

Archive 2001

Cyprus 2001

This year there were four new members - Benedict and his brother Alan and friends of Ron and Pam-Mary – Dorothy and George. The group gathered at the home of Rita and Peter for the journey to the airport. A diversion had to be made to Bristol to pick up other passengers, but eventually we arrived in Limassol in time for dinner.

Thursday morning dawned bright and clear and after obtaining the cars we ventured into Limassol in search of vestments for Fr John-Mark. We managed to find the offices of the Bishop of Limassol and after Rita made enquiries we were directed to an ecclesiastical outfitters and bookshop.

We managed to make ourselves understood and were shown samples of many materials. Fr. John-Mark decided on the material and a tailor was phoned (she arrived within 3 minutes!) and Fr John-Mark was suitably measured and further arrangements made for a fitting and for picking up the completed garments.

After lunch we set out for Larnaca, but had to stop on the motorway for George to change a tyre. We eventually arrived at the Church of St.Lazarus. We then had a walk round and Benedict decided he had to have a paddle in the Med.

On Friday we set out to find a convent, but our first call was at Choirotikia Neolithic settlement, where we had a quick look round some reconstructed stone age round houses, but the greater part of the site entailed a steep climb, so this was given a miss.

We then carried on until we came to Agios Minas, a nunnery with very well kept grounds and courtyard, and well appointed church. An attached shop provided a good selection of icons and other goods, but we did tend to overawe the sister looking after the shop with so many people being in there at once. We eventually made our way back to the hotel after a mountainous hair raising journey over a partially unmade single track road (George wondered where we were going to finish!)

A high wind was blowing the following morning as we made our way along the coast road calling at Aphrodite's Rock before arriving in Yeroskipos and the church of Agios Paraskevi. We continued on to Paphos where we called at the church bookstore to collect the Bishop's candlesticks which had been on order since May. The afternoon was spent wandering round Paphos until it was time to attend Vespers at the local church where Rita-Mary is known.

On Sunday it was decided we would attend a church we had seen many times in passing along the motorway. After several tries we found the right road and found that it was an Antiochian Church dedicated to St. Ignatios Theophorus of Antioch. After the service we made ourselves known and were treated very hospitably and invited to take coffee. We learned that the building of the church had been made possible by the generosity of Mr. and Mrs Issa, Dolly Audeh and family.

Fr Michael Saba presented us with an icon from Mt.Athos of the Theotokos.

In the afternoon several of us visited Amathus the site of the ancient city of Agora. Afterwards it was on to Ladies Mile Beach where we were entertained to a bottle of wine by a Cypriot whose daughter was attending college in Lancaster. So with a bottle and coffee we spent a pleasant hour or so.

We then went on to visit the monastery of Agios Georgios Alamanos. We were met by an elderly monk who spoke little English and who invited us into his room. He proceeded to show us photographs of his life in Famagusta prior to the Turkish invasion. Compared to other monasteries we had visited this was very sparse. There was only a small church in the grounds which we could visit.

A roundabout route took us to the Tenta archaeological site. This is the remains of a settlement of mud huts, several thousand years old that has been uncovered in recent years. In order to protect the site from the vagaries

of the weather a pyramid structure of timber and heavy canvas has been erected.

Tuesday saw us on our way to Kikkos monastery for those who had not seen it previously and for others who wanted to buy their miniature liqueurs.

Marina wished to go in order to see the icon of St. Marina again. On the way back we were driving through very low cloud but we managed to keep George off those precipitous roads he so enjoys.

The week was drawing to a close and it was time to visit the centre of Limassol to complete any last minute shopping.

As usual, Ron did an excellent job in arranging the hire of cars, driving us round, and acting as banker and the settler of bills.

Apart from a wind on one or two days the weather had been very good until the Wednesday morning when as Fr. John-Mark described it – the heavens cried as we were leaving. But despite this everyone enjoyed themselves.

Peter Hoyland

Where we stand

by Fr. Gregory

I am often asked on discussion boards on other sites to outline the similarities and differences between Orthodox Christianity and other Christian traditions. This prompted me recently to put all this together into a reasonably comprehensive article which would be permanently archived and updated on this site.

In an age in which people like to think everything is the same really and the differences are just a matter of style, we need to look afresh with honest minds at both what unites us and what still hinders unity in the wider Christian world. Orthodoxy is often left out of these comparative studies. Many in the west think that Christian divergence / convergence is just a Catholic / Protestant thing. I hope that this article may effectively refute this notion and offer a refreshingly different perspective. I have retained the original text and structure of my on-line version as I think that it has a clarity which helps in the treatment of this rather difficult subject.

THE TRUE CHURCH?

Christian Orthodoxy is not well understood in the Christian world. Since we are attempting here some assessment of the Christian Church / churches, you may find this quick guide and comparison of Orthodoxy with other Christian traditions useful. The text includes at the end those distinctive elements which substantiate Orthodoxy's claim to apostolicity.

ORTHODOXY COMPARED ...

SIMILARITIES - CATHOLICISM (this is not to deny that SOME of these similarities are shared by SOME Protestants)

We are both liturgical churches, that is to say that our teaching is conveyed by both rite and ritual. We are both sacramental churches in the sense that spiritual realities are conveyed by material forms and means. We both centre our Christian lives on the Eucharist as a communal celebration of and encounter with our saving God. The Eucharist is for both of us an encounter with the Risen Christ. He has many modes of His Presence but we, in the Eucharist, celebrate His coming to us in the Holy Mysteries, (our word for Sacrament). We are both credal churches in the sense that the ongoing life of the Holy Spirit in the Church is definitive against heresy, (remembering that creeds define against error rather than teach comprehensively the truth). We both affirm the role of Tradition in unfolding the meaning and consistency of Scripture as the foundation of the Church's life. We both assert the need for continuity in

ministry not only as to form but also as to content in the historic yet evolved threefold service of the episcopacy, presbyterate and diaconia. We both uphold the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ, the sure means of access to salvation without denying the possibility of salvation by other less certain means. We both celebrate the saints as living icons of God's redemptive power. We both rejoice in Mary as the Mother of God, recognising that the refusal to ascribe this title to her reflects a continuing Nestorian Christology amongst some Christians. We both assert that redemption is a renewal of creation and not simply or only a matter of human regeneration. We both assert that salvation having been secured by God in Christ is in its application in human life a process and not merely a forensically applied past event. Salvation requires a growth in holiness to make it complete. We both assert that the gospel has profound social and political implications but only by preserving the Church's distinction from worldliness and carnal power so she can be a prophetic voice in the world. We both affirm the role of monasticism in maintaining that distinction and witness.

