

True Knowledge of God and of the Self (Saint Justin Popovich)

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An excerpt from *Put Bogopoznanja* (The Path to Knowledge of God)

Only the nous that has been cleansed of the passions and the darkness of sin and has been sanctified by the Grace of the Holy Spirit is in a position to sense and conceive of and love that which is holy, to live from it and for it. Only those who are pure can come to know the only Pure One. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. First they'll see Him in the face of His saints, because 'God is at rest in the saints'. They will also see there every divine gift which has been placed within every one of God's creations.

The human conscience is a gift from God. It's so mysterious and enigmatic in its immediacy and reality that nothing less than God could have given it to us. In the innermost core of the human conscience, there's an awareness of God. Because, in essence, the conscience has been given to us as a divine gift from God.



True and real knowledge of God and of the self is acquired by us only through the path of practical love. By loving God and other people, we come to know empirically that our soul is Christ-like and immortal. The experience of practical love as a method of coming to know God and people is part of the good news which Christ, as God-Man, gave to the human race. By employing this method, we quickly find both God and ourselves. Once it had been used by Christ, the God and human, this method of acquiring knowledge of God and the self became and remains the definitive method of Orthodox epistemology.

In Christ, Who is both God and human, there's something incomparably greater than Truth, Goodness and Beauty. He is Himself all of these in their absolute sense and, at the same time something far more than them. Whatever good there is in the human soul, Christ draws it to Himself by some invincible force of love. He it is Who gives the human soul something that absolute Truth, absolute Goodness and even absolute Beauty couldn't give by themselves.

Only one path leads to knowledge of the Eternal Truth: that is the path of Love. When we acquire love, which is God Himself, we really are united with Him, and, in this way, we arrive at real knowledge of the Eternal Truth. Love fills us with God. Our knowledge of God depends on the extent to which we're filled with Him. People who are filled with God are illumined, sanctified and deified and in this way come to true knowledge of God. Through the acceptance and experience of the 'first and great commandment', we become 'sharers in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1, 4). The divine energy of love brings the whole person onto the path of progress towards

deification: it deifies our heart, soul, nous, will and everything else that's human within us. We live through God, feel through God, think through God and will through God. Apart from this, the mystery of God is revealed to us, because 'no-one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God'. (1 Cor. 2, 11) And the Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of Love' and the 'Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding', that is the 'Spirit of Knowledge'.

As God and human, Christ made love the essence and method of acquiring knowledge of God and of other people. It is the main creative force through which the New Testament personality establishes itself. The mystery of the wonderful Person of Christ lives in love. Love is also where we find the mystery of New Testament epistemology. Theanthropic love is the new path to awareness. Its categorical imperative is: love so that you may know. True knowledge of everything depends on love, is born in love, grows through love and reaches perfection with the aid of love. To love is to know. Knowledge is the result of love. The whole of the philosophy of knowledge is contained in the philosophy of love. It's only if people love with Christ-like love that they are true philosophers and know the mystery of life and the world. God is God through love and, by the same token, we are human through love.



The Christ-like personality, guided by Christ into the mysteries of the worlds of God, sees the Logos and the logic of the universe and accepts every part of creation as if from the hand of the Creator. Reflected in the mirror of the soul of such a

personality, the created universe of sickness and decay is shown in its rational sinlessness and beauty. In the Christ-like soul, the last mystery of the creation is revealed, because such a soul loves and has affection for the creation. People who are loved always reveal their mystery to those who love them. A Christ-like personality regards nature and the creation not as a wild monster to be tamed by cruel methods but rather as an invalid needing sympathy, affection and love. For such a personality, creation isn't inanimate material towards which we should behave with harshness, something which we should exploit as arrogant conquerors, but should approach as a precious mystery of God to which we should bring God's mercy, through prayer, and His love, through the study of it. Dostoevsky tells us: 'Love all of God's creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If you love each thing you'll perceive the mystery of God in all; and when once you perceive this, you'll then grow every day into a fuller understanding of it' [Brothers Karamazov, chap. 41. Fr. Zosima's teaching (g) On Prayer, on Love, and on Contact with other Worlds].

With the insight of the eye of prayerful love, the Christ-like personality sees the immortal truth of every one of God's creations and its proper place in the rational harmony of the world. In truth, everything is good and nothing is worthy of contempt, when we approach it with prayerful love, 'because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer' (1Tim. 4, 5). Indeed, all things are pure to the pure, whereas to the defiled unbelievers, nothing is pure.