, the same as the activity of a true Buddhist, Hasid, Sufi and so on. The truth of God, which lies deep in ineffable mystery, is not found through any sign, any ceremony, any secret or any intellectual effort. Later, I'll omit a few lines: "We Christians are called to live at a greater depth (than the level of principles and ideas), to live with a deep inner life ... and this very depth enables us to take a long and calm look, with ardent purity, into the canvas of history, the canvas of life, and thanks to this contemplation, this gaze, to discern in it the thread of Ariadne, the golden thread, the red thread, which will show us where God is leading us amid the complex homogeneity of life that surrounds us." Therefore "wisdom acts 'madly'. Wisdom consists in burying one's gaze in God (I shall explain for the second time: in the ineffable mystery of God, which cannot be put into words — G. P.), burying one's gaze in life in search of that which I have just called the way of God, and acting madly, illogically, against all human reason, as God teaches us to act." This praise for the absurd follows straight after his dithyramb on human experience, which I have just omitted and now restore: "Experience is the result of the past, accumulated human experience; it is directed towards what we have been through, to experience that is more extensive than personal experience, and it draws conclusions that are intellectually sound, precise and profound." This is followed immediately, without any transition, by praise for madness. And this is where the typist could not contain herself and would not permit the transition, and closed the quote marks before it.

Praise for madness certainly does not flow from a high appraisal of "intellectually sound, precise and profound conclusions." Antoni does not explain why they become relative, nor indisputable and downright false,

and does not say when this happens and when we must go against our principles and break laws. When does a principle become absurd? How can we establish the moment of transition from the truth to the absurd? I think that all principles are only true when taken *en masse*, when they are limited by other principles; limited, if one can put it this way, by the spirit of the mass, the spirit of culture, which is itself a mass of principles, and not the logical development of axioms from which theorems and lemmas can be deduced. Culture puts principles in their place. When torn from its place and cast into the abstract space of logic, a principle swells up like a cancerous tumour, and a blessing turns into something evil.

This is how the Leninist definition of dictatorship as unlimited violence appears. Logically speaking, this is correctly constructed. But the historical dictatorship that of Rome, was not at all like this. Dictatorship was extreme powers given by the Senate for six months, after which an account had to be given. The period could be extended — for another six months — or not extended. The dictatorship did not give the right to dissolve the Senate and declare the senators enemies of the people. This example shows that the historic definition of the term does not allow it to be simplified to the level of the mathematical definition of a triangle. The historic principle is true, if you like, in its imprecision, in the way it links with other principles of culture is not fully revealed. When a principle becomes mathematically precise, it also becomes false. Any principle that breaks free of the historic mass and into theological expanse becomes an evil, becomes a force that destroys culture.

But neither does culture possess indisputable truth. It also has its defects, which are not seen when looked at from the side. The Christians, who identified themselves as being outside antiquity, saw in it so many defects that they considered even the virtues of the pagans to be hidden defects. But this is again the victory of logic over history and lies over the truth.

In the Zen tradition there is a legend that says that Buddha showed his disciples a flower without speaking. Truth was in the flower, but the flower did not speak. The flower seen by the contemplator resists the word and does not yield to the word. Tyutchev was not a Buddhist, but he understood this:

The thought expressed is alie.

If you stir up the spring, you cloud the water.

Be nourished by it — and keep silent.

Keep silent — until a poetic word is born, which is based on the feeling of the rhythm of the universe and not on the rules of logic and grammar or whatever else that has broken away from the way of God and lost the thread of Ariadne. But do not think that the typist was stupid. She had come up against a very serious issue.

All the answers have long been ready,
But there is still one question.
How will you tell if once again
Christ should come before us?
There will be no sign from heaven,
And again, just as then, again,
Someone powerful and known to all
Will order us to crucify him.
Your heart will pound like wind rattling a window:
Are you a pretender, or God?
Who will help me, who will answer?
The ground has crumbled beneath my feet.
How difficult freedom is.
No one in the silence of the world.
Can you really walk on the water
Inside, into the boundless reaches of your
own soul?

When a person lives without breaking away from nature, the way of nature and the way of the heart merge into the one Tao. You only have to stop the chatter of your mind, keep your eyes and your ears open, see through nature to the spirit within it, and you will suddenly notice in yourself a loss of rhythm in your affairs and your thoughts. And once you feel that loss, you can restore what was lost. Prayers, poetry, music and painting are various means of fanning the flames of your inner fire which has been damped down by ashes and of finding God's way in a moment of epiphany. But we live for many hours, days, and sometimes weeks and months in the world that man has built and organised against nature. "Our path does not wind like forest paths and streams, in a glorious meander. It is short, and straight. Thus only a machine can make its artificial-winged flight. We, like swimmers among the waves, have lost our last traces of strength" (Rilke).

We have to fan our inner fire for a long time before its flame can burn up the rubbish and open the way to profound contemplation; to the moment when the chaos of human affairs is grasped by an enchanted knot and becomes one, becomes a hierarchy in which everything is in its place and there is no doubt about

what is higher and what is lower, when to bind and when to loosen. If you do not understand this and do it, Antoni has said nothing to you. We need the fire which is fanned in contemplation, a fire of ardent purity. These words, about ardent purity, are at the heart of all reasoning. They echo the words of Tsvetayeva about the white fire, white with the purity of burning, a flame without smoke, without the soot of passion. And yet another echo: the flame without smoke is a term from Indian mysticism. Deep down, all paths converge.

The way of God is revealed through contemplation undertaken in ardent purity, and it was on this contemplation, on the gleam of meeting (as Antoni called his feeling of the presence of God), that he mentally built his church. I think this is the invisible church, where all people stand before the face of God on the Day of Judgement and can have no doubt about what they see and hear in the depths of their own hearts. The invisible church will never take the place of the visible one; the ecclesiastical organisation of sinners who more or less acknowledge their sin, their separation from God. The invisible church has no framework, no dogmas, and relies only on the word of Christ: where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with you. In the ardent purity of contemplation there are no boundaries between people. But the typist was right in her own way. She needed a framework, she needed rules. What for those who have encountered it is truth, was for her a stumbling block.

I have written* and spoken on television (which cut my words) and I have again said on the Internet (polit.ru) that in the dispute between the two reformers, Anthony Bloom and Sergei Averintsev, both are right. Averintsev's truth is historical. We do not each have an eparchy after the manner of Anthony. We do not have the very particular situation in which the Surozh eparchy lived. The reform of the church should not strive for what is unachievable. But that which is historically unachievable remains spiritually achievable and if someone can accommodate it, let them do so. Dialogue is possible between the eschatological minority and the historic majority. And poetry such as the psalms of David and the verses of the Sufis and Tagore could become the place of reconciliation. Islam, for all its cult of the word written in the Koran, has learned to live with Sufism. I do not see insuperable obstacles to something similar on Russian soil. ■

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* In my article "The path of individuality", Herald of Europe, vol. XIII-XIV.