SIMILARITIES - PROTESTANTISM (this is not to deny that SOME of these similarities are shared by SOME Catholics)

We both assert that the only Head of the Church is our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ and that the Holy Spirit alone is the Church's Guide, Inspiration and Strengthened. We both celebrate the unfettered and universal priesthood of all believers, believing that each man and woman has a ministry to fulfil by virtue of his or her baptism. We both believe that the believer can know God personally and in the most intimate manner, and in this knowing, the believer becomes mystically joined to and transformed by the Holy Trinity. We both believe that Scripture is the authoritative foundation of the Church's life and not to be separated from Tradition which is the ongoing reflective mind of the Church in the Holy Spirit as the Word of God is broken and shared afresh in each generation. We both believe that defending and living the Faith is the province of the whole People of God and not merely the clergy. It is the whole People of God also who are ultimately responsible for the legitimacy of any ministry or teaching which is exercised in its midst.

DIFFERENCES - CATHOLICISM (MANY of which are shared by Protestants, SOME of which also apply to Protestants)

We neither accept the universal jurisdiction claimed by the Pope over the whole of Christendom since the Hildebrandine period of the papacy, nor the claim to infallibility defined by Vatican 1, however qualified. We reject the "filioque" addition to the Nicene Creed not just because of its unilateral imposition by the Latin Church but also because it effectively subordinates the position of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Also, by creating a dyarchy of origin, (however qualified), for the Holy Spirit (proceeding from the Father and Son) under the false premise that the Son is thereby distanced from Arianism, the Trinity itself is radically unbalanced and the Holy Spirit reduced to an incomprehensible, impersonal afterthought. We accept much of St. Augustine's teaching but reject his contribution to the filioque development in which he embraced the psychological analogy of the Trinity and the associated understanding of the Holy Spirit as the "bond of love" between the Father and the Son. We reject the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as based on a faulty understanding of original sin largely perpetuated by St. Augustine who regarded the primal rebellion against God as a "sexually transmitted disease." Although we believe in the assumption of Our Lady to heaven at her Dormition, nonetheless this is not to be overdefined as public dogma as it has never been part of the public preaching of the Church but rather an essential part of the Church's inner life which we have no business defining as if it were a saving truth in the public domain. (We do not rank truths according to their alleged importance; we distinguish them according to their appropriateness). We do not think it necessary to define "everything under the sun" in order to make the Church's teaching either more rational, systematic or clear cut. We accept that there are truths firmly to be believed but embedded in the mystery of God. The most appropriate language for such truths is poetry and hymnody, not the legalistic and defective analytical language of the scholastic theologian or canon lawyer. We reject the notion that the end of saved humanity consists only in the Beatific Vision or mere reconciliation. The end of humanity is the resurrection life of Christ where we shall be transformed by the divine energies of the Trinity from one degree of glory to the next. In this we shall be divinised, made whole and perfect as an iron glows red in

the fire. We thereby reject, (after Anselm who defined the idea), that redemption consists ONLY or PRIMARILY in the satisfaction of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. The resurrection is as much part of the salvation process as the Cross. The full and rich biblical salvation metaphors need all to be included, not just the ones that emerged from feudal medieval Europe, (if these at all)!

DIFFERENCES - PROTESTANTISM (MANY of which are shared by Catholics, SOME of which also apply to Catholics)

Notwithstanding our acceptance of the primary and definitive authoritative role of Scripture in the Church we do not believe that the Bible alone, decontextualised as it were from the life of the Church in her Tradition, Liturgy, Ministry, Art and Sanctity, can possibly ever function on its own as the yardstick of belief, worship and life. We base this belief on the understanding that the Bible was written by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women who were members of the Church in both the Old and New Testaments. We observe that where "Sola Scriptura" prevails, there are over 20,000 denominations each more or less claiming to have the correct "angle" on the Word of God. The impossibility of this approach combined with the marginalisation of the Roman magisterium, (including amongst many Catholics), has indirectly hastened the secularising, agnostic and rationalist trends in the west since the Enlightenment. This has now reached rock bottom in post-modernism whereby no meaning exists in life apart from that which the individual may ascribe to it. In this, Protestantism has unwittingly hastened secularisation and unbelief. Once the Church is divorced from the Bible, BOTH suffer. We also reject the over-spiritualising tendency of Protestantism which divorces the spiritual and material realms. This legacy has rendered the Protestant tradition opaque to the physical aspects of creation and sometimes even antagonistic to sacramentalism and a creation based spirituality. It has also stripped the physical dimension from such hitherto shared beliefs as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of the Body. We also do not accept the latent or actual individualism inherent in the Protestant approach to God which tends to marginalise or reject the role of the community in the Church. We regard this as a rather strange development within the Reformed Churches considering the manifestly body-corporate nature of salvation in both Old and New Testaments. Orthodoxy also rejects the narrowing of salvation to satisfaction which has been a common legacy from Catholicism, (ante) and the corresponding existential removal of the resurrection from day to Christian life and liturgical celebration. Notably, the feast of Pascha (Easter) has a greater prominence in the Orthodox Church than that of the other non-Orthodox churches where the sentimentality of an emasculated Christmas seems to have taken over.

