What do Metropolitan Anthony and the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément have in common? To what extent do their paths cross?

Metropolitan Anthony and the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément were both well-known advocates for Orthodoxy in their own countries. Metropolitan Anthony became the public face of Orthodoxy in Great Britain, Olivier Clément became one of the foremost spokespersons for Orthodoxy in France. Both were tirelessly active, in interfaith conferences, on the radio and TV, and, in the case of Clément, in the press. Metropolitan Anthony's period of activity in Great Britain started in 1949 and ended with his death in 2003. Clément, seven years his junior, began his teaching career in Paris in 1948. He was baptised into the Orthodox Church in 1952 and continued teaching and writing until his final year. He died in 2009.

Clément arrived in Paris just before Hieromonk Anthony left Paris for London. Their documented contacts are few. In her encyclopedic biography, Avril Pyman cites a 1965 letter from Clément to Metropolitan Anthony as Exarch for Western Europe, thanking him for his pastoral care (Pyman, p.100). In a recent presentation to the Institut Saint-Serge (2024), Olga Lossky-Laham noted that Clément and Metropolitan Anthony would have encountered each other at the triennial meetings of the Fraternité Orthodoxe. There are few if any references to each other's writings in their published works.

Should we then regard them as having nothing in common, other than their work as the public voice of Orthodoxy? This would give us an incomplete picture.  According to Avril Pyman, the key influences on the young Hieromonk Anthony were his spiritual father Afanasii, his close friend Vladimir Lossky, and Father Lev Gillet. Clément's spiritual autobiography, *The Other Sun*reveals Clément's deep intellectual debt to Vladimir Lossky. Lossky introduced Clément to Archimandrite Sophrony, who became his spiritual father - a relationship that seems to have ended with Sophrony's move to Essex in (1959?). Clément's *La Prière* *de J*é*sus shows* the influence of Archimandrite Sophrony and also of Father Lev Gillet's *Orthodox Spirituality.* Together with Archimandrite Sophrony's *Des Fondements de l'Ascèse Orthodoxe,* this forms the core of Clément's teaching on inner prayer.

One can trace two spiritual lineages here. Hieromonk Anthony's spiritual father was a monk of the Valaam Monastery. Archimandrite Sophrony was a monk of Mount Athos. Rather than looking for direct connections, we should perhaps place Metropolitan Anthony and Olivier Clément in the broad stream of Orthodox teaching that flows from these monastic communities.

Met Anthony graduated as a Medical Doctor in Paris in 1939, at the same time as he secretly took monastic orders. He was ordained as a hieromonk (monk-priest) in 1948. His ministry in England began in January 1949. Throughout his career, he and his diocese were under the omniphoron of the Moscow Patriarch. As an ecclesiastical administrator, Met Anthony clashed with Archimandrite Sophrony. Sophrony then petitioned to transfer his monastery to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. The extensive contacts between Metropolitan Anthony and Father Lev Gillet are documented in Elizabeth Behr-Sigel's biography of Father Lev.

Olivier Clément arrived in Paris in 1948 at the age of 26. As he describes in his spiritual autobiography *The Other Sun,* he spent his twenties searching through the religions of the Far East.He was baptized into the Orthodox Church in 1952, at the age of 30. He taught initially at the Lycée Condorcet (1947-1962), in a Jewish working-class neighbourhood. He then taught at the prestigious Lycée Louis le Grand until his retirement. As a young Orthodox intellectual, he was recruited by Father Lev Gillet for editorial board of Contacts. Vladimir Lossky introduced Clément to his future spiritual father, Archimandrite Sophrony, the disciple of Silouan of Athos. Lossky also introduced Clément to the lay practice of the Jesus prayer. In the 1950s, Clément also became friends with Paul Evdokimov. In the 1960s, Evdokimov invited Clément to teach at the Institut Saint-Serge.

Apprenticeship with Vladimir Lossky

Clément read Lossky’s *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l’Eglise d’Orient* almost as soon as it was published in 1944. Lossky’s first book had its origins in a series of lectures in which Lossky presented the Eastern tradition to his Catholic colleagues in the Dieu Vivant circle. In Paris, Clément sought out Vladimir Lossky and became his student at the Institut Saint Denis. Clément followed Vladimir Lossky’s courses from 1953 until Lossky’s sudden death in 1958, becoming Lossky’s collaborator along the way. For the first year, Lossky was teaching at the Institut Saint-Denis, and then, until his death, under the aegis of the Moscow Exarchate. Clément’s lecture notes form the basis of the published text of Lossky’s Dogmatic Theology.

The Socially Engaged Theologian

Clément engages with contemporary thought, without yielding to intellectual fashions: existentialism, semiotics, structuralism or post-modern deconstructionism. In the 1966 article “Purification through Atheism” we see Clément’s engagement with social trends and with the thinking of his time. “Purification through Atheism” (*Sobornost* 1966) was translated by A. M. Alchin from a *Contacts* article of the same year. With this, Alchin introduced Clément to an English audience.

Clément seeks to understand the roots of modern atheism, and the contemporary revolt against authority and the Church. He lays out themes that will become familiar in his writing: the Old Testament basis of modern scientific thinking; the freeing of Western thought in the Enlightenment; the Church’s deviation into authoritarianism; the Western Church’s loss of the eschatological dimension. He contrasts this with Marxism’s rediscovery of the eschatological dimension. Clément notes, however, that with this rediscovery came the complete devaluation of the individual person.

Clément explores the growth of the institutional Church; the reduction of religion to moralism; the emergence of a scientific rationalism that proclaims the supremacy of the human mind. The split between religion and socialism had divorced the Church from social issues. But at the same time, secularization has freed the Church from its moralizing role (237–238).

