

Centenary of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

King's College London - 15/16 November 2014

A capacity audience of some 200 people attended the two-day conference at the prestigious King's College London on the theme "The Glory of God is a Man Fully Alive", impeccably organised by Kelsey Cheshire on behalf of the Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation (MASF) – the Foundation dedicated to the study and dissemination of Metropolitan Anthony's teaching.

This year marks the centenary of his birth, therefore the conference had a much higher profile - in the number and eminence of speakers, in the scope and quality of talks presented, in the quality of singing at services, in the variety of books and recordings on sale, in the excellence of the exhibits of photographs of Metropolitan Anthony at different stages of his life and in different situations, with commentary and quotations in English from his works. This exhibition was all the more extraordinary because it was conceived, executed and brought to London from Moscow by a group of young Russian volunteers: young professionals and students who devote their skills, much time and energy and much love to the dissemination of Metropolitan Anthony's teaching. These volunteers also played an essential part in the practical running of the conference.

I was struck by the easy and friendly general atmosphere which reigned on both days, in spite of the awe-inspiring surroundings of the College's Great Hall, of the awe-inspiring stature of speakers, of the great number of talks and of their exceptionally high standard. MASF plans to publish the full text of the talks in English on its website (www.masf.org.uk) so everyone will be able to familiarise themselves with the content of these talks – though of course only personal experience can do justice to the human variety and personal feeling which permeated the presentations: so many of the speakers (and of the participants) were personal friends of our late Metropolitan, so many were his disciples, so many his co-workers.

There were eight talks in all. The keynote speaker on Saturday was Dr Rowan Williams, who as Archbishop of Canterbury had given such a moving sermon at the funeral service of Metropolitan Anthony and who now spoke of a man and of this man's teaching which were a part of his own experience. Brother Adalberto Mainardi from the monastery of Bose (Italy) named his talk "Encountering God in the Living Man". Then three people, active in very different fields (and in different countries) who had worked closely with him, spoke of the ways in which Metropolitan Anthony's teaching was embodied in the reality of our

work and life – here Archpriest Alexander Fostiropoulos (a priest of the Exarchate, and Orthodox Chaplain of King’s College London) was particularly striking in “Metropolitan Anthony: A living Example of Witness of the Gospel in the World”.

On Sunday after the Liturgy we heard a most impressive keynote presentation by Metropolitan John (Zizoulas) of Pergamon – “Man as Priest of Creation: Insights from Metropolitan Anthony;’s Thoughts”. We were fortunate also in Metropolitan John agreeing to answer a variety of questions from the audience at the end of this day. His talk was followed by a presentation from one of our Bishop’s major co-workers – Costa Carras - “Metropolitan Anthony’s Teaching on the Holy Trinity”. And next we had two important reminders of the huge impact of our late Metropolitan in many parts of the world through his many broadcasts on radio and television: first, Dr Elisabeth Robson (former Head of the BBC Ukrainian and later Russian Services) gave a fascinating account of the immense number and variety of his broadcasts in English, Russian, French and German; and then we saw the main part of the celebrated dialogue - entitled “The Atheist and the Archbishop”- between Manghanita Laski and Metropolitan Anthony, shown on BBC television about fifty years ago. We suddenly saw the young and fiery bishop in a situation which looked alien – but his wit, his intelligence, his respect for the person facing him were immediately familiar, and the strength of his faith was all the more striking.

Both days ended with very moving prayers in the magnificent chapel of the College, including a memorial service (panikhida) for Metropolitan Anthony, Archbishop Gabriel and others close to MASF. On Sunday morning we celebrated the Divine Liturgy there. This was an exceptionally beautiful service, full of peace, flowing without the slightest hiatus in full accord between the priest, the deacon, the choir, the readers, the many faithful. We were back in the Liturgical practice of Metropolitan Anthony, thanks primarily to Father Alexander, his pupil, who officiated and who also brought the choir mistress of his parish to lead the singers.

This conference was a profound experience, not only on an intellectual level, not only because it allowed us to meet so many different people of various nationalities but united by a common interest, a common attitude to God and Man, not even because it allowed us to pray together in such deep peace, nor because we could see the input of the young Russians who came to God through the teaching of our late Metropolitan. Rather it was a taste of life as it should be lived – for two days we too were Fully Alive and we praised God for this.

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