DISTINCTIVENESS OF ORTHODOXY

Orthodoxy's ecclesiastical polity is based on the Council and conciliarity. This is how the mind of the Church emerges as the Holy Spirit speaks to the assembled faithful. The period of the Ecumenical Councils and the Undivided Church has a great prominence in the Orthodox Church. We have a synthetic and maximalist approach to Church life, (as opposed to analytical and minimalist). We place worship at the centre of the Church's life for it is here that we are transformed progressively into what we already are by baptism ... the body of Christ. We see worship (on the human side) as an ascent to God. We see worship (on the divine side) as a descent to Creation / humanity. Our worship is "a capella" and standing (no pews ... usually!) because it affirms the dignity and beauty of the unaccompanied human voice and the importance of movement / bodily posture in worship. We venerate icons and saints (living icons) because beholding and encountering the glory of God we are transformed ourselves by that glory as we repent. We are confident, (without being triumphalist or proselytising), that God has not left Himself without a witness and that this witness is in the Orthodox Church. This confidence is based on the empirical evidence of the claim of the Orthodox Church to be the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" of the creeds the Church of the Old Testament, New Testament and the Pentecostal period, (ie. to the present day). The validation of this claim can only be undertaken by both close study and experience of the Orthodox Church herself and certainly not merely this weak, incomplete and imperfect offering. Lord have mercy!

Fr. Gregory

The Fullness of Time - a Homily for the Nativity

*"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law."
(Galatians 4:4)*

The gospel is quite clear that Christ was born at the proper time ... in the fullness of time God sent His Son. Yesterday we heard in the reading of the Infancy Genealogy that there were fourteen generations in each of the three major epochs leading up to the birth of Christ. St. Matthew records this in order to show two things about God's timing; in human terms, it was a long time a-coming and in divine terms, it was according to God's plan and promise under the Law; the Torah for the Jew, the five books of Moses within the Old Testament for us. Quite clearly, St. Paul's insights from the Apostle today configures with the Jewish expectation of the Messiah in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Firstly, and chronologically, it was a long time a-coming. 42 generations is a long time to wait for the coming of Jesus. This generation cannot wait the span of one human life for anything let alone the 42 that the People of God waited for Jesus. Everything in our culture has to be NOW. Mass consumerism is built on such absurdity. Christmas, therefore, bids us to wait a while ... maybe even dying with our hopes and dreams unfulfilled, but knowing that our children, or their children, or their children ... and so on, will reap the reward. This extremely long term view is necessary because human culture is organic. Things don't happen overnight and valuable change takes time; God's time which leads me to the second point.

God sent His Son in the "fullness of time." This works on many levels. At a personal level we can say that there had been no one before like the Theotokos. She was Israel's richest fruit, matured over a long time in the vineyard. From her, the pure wine of Christ flowed. At the national level we can say that Israel was ready for God's intervention in the flesh. Political aspirations had been constantly dashed over many centuries with succeeding waves of barbarian conquest, often seen as God's judgement on the nation's waywardness and unfaithfulness. First the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then Greeks, then the Romans; Israel had, apart from a few hotheads, despaired of "princes who couldn't save." God's opportunity! At a global and even a cosmic level, this was the right time as the Roman Empire had managed to connect up vast expanses of the ancient world. The communication and social infrastructure was already in place. God's coming marked the beginning of the modern world and from there it is only a small jump to the galaxies.

It was also the right time because in some hidden way, non-Jewish cultures had become extremely receptive to the message of Christ. The pagans with their fruitless sacrificial rights and nature mysticism were reaching out toward something real but whose shape and form they could not yet see. The Greeks had developed a sublime philosophy and science that predisposed them to see Christ's as God's foolish wisdom. The cross earthed Greek knowledge in the things of this world and not the Platonic archetypes of the next. So, when Christ came in the flesh and when his message was preached across the whole known world there was a ready response. Nonetheless it took 400 years for the gospel to take root properly here in England and 900 years for Russia. Where does this place us now? What is God's fullness of time today? When will Christ be reborn in a western culture that has become apparently so cynical and hardened?

God knows! We could say that it is taking a long time for West and East to realise that the Holy Roman Empire is neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire anymore. Welcome to the modern world! What God does in the fullness of His time in the next Millennium (which starts next week!) we can only guess, but it will not be built upon the political realities or legacy of the first or second thousand years of the Christian era. Perhaps this means that we have to return to basics, to where this story began, a story that every succeeding generation has made its own. Here is a child in its Mother's arms who is God. Here is a Man, the Man who will lay an eternal claim on all human life and through us to the ends of Creation. Here is the One who shows all life what Life is about. Here is the One whom must worship and adore. *Then*, spiritually, we shall be ready to storm again Parliament and all the high citadels of Man!

Fr. Gregory

Orthodoxy and Christian Unity

Some of you here may not know much about the Orthodoxy other than that it is the Church that you encountered maybe when travelling in the Eastern Mediterranean, Eastern Europe or Russia. Perhaps you may know a Greek Orthodox person but not much about his or her faith. You might be surprised to know then that there is a growing Orthodox presence in the West including people such as myself who have absolutely no Greek, Russian or Eastern European ancestry. We are English Orthodox. How could we be anything else? Anyway, the recent growth of the Orthodox Church in the West has brought her into ecumenical relations with other Christian churches. We may be "Johnny-come-lately" to the ecumenical scene here but I believe that we have something important to contribute. In short, our tradition gives quite us quite a distinctive approach to the search for Christian unity. It's only distinctive though in that, from our point of view, the west also once shared the Orthodox approach, albeit less so in the Second Millennium and not at all amongst some groups.

Let me say from the outset that the Orthodox Church considers the search for Christian unity from the standpoint of truth and in the context of love. St. Paul himself urged his churches to "speak the truth in love." [Ephesians 4:15] Ah! you say, but do not all Christians aim to do this? Of course! ... but I am sure that we have all noticed how in an ecumenical setting we don't talk about certain things because they tend to expose certain issues that still keep us apart. Orthodox people sometimes make themselves unpopular or unwelcome by resolutely refusing to do this. We observe that many Christians tend to settle for a less than satisfactory invisible unity in order not to upset people. Now, I am not going to get into the differences today. I haven't the time, although I do have the inclination! What I am concerned to do today is to help you understand the unity of the Church from an Orthodox point of view.