Clément proposes that for the Church and humanity, the resolution is to be found in divino-humanity, in a Trinitarian anthropology “in which the transparency and uniqueness of each person is fulfilled” … “where the Eucharist bears fruit in the ‘sacrament of the brother’” (236). This will lead to “a Church that transgresses the laws of secular rationalism”. “In this world controlled by mathematics, programs and cybernetics, the world of the ‘Crystal Palace’ so brilliantly prophesied by Dostoevsky”, it will be transcendence that transgresses…. “ The Incarnation, the breath of freedom, breaks all laws of science. Pascha blows into the ‘Crystal Palace’ fragments …. That is why the future of Christianity lies less in moral preaching than in sacred transgression” (238).

Clément goes on to explore the image of God in Western religion as “the sadistic father”. He condemns the “terrorist” sensibility of the Church. In all this, the Church has lost any awareness of the transfigured, glorified Christ. God the Father is subjected to a human conception of justice. The meaning of the Cross is turned upside down. “Today, for most Western people, the Cross is synonymous with death, with the cemetery, with the sign of nothingness” (240).

To respond to the atheist, we must root ourselves in the Gospel message of love. Clément cites Nicholas Cabasilas’s Life in Christ: “God comes and declares his love and asks us to pay him with love in return.” Clément then explores the “exile of God into heaven,” which brings the transformation of religion into something that gives comfortable guarantees. Not so: “Faith is the personal adventure of man going out to meet the personal adventure of God” (245).”

Clément joins Bonhoeffer in rejecting a “God of the gaps.” “God is not exiled in the heavens. He is not the ‘stop-gap’ of human ignorance. He is at the center of beings and things...” (247). “In the world of cybernetics and boredom, the future of Christianity is to become open to the creative liberty of the Holy Spirit, “the giver of life” (248).

The Atheist and the Archbishop

Met Anthony’s conversation with the English writer Marghanita Laski, televised in 1970 as “The Atheist and the Archbishop” (published in *God and Man*, 1971) captures two aspects of Met Anthony’s work: the presence in the Public Square and the engagement with contemporary secular and atheistic thought. But he approaches the question in a very different way than Clément. With Clément, we have examined the intellectual roots of atheism and the Church’s response. With Metropolitan Anthony, we find ourselves in a thoughtful conversation that explores Lasski’s unbelief – or rather her belief in a system of unbelief. We see him lead her gently to the point of admitting the beauty of the scriptures and the power of reading the Lord’s Prayer at a time of deep distress.

We are led into the dilemma of faith. Metropolitan Anthony states that for him “Faith is certainty about things invisible”, citing the Epistle to the Hebrews (8), whereas Lasski insists on the absolute necessity of empirical verification. For Lasski, the power of prayer and poetry will ultimately be explained in rational, scientific terms. Metropolitan Anthony brings Lasski right up to the apex of the contradiction. On the one hand. Lasski says: “I don’t think God exists. How would my life be changed if my very imperfect world picture was made more perfect? How would my life be different?” But then she goes on to say : “Since the Renaissance, it has been all too sadly apparent that there has been no inspiration comparable with the inspiration that religion gave….I certainly believe that belief in God did give a pattern to life for which I can conceive of no possible substitute.’ (29)

Metropolitan Anthony’s *School of Prayer*

Metropolitan Anthony’s *School of Prayer* similarly leads the reader into the possibility of belief. Metropolitan Anthony starts from the situation in which God seems to be absent, in the chapter on the Absence of God. He explores prayer as an encounter. He starts with our experience of not finding God – we call out to an empty heaven from which we receive no reply. But, he says, if we could automatically summon God, just because we have chosen the time and place, this would be neither encounter nor relationship. (37 – French edition) If we spend half an hour at fruitless prayer, what should we say about the twenty-three and a half hours of the day in which God has been knocking at our door, with no response? Metropolitan Anthony then proceeds, in the manner of a father confessor, to guide us gently into the practice of prayer. Here, then, we have a practical guide, illustrated by scriptural examples. The reference to God knocking at the door takes us to Nicolas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, to which Clément also frequently refers.

Clément’s *La Prière de Jésus*

Of his own prayer life, Olivier Clément says very little, guarding the veil of modesty. But he spoke of prayer with authority. His presentation on the Jesus prayer to the monks of Tamié Abbey was published as “La Prière de Jésus.” In this short guide, Clément places the Jesus prayer in its theological and sacramental context. It is theological because it is Trinitarian in essence. It embodies the words of the Epistle: “at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.” It is sacramental, because it is embedded in the scriptural “Son of David, have mercy on me” of the blind man, and the repeated liturgical “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy” and “to Thee O Lord.” But in its practice, the prayer is also a complete Christian ontology, a way to end the separation of mind and heart, restoring the person in the image and resemblance of God. In practice, The Jesus prayer exemplifies Vladimir Lossky’s theology of image and resemblance.

In the second half of the essay Clément explores the progression of the Prayer of St. Ephraim. He describes metanoia as the turning point of repentance. Clément calls this a Copernican revolution for the human person. The world no longer revolves around me and my pursuit of self, and begins to revolve around the God of love. Here we have a whole theology of the human person: the person as the lord of creation, the possibility of deification, the whole world becoming prayer, the possibility of encounter in the light of Tabor.

So there we have it. A priest and a theologian. A medical doctor and priest, at work healing the souls of his flock. A researcher exploring the intellectual and theological dimensions of this healing. Both rooted in the Orthodox tradition of inner prayer. Both speaking to us today, as contemporaries.

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