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OUR LADY OF GETHSEMANI
TRAPPIST, KENTUCKY

May 14, 1959

Dear Victor:

I have not rushed to reply to your letter first because I have been a little busy, and second because it is most difficult to write anything that really makes sense about this most mysterious reality in the mystery of God - Hagia Sophia.

The first thing to be said of course is that Hagia Sophia is God Himself. God is not ~~not~~ only a Father but a Mother. He is both at the same time, and it is the "feminine aspect" or "feminine principle" in the divinity that is the Hagia Sophia. But of course as soon as you say this the whole thing becomes misleading: a division of an "abstract" divinity into ~~two~~ two abstract principles. Nevertheless, to ignore this distinction is to lose touch with the fulness of God. This is a very ancient intuition of reality which goes back to the oldest Oriental thought (there is something about it in Carolyn's wonderful book Peaks and Lamas, incidentally). For the "masculine-feminine" relationship is basic in all reality -- simply because all reality mirrors the reality of God.

In its most primitive aspect, Hagia Sophia is the dark, nameless Ousia of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the incomprehensible, primordial darkness which is infinite light. The Three Divine Persons each at the same time are ~~and manifest~~ Sophia and ~~manifest~~ in her. But where the Sophia of your picture comes ~~in~~ in is this: the wisdom of God, "reaching from end to end mightily" is also the Tao, the nameless pivot of all being and nature, the center and meaning of all, that which is smallest and poorest and most humble in all: the "feminine child" playing before God the Creator in His universe, "playing before Him at all times, playing in the world" (Proverbs 8) (This is the Epistle of the F. of the Immaculate Conception.) This feminine principle in the universe is the inexhaustible source of creative realizations of the Father's glory in the world and is in fact the manifestation of His glory. Pushing it further, Sophia in ourselves is the mercy of God, the tenderness which by ~~its~~ His infinitely mysterious power of pardn turns the darkness of our sins into the light of God's love.

Hence Sophia is the feminine, dark, yielding, tender counterpart of the power, justice, creative dynamism of the Father.

Now the Blessed Virgin is the one created being who in herself realizes perfectly all that is hidden in Sophia. She is a kind of personal manifestation of Sophia. She crowns the second Person of the Trinity with His human nature (with what is weak, able to suffer, able to be defeated) and sends Him forth with His mission of inexpressible mercy, to die for man on the Cross, and this death, followed by the Resurrection, is the great expression of the "manifold wisdom of God" which unites us all in the mystery of Christ-- the Church. Finally, it is the Church herself, properly understood as the great manifestation of the mercy of God, who is the revelation of Sophia in the sight of the angels.

The key to the whole thing is of course mercy and love. In the sense that God is Love, is mercy, is humility, ~~his~~ his hiddenness, He shows Himself to us within ourselves as our own poverty, our own nothingness (which Christ took upon Himself, ordained for this by the Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin) (the crowning in your picture) and if we receive the humility of God into our hearts, we become able to accept and embrace and love this very poverty, which is Himself and His Sophia. And then the darkness of Wisdom becomes to us inexpressible light. We pass through the center of our own nothingness into the light of God.

I wrote that first page without keeping a carbon, but I am getting someone to copy it because I am going to want to know what I said. I say these things and forget them, and then someone refers to them again and I can no longer remember what is being talked about. I cannot remember what it was I said when I was there in Lexington and we were looking at the triptych.

The beauty of all creation is a reflection of Sophia living and hidden in creation. But it is only a reflection. And the misleading thing about beauty, created beauty, is that we expect Sophia to be simply a more intense and more perfect and more brilliant, unspoiled, spiritual revelation of the same beauty. Whereas to arrive at her beauty we must pass through an apparent negation of created beauty, and to reach her light we must realize that in comparison with created light it is ~~at~~ darkness. But this is only because created beauty, and light, are ugliness and darkness compared with her. Again the whole thing is in the question of mercy, which cuts across the divisions and passes beyond every philosophical and religious ideal. For Sophia is not an ideal, not an abstraction, but the highest reality, and the highest reality must manifest herself to us not only in power but also in poverty, otherwise we never see it. Sophia is the Lady Poverty to whom St Francis was married. And of course she dwelt with the Desert Fathers in their solitude, for it was she who had brought them there and she whom they knew there. It was with her that they conversed all the time in their silence.

I wish I had a fuller remembrance of your pictures. I just remember the general idea. The story you tell of its growth is very interesting and revealing and I am sure Hagia Sophia herself was guiding you in the process, for it is she who guides all true artists, and without her they are nothing.

When Reinhardt was here he was discussing art too. His approach is very austere and ascetic. It is a kind of exaggerated reticence, a kind of fear of self expression. All his paintings are very formal and black. I certainly do not think he is a quack like so many others, on the contrary he is in strong reaction against them. I think you and he would be in ~~fundamental~~ fundamental agreement. It is a pity he was not able to get over there. He is certainly not a brilliant success (like so many of the others who are making fortunes with their stuff.)

Now J. Laughlin, whom you know, is coming down in June. He wants very much to see you, and will write to you about it. My novice who was in the hospital came out but is going back, and it is possible that perhaps it might be necessary for me to make one trip more. I do not know what the future will bring, but until I know more about it let us wait and expect the possibility at any rate. If nothing comes up, then we could plan on you both coming over here later in June. I could write about that. I think often of the Desert Fathers, and the work progressing. And how is the broadside? Maybe we could make a little broadsheet on Sophia, with the material begun here????

I am really enjoying Peaks and Lamas, and also the Athos book has been very fine-- and the Hesiod. When you have thought about this material on Sophia perhaps we could make a further step toward thinking of a title. I am so happy to be involved in what is clearly a very significant work, spiritually as well as artistically.

Thank you for the photostats from the Encyclopedia. I looked them over, and they just begin to touch on the mysterious doctrine. Carol should try to get for the Library a book by Sergius ~~Ranga~~ Boulgakov, called the "Wisdom of God" published in London in the thirties. It would cover very well the Sophia theme. I have notes on it, but the book is very technical in its way.

Is Berdyaev's *Destiny of Man* available at the Library yet, I wonder?

All the best to both of you. I will let you know what comes up. Meanwhile, God bless you. And especially this Whitsunday, for we are entering into the great feast of Wisdom and creativity. May the Holy Spirit be with us and bless us.

Faithfully yours in Christ

M. Loris

Does the library have anything new or especially good on Mexico - travel book type, or anything to do with culture, way of life, mentality of the people etc. Have they any other book by Laurens Van der Post besides the "Dark Eye in Africa"?