Unity is not necessarily a word that springs to mind when the Orthodox Church is considered. The popular image of us is of a dog-fighting rabble of nationalistic Christians squabbling over territory and far too concerned with ethnicity and culture to bother about mission. The problem here is that the west never has had a clear understanding of what binds Orthodox Christians and churches together when, so often, we do fall out with each other. Ours, however, is not a monolithic or institutional view of unity, nor a matter of inward disposition only. We are a family and families sometimes squabble. What binds us together though and what compels most of us to deny the adjectives *Greek, Russian, Arab* etc., and prefer simply, "Orthodox" is our faith and life. Orthodox faith and life is absolutely uncompromised and one. Martyrs have died for it. Pastors have consistently taught it. The People of God have lived it with a passion unmatched outside soccer grounds. It is this faith and life that enables us to say, from one church to another, we are in communion with you or we are not in communion with you. The supervision of validly ordained ministers or membership of a national network of churches, does not, of itself constitute Orthodoxy. Only Orthodox faith and life shared with an Orthodox bishop does that. The Orthodox model of unity is, therefore, based on an Orthodox bishop surrounded by his presbyters, deacons and People all sharing and living Orthodox faith and life.

The major divergences between eastern and western models of unity appear when we consider discernment and authority. How in mutual charity is truth to be discerned? Does the Bible tell us, the Pope and the magisterium or our own individual conscience? None of these, we believe. Orthodox discern in that living stream of the Holy Spirit that we call *Tradition*. Tradition, for us, is not an archaic collection of man-made rules and customs; but that which in God's hands saves us. It is our healing and our life. But what is Tradition, actually?

Tradition, firstly, includes for us the Bible - Holy Scripture as the normative and primary but not exhaustive account of the Christian life. "Normative" and "Primary" is in the sense that our belief is shaped by Scripture and nothing we believe violates that Scripture. Not "exhaustive" is in the sense that the Bible doesn't have a word about everything and since the Church's oral tradition inspired and guided by God constituted the Faith long before the New Testament was written, the Bible is the Church's book. The ongoing life of the Holy Spirit revealing the Truth to us in ways always consistent with previous testimony is the ongoing stream from which the Bible first emerged both as to the Old and New Testaments. This stream flows in and through our worship, our art, and our common life. "Lex

orandi, lex credendi" the rule of prayer is the rule of faith. The theologian is simply the man or woman of prayer.

Tradition then, for us, also includes people, Godly people, through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken and still speaks. Their words are heard and received because they have drunk deeply from that stream which is the Life of Christ. These are our Fathers and Mothers in the Faith. Nothing they say violates Scripture. Nothing they say takes Tradition of into wild places or down unaccustomed and dangerous paths. The confidence that we have in God speaking to His people is ground upon our conviction that we hear His voice more clearly when we meet and pray together in the presence of God-bearing persons whose counsel we value. This was the pattern for the New Testament Church in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, when the early Christian communities met in the presence of their apostolic leaders to consider whether or not Gentiles who had accepted Christ should be required to keep the Jewish Law. A key recurring phrase in St. Luke's account in Acts is:- "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," [Acts 15:28a].

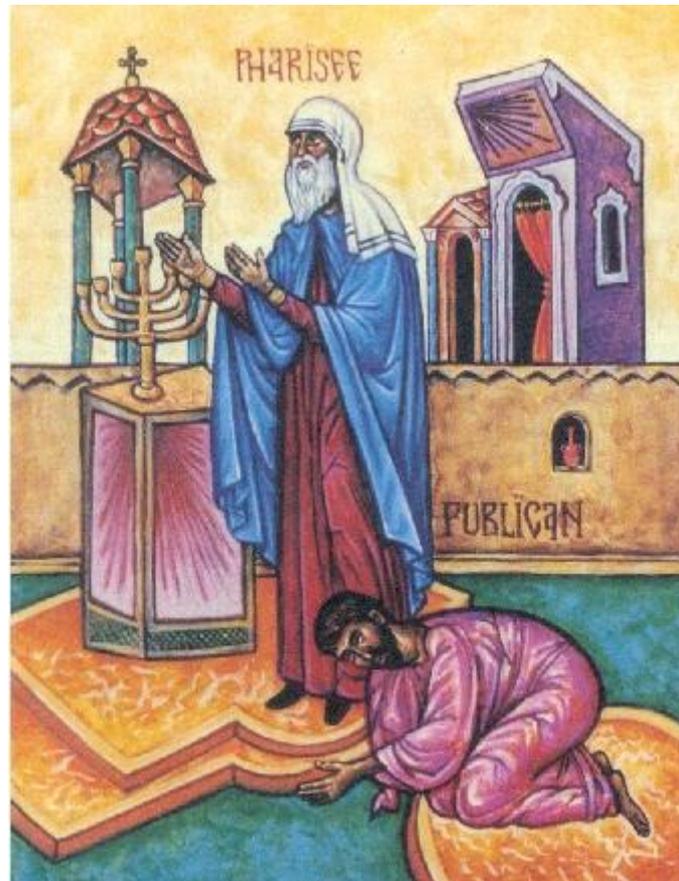
This then is how the Orthodox Church maintains her unity and proclaims her faith. She meets in Council to determine important new issues. In matters already resolved she maintains the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." [Ephesians 4:3]. She embraces the faithful in one equal fellowship with the bishop. She does nothing important without the consent of the rest. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." For this reason there is no higher authority in the Orthodox Church under God and as an instrument of Tradition according to the Scriptures than an Ecumenical Council. By our reckoning there have been seven of them. Moreover there is nothing more necessary from time to time than such a Council and nothing else in substitution for it that will do. We believe that this was the way for the Undivided Catholic Church in the First Millennium when the west was, for us, as fully Orthodox as the east.

Of course such councils are relatively rare in the life of the Church. Ordinarily, Council principles are applied in the less contentious and more practical concerns and issues of daily diocesan and parish life. For a more personal approach to matters of discernment, a more pastoral way, we look to the saints, living and reposed, who have lived and are living for us the Word of God. They are God's living icons. They show us what it is to be fully human, fully alive, what it is to be the Church, what it is to be saved.

All these factors, therefore, inform an Orthodox understanding of the unity of the Church. I submit that being the common use of the Church in the first Millennium, they ought to become again the common use of the churches in the third Millennium. Orthodox participation in ecumenism will always have this goal in mind. It is, if you like, "our bottom line." Do you think it could become yours? Perhaps the place to start with Orthodox in mind in ecumenical encounters is that first crucial thousand years. Here we will discover again what St. Paul meant by "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." [Ephesians 4:5]

Fr. Gregory

Oh to be a publican!



Christianity is not for "good" people. Good people crucified Jesus. Good people defend God's honour by force. Good people kill the souls others with their oppressive religious duties and expectations. Good people fast twice a week and give tithes of all that they possess and then look down on those who don't. Good people don't eat with tax collectors, prostitutes and other heinous sinners. Good people keep themselves pure. Good people never experience any doubt isn't that frightening? Good people are blameless. To paraphrase an Archbishop. Good people don't dream. They sleep the sleep of the righteous. How can God save good people? Well with God, anything is possible.

Christianity is not for evil people. Evil people will use religion to suit their own ends. Evil people will put on the mantle of religion to bless bombs, to curse enemies, to demonise those who oppose them. Evil people will cast away the mantle of true religion and persecute those who hold to what they hate. Evil people do not want God. They have themselves. Cast not your pearls before such swine!

But, if a "good" person should repent, if an "evil" person should repent, then Christianity CHRIST! is definitely for them. Such a person will not lift his or her eyes toward heaven. Rather with a godly grief he will confess: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And God will not disappoint in His mercy. Oh, then, to be a publican! Oh to have his grace, his self knowledge, his hope. Here are the truly great, despised by the world but magnified in the kingdom of heaven, the truly humble. Their humility is not an affectation, a pretence, a bargain with the Almighty; it is a painfully wrought true understanding of the human heart.

Who can bear such knowledge? Wouldn't we rather think a little better of ourselves? You know, the typical English disease:- "not too bad, not too good, moderation in all things, a little bit of God when you need him." To these the Son of Man says:-

"I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth!" (Revelation 3:5-16)

Some people say that we don't like looking at our true selves because we are frightened what God will think of us; others that we secretly hate God and just go through the motions; others that it is too

upsetting to our self esteem, others that we resist the call to change, preferring comfort instead. I don't think that there is just one answer to that question but the key is honesty. I recall, a long time ago now, an alcoholic at his wits end coming into church, (not here), and sitting alone. In a long conversation, I asked him if he could pray. His reply was disarming. "If I can't be honest with myself, how can I be honest with God?"

"Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

Happily our God is big enough for such problems, but we are not small enough to see the solution. One of history's great tyrants, Napoleon Bonaparte," is buried in a mausoleum in Paris where visitors have to bow their heads to view the body. In a monstrous parody of Christian worship, we recognise what we often neglect in our relationship with God. We have to get down in order to be raised up. We have to lose everything in this life in order to gain heaven.

This is why our Lord drew close to the poor. They were already pretty low down. This is why he drew close to children. They were already nearer the Source. This is why he drew near to the despised. There only hope could be God. Marx saw in all of this the opiate of the people. We see the glory of an eternal kingdom. Oh then to be a publican; to pray the Jesus prayer:- "God be merciful unto me a sinner." Only in this manner can we be saved. So, as we draw near to the beginning of the Fast of Great Lent with the Jesus Prayer and the Prayer of St. Ephraim ringing in our ears, let us always keep before us the great truth that these prayers can only be truly prayed with a humble and contrite heart. In this life we shall never cease to need to repent.

Fr. Gregory

Opportunities in Great Lent

For most Orthodox, Great Lent is quite a demanding exercise. The vegan fast, the desirability of having just one main meal a day, the call to prayer repentance and confession, the study of the Scripture and the Holy Fathers, the Church's services, almsgiving and the like, if undertaken in the right spirit can be extremely profitable, if, nonetheless a great labour of love.

No one could accuse Orthodoxy of being half-hearted in its commitments but we might be accused of being legalistic and self-regarding if we didn't make it clear to ourselves and others that we were not doing these things to secure favour with God or esteem amongst men, but rather to grown in holiness and truth. This is why, of course, we prepared for the Fast by rehearsing the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee in the Liturgy. This is why throughout Great Lent on week days we pray the great prayer of St. Ephraim:-

*"O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power and idle talk
(prostration)*

But give to me Thy servant a spirit of soberness, humility, patience and love (prostration)

*O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother: for blessed art Thou
to the ages of ages. Amen" (prostration)*

To understand the reasons for our Lenten activities one has to have the mind of the mind of the Church, which is the mind of Christ. We have to know that Great Lent is a means of deepening our quest for salvation and the service of others. The Fast is not a cultural artefact or a religious practice. It is a springtime for the soul as it approaches the Great and Holy Mystery of Pascha. It is the dawn of a New Creation, in and through us to the whole Universe. Lest us use the Fast well and in this spirit.

Fr. Gregory

Anger

"Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath." (Ephesians 4:26)

Anger can be a destructive force that does more harm to us than upon those upon whom we vent it. For this reason St. Paul gives the sound counsel to be reconciled with others before the day is over echoing Christ's own imperative in Matthew 5:23,24:

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there, before the altar, and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

It is often not the big things in life that cause arguments but the little things. We may have fallen out of friendship with someone we know over something quite inconsequential and trivial but anger causes pride and we try to justify our righteous indignation with rampart defence mentality and further vitriol. The trivial becomes magnified and magnitudes become trivialised. It only takes something very small to upset our equilibrium and lose our sense of proportion. The evil one know this only too well and uses it to great effect if we allow him. It is for this reason that St John Chrysostom advises us to direct this anger in a positive way, not at others or ourselves but at the evil one.

"This is why God has armed us with anger. Not that we should thrust the sword against our own bodies, but that we should baptise the whole blade in the devil's breast."

St John Chrysostom

Elder Joseph the Hesychast in one of his letters to one of his spiritual children writes that:-

"Anger in itself is natural. Just as the body has nerves, the soul has anger. Everyone should use it against the demons, heretics, and anyone who hinders us from the path of God. However, if you get angry with your fellow brothers, or get in a rage and ruin the work of your hands, know that you are suffering from vainglory and are abusing the nerve of your soul. You are delivered from this passion through love towards all and humility."

First, we must recognise the anger welling up inside and this is not difficult since anger is truly psychosomatic with increased heart rate and blood pressure. Then we should close our mouth tightly so that the demon of anger is not allowed a voice. When we are cursed we should answer with a blessing since man was created by God as a rational and gentle being. Others are corrected far better with love and gentleness rather than with anger and harshness. We must suppress anger with all the grace and might that God gives to us and we will find it weaker when the passion is aroused on future occasions. Indeed, the Apostle Paul identifies anger as one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20) and gentleness and self control as two of the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22)

According to the sayings of the Desert Fathers. *"An angry and irritable man is not accepted in the kingdom of God even if he raises the dead!"*

An illustration: A cautionary tale

In a small cantina in Mexico, one afternoon in the height of summer, two friends were drinking coffee. The devil had bet one of his demons that he could start a fight between these two friends just with a fly. The devil put the fly on the table where the two friends were drinking and where a cat was sleeping. The cat was annoyed by the buzzing of the fly around its ear and with its paw swiped at the fly, but missed, knocking the cup on the floor where a dog was asleep. The man's dog awoke and started barking waking the other friend's family who were having a siesta in their house on the other side of the street. One of them threw a stone at the dog hitting him and making him yelp in pain. At this, the first friend, whose dog it was became enraged. "How dare you throw a stone at my dog!" he said and threw a stone at his friend's relation at the window. A fight began between the two friends and their

respective relations joined in. Such was the ferocity of the injuries that the two friends became bitter enemies and remain so to this day. "You see," said the devil to his demon, "it takes only the smallest thing to make these humans become angry."

Fr. Jonathan

AS A REFINER OF SILVER

Some time ago, a few ladies met to study the Scriptures. While reading the third chapter of Malachi, they came upon a remarkable expression in the third verse: And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver (Malachi 3:3).

One lady decided to visit a silversmith, and report to the others on what he said about the subject. She went accordingly, and without telling him the reason for her visit, begged the silversmith to tell her about the process of refining silver.

After he had fully described it to her, she asked, "Sir, do you sit while the work of refining is going on?" "Oh, yes ma'am," replied the silversmith, "I must sit and watch the furnace constantly, for, if the time necessary for refining is exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured. "

The lady at once saw the beauty and comfort of the expression, He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; God sees it necessary to put His children into the furnace; but His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for us. Our trials do not come at random, and He will not let us be tested beyond what we can endure.

Before she left, the lady asked one final question, "How do you know when the process is complete?" "That's quite simple", replied the silversmith. "When I can see my own image in the silver, the refining process is finished. "

Globalisation Goblins!

We seem now to have settled down into a pattern of annual international May Day mini-revolts. In cities across the world, idealists, the just plain curious and mischief makers alike gather to protest about the "G" word ... globalisation. This can and does mean several different things to several groups. For some it's about the power of international corporations and unchecked global capitalism, for others it's about Third World debt, still others see it as the rape of the planet and the need for sustainable "green" technologies.

The British government was telling us that there were going to be tough on the protest days before it happened which had more to do with the image of London as a financial centre and the image of the present administration before an imminent General Election than anything else. The trouble with all of this is the violence and damage to property, (much much less significant than last year), which only serves to erode wider support amongst the population and grant a nice knock down argument to those who need to belittle and scorn what the protesters are standing for.

There can be no doubt that there is a growing constituency of young (and not so young) people who feel marginalised by the forces that affect their lives and over which they have little control. National governments, also increasingly powerless in the face of such forces, seem to have resigned themselves to trying to curb the worst excesses without either being willing or able to ask those difficult questions

of principle:- "Where are we going as a world? What are our goals? What must we affirm and what must we both challenge and redirect?"

This is profoundly destabilising for those democracies that shirk such issues. If history teaches us anything it is that battenning down the hatches and increasing surveillance on any "undesirable elements" won't make the problems go away. Above all we need a public debate ... more especially in Britain as we approach a General Election!

The trouble is that the 80's left many in this country apolitical. A reaction set in of course which led many to hope that a responsible social policy might return. To some extent it has but very often this has also merely salved the consciences of Middle England that indeed benefited the most from the reforms of the 80's. The greater mass of the British, especially the young, remain profoundly cynical or simply disinterested about politics. If democratic solutions are to be found to the problems of globalisation then everyone must play their part and politicians must become a little more concerned with policy and a good deal less concerned with "spin." The alternatives, as the worst excesses of May Day have shown, are too alarming to contemplate.

None of this will work though unless and until Governments place human values, and yes, spiritual values, back on centre stage. We need to see Governments listening and working with people, not contending against them or flattering them when the occasion suits. All the religions and certainly Christianity have a great deal to offer from the perspective of our doctrine of creation. For too long we have assumed that mastery and manipulation of this world and its resources are inalienable rights. A new consciousness needs to arise; a consciousness that places responsibility alongside rights, dependence on each other, this world and God at the heart of our economic and political life. The world belongs to those who are prepared to transform such ideals into reality.

Wake up governments! The world will not wait on this one. Neither will God.

Fr. Gregory

The Meaning

In Act 5 scene 5 of Shakespeare's Macbeth, the character Macbeth has heard that the queen is dead and he knows his own death is imminent. At this time he delivers his famous soliloquy:

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.

Out, out, brief candle;

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Is Macbeth right? Is life nothing but a shadow having no substance, no meaning? Writers and philosophers since recorded time have tried to answer the question

What is the meaning of life? A philosophical question to be sure but this is not only the philosopher's question. It is a genuinely human question and therefore a question that we all ask. It might be a question that is asked in despair or hope, out of cynicism, or out of sincere curiosity and a deep desire to

have goals and guidance in life. However we raise the question about the meaning of life, it is our most basic and fundamental question. And so it comes as no surprise that Jesus deals with this question and answers it. Surprisingly, the answer is not given in the context of an argument with the Jewish leaders or in a discussion with his disciples, and it is not given in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus deals with so many fundamental issues. It is telling that Jesus deals with the meaning of life in the context of prayer.

In the context of what has been called, by many scholars, Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. The Disciples are in the upper room, now. They have just finished the Passover meal and Jesus is thinking about his crucifixion which will occur within the next 24 hours. He knows he is about to leave his disciples alone in the world and he goes before God as a priest would, to intercede for them, to pray for them. Now Jesus, being the second person of the eternal Godhead, has a unique relationship with God the Father. And we must be careful to guard that. He alone is the Son of God in the sense of being the eternally begotten one who was always at the Father's side. The Word who was with God and was God in the beginning. However, because of the relationship we have with Jesus, our spiritual union with him by faith, we too may call God our Father. Listen again to his prayer. Here are a few key verses:

"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe, but I will remain in the world no longer...Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life...and this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

It is in this third verse that Jesus delivers the meaning of eternal life and in essence the meaning of life itself. He says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." The Old Testament speaks of God's Glory as being that incredible aura of holiness and burning righteousness and splendour that surrounds the Presence of the Almighty. This is the Glory that Jesus says he enjoyed with the Father before the world began. John's Gospel quite clearly teaches that Jesus understood himself to be the pre-existing One who was at God's side from eternity. If anyone doubts the true deity of Jesus they should look closely at this prayer from John 17. For in the Old Testament, God says that he will not share His Glory with another. Isaiah 42:8 declares: "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." And again in Isaiah 48:11, "...I will not yield my glory to another."

Now although God's Glory conjures up images of his unapproachable light and power, an important aspect of what it means to glorify God is the idea of making God known. And making him known in truth and love. Jesus glorifies the Father by making him known in the world. And in this process the Father also glorifies the Son. So when Jesus is praying about himself and his glory, he is not doing so for selfish reasons. Notice how even in this first section of the prayer which is about himself, he is actually praying about bringing us to the Father and the Father to us. He wants to bring glory to the Father by reconciling Him to us. By making him known. The only reason he wants to be glorified is so that he can glorify the Father and save us. That is, make the Father known to us for salvation. Look at what he prays: "Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

This is perhaps the clearest and most succinct definition of eternal life in the bible. Eternal life means knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. You could possibly translate that sentence as "that they may know you, the only true God, even Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. Jesus is so closely identified with the Father that the only way to have eternal life is to know God through Jesus Christ.

Eternal Life is a quality of relationship. Most people would like to live forever. On their own terms, and without regard to God. But that would not be true eternal life. To live forever in a wrong relationship with God is eternal death. The bible clearly states that until a person believes in Jesus Christ, they are

spiritually dead, even though they may be walking around. And it says that anyone who has the Son of God already has eternal life, even before eternity begins. If you trust Jesus, then you are already living eternally.

In essence, Jesus says, "the meaning of life is this: that you have a relationship with God, and me his Son, Jesus Christ." And that's the long and short of it! But, Jesus himself, understood just how difficult it was going to be not only for his disciples but for all of us to come to this very simple realization in life and so he prays for two key things. First, in order that we might understand the meaning of life... 1. He prays for our protection from the world. We do need protection from the world because the world can steal life from us. In the book 'God Uses Cracked Pots,' Jason, a young boy, has two goals in life. One is to have fun, and the other is to rest. He does both quite well. One day when he was sent out to catch the bus for school there was, a few moments later, a knock on the door. His Mother flew to the door, opened it, and there stood Jason looking up with his hold-all and lunch box dragging the ground. Mum demanded, "What are you doing here?" He bravely said, "I've quit school." Mum said, "Quit school?" As she looked at her child in disbelief she tried to think of some motherly wisdom but all that came to mind at the time was "A stitch in time saves nine" and "Starve a cold, and feed fever." They didn't seem to fit the occasion so she asked, "Why have you quit school?" Without hesitation Jason said, "It's too long, it's too hard, and it's too boring." This time she was equal to the task. She shot back, "you have just described life. Get back on the bus!" The day in and day out tediousness and challenges of life can be overwhelming. Sometimes life can be just too long, too hard, and too boring and we can lose our Christian hope and joy and succumb to despair. It's then that we try to find meaning in life in things other than God. We look for escape through a bottle; we look for happiness in the form of another woman; we look for stability in life through another man; we try to resolve conflict through violence; or we try to solve material desires by stealing. Jesus understood these trials and temptations and so he prayed, "Holy Father, protect them from the world so they may be one as we are one."

We all need someone to keep us safe. So why should it surprise us that our souls need to be safeguarded from the corruption of the world. Jesus prayed for his disciples that the Father would protect them and keep them from losing their way in the world. Jesus knew, only if God protected them, would they be able to discover the ultimate meaning of life. We need a safe environment—and I don't think this means merely a safe physical and social environment—but a safe spiritual environment to nurture our commitment to God. Jesus understood how difficult it was going to be for us to understand the meaning of life. It's difficult, because there are so many ways to get lost in the world; but, the way is open, because God is here to protect us. To give our souls the security that we need in order to hear his call and follow. This brings us to the second part of his prayer. In order that we might understand the meaning of life... 2. He prays that we might know God. Moses, when he brought down the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, he gathered all Israel together and he read the commandments before the people. And then he summed up the Ten Commandments in these words, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all soul, and with all your strength.

When Jesus was asked by an expert in the law, "What is the greatest commandment in all the law?" Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and all your mind."

And on the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus prays. He prays that the disciples will come to know God in a personal way. Actually Jesus is simply echoing those words of Moses. He is restating the lines in a brief phrase: "That they may know you, the only true God."

Jesus isn't talking about knowing God like you know your Alphabet. He wants to know you personally. That's what Jesus is praying and that is hard. It's hard enough to let our family into our hearts let alone God. And yet, that is what is being asked of you. This is the only way to find meaning in life and the lives of your children and grandchildren. When Moses read all of Israel the ten commandments and summed the up by saying "Love God with all your heart," he added something very important. Teach these commandments to your children Of course, the best way to teach your children the meaning of

life is to live it yourself in the home. If your children see you putting other things ahead of God, they will become discouraged and disillusioned, like a young Jewish boy who once lived in Germany.

His father was a successful merchant, and the family practiced their Jewish faith. But then they moved to another German city, and the boy's father announced that they would no longer attend synagogue. They were going to join the Lutheran church. The boy was very surprised and asked his father why the family was joining the Lutheran church. His father's answer was something like, "For business reasons. There are so many Lutherans in this town that I can make good business contacts at the Lutheran church. It will be good for business." That boy, who had a deep interest in religion, became so disillusioned with his father that something died within him. He said to himself, 'My father has no real convictions.' The incident helped to turn him against religion with a vengeance. That young boy later moved to England and began to write. His name was Karl Marx. As the father of communism he wrote the "Communist Manifesto," in which he called religion "the opiate of the masses." In other words, he believed that religion pacified people and made them ineffective for the world—a destroyer of progress. I wonder if world history would have been different had Karl Marx's father come to know God as Jesus had prayed for disciples to know God. One thing is sure. He needed to learn that from his father and he did not. Children know whether you love God with all your heart. What they want to see is parents and Grandparents with such love and reverence for God that they bring Him into every area of their lives and put him first in everything. Children want to see whether their parents love God enough to obey him.

Conclusion

God gives us protection and he desires that we have a personal relationship with him. I am not speaking primarily to the lost this morning. I am talking to a Christian community. Remember that Jesus' prayer was for his disciples. Those who had already walked with him for three years. We have a need to deepen our relationship with God. Jesus prays that we might do so. Will you pray that you might come to know God more deeply so that you can be one even as Jesus and the Father are one. "Hear, O Orthodox believers: The LORD our God is one LORD: and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

Fr. Christopher Rogers (sermon)

A Discordant Symphony

In the run up to the General Election in the United Kingdom it has now become painfully obvious that no political party can espouse Christian values or faith. This is to be expected. Only some 10% of the population have any active Christian commitment and the remaining 90% consisting of those of other religions and none would rightly balk at a party or Government proposing an explicitly Christian agenda.

There was a time when those who clutched to the straws of the Anglican Establishment or the historic Christian foundations of this country could hold the tide of pluralism back for a little while. Any such position now seems merely words spoken by Christians to Christians for comfort only. The reality on the ground is that we are a "post-Christian" society. Direct evangelism is the only option, (arguably, this has always been the case!)

In the meantime, what are we to make of the relationship between Church and State in Great Britain? There is a growing voice in the Church of England now in favour of disestablishment; the formal separation of Church and State. Some support this in principle because they believe that politics always compromises religion; others see this as a rational response to the fact of religious pluralism. Only the enormous inertia of British constitutional life makes this severance of Church and State unlikely in the short or medium term. It is an issue (short of a crisis) that makes most people yawn.

The question, however, will not go away. It will become a pressing one when the next monarch, (if there is to be one), promises at his (presumably not "her") coronation to uphold the Protestant order. That disenfranchises Catholics and Orthodox never mind those of other faiths. Although it has been a commonplace now to hear (particularly) Roman Catholic clerics supporting the Establishment of the Church of England for noble motives, one cannot help wondering whether or not there is a "keep the seat warm" agenda here.

As for the Orthodox, well, many support the Establishment because anything else would be considered rude to one's "host." This guest mentality of consciously diasporal Orthodoxy will not die until there is a united mission minded indigenous Orthodox Church of Great Britain. This is what many of us in the English speaking communities are labouring through the midday sun to achieve ... although it may be only our great grandchildren who see it!

By the time Orthodox Christianity resumes its rightful place again in these islands I believe that the existing Church State link will have been severed. What are we to make of this prospect? This is not just a question for the near future but one which profoundly informs our Orthodox understanding of the relationship between faith, culture and authority today. If it is the foundations that we are building now, then it is even more important to get this right.

First we have to recognise a "problem." We no longer have absolute monarchs, (except in one or two Middle Eastern countries and that does not concern us here). The Orthodox political theology of "symphoneia" or symphony between the God-appointed Emperor and God-ordained Church with its rich Old Testament models of kingship and prophecy has gone and, I believe, it is lost irretrievably. There are some Orthodox voices who want to bring it back and strengthen an executive as opposed to a constitutional monarchy. It is not my place here to comment on the desirability or fitness of that enterprise, although as a democrat I have my views!. We must conclude though that this plan is doomed to fail. Orthodoxy has to forge a new political theology, a new understanding between Church and State in a pluralistic context.

One can see this happening in Russia right now. Although Church and State have been separate constitutionally in Russia since the 1917 Revolution, the Orthodox Church still has pre-eminent sway over public life. This is an informal social contract for the most part and only becomes problematic when legal issues of registration of religious organisations are disputed or when the State and the Church appear to differ on individual issues; for example the prospect of a papal visit. If this model can be made to work then there is a real hope that the discordant symphony of the post-Christian secular west can give way to a new expression of the Orthodox symphony of faith and government in a democratic context. In a potentially if not actually pluralistic democracy, however, there are instabilities. A non-legal social contract can be renegotiated at any time. The Church's role can be reduced to one of adornment or complaint. True and honest participation is much more difficult to achieve. However, for the sake of the gains, it is an enterprise that the Orthodox Church should support whole heartedly.

How does this translate to our situation as Orthodox Christians in Great Britain? Happily there is both an issue and a political opportunity that could provide us with a similar way forward - the House of Lords. In many ways, the Government's reform of the Second House has been too timid. Although the life peers are gradually being phased out the cronyism of political appointees continues and there is still a gross imbalance of Anglican bishop members vis-a-vis those of other faiths. An elected second chamber comprising representatives from all areas of public life and religiously balanced could provide the kind of "symphoneia" we are looking for. The members of this House would not, primarily, vote along party lines, (as is necessary in the "other place"), but according to their consciences and the communities or interests they represented.

The issue of the monarchy is much more difficult. Orthodox appreciate that we have a Christian Sovereign, (albeit not Orthodox!), but this isn't always going to be the case. Perhaps there is an argument for making the monarch's position in relation to the churches officially ecumenical both in the

coronation oath and, breaking out of a disestablished Church of England, across all Christian communities. We need not go so far as Prince Charles redefinition of the monarchy as the Defender of Faiths (plural). That should not be formalised as it obscures the one remaining and, arguably, important constitutional link with our Christian past; and, hopefully, our Christian future. I have not met any person from any other faith or heard any public representative claim that this would be unjust or discriminatory.

Clearly, these proposals for a new symphonia, harmonious and prophetic rather than discordant and vacuous, between the Church and a pluralist society and State will work better outside any legal framework. Its success depends on the consensus that its participants bring to the process. The transparency of its operation and honesty of its witness might just restore peoples' faith in Parliamentary democracy as well. It is a goal well worth striving for.

Fr. Gregory

Saints Galore! - Orthodox Missions to the North of England

by Fr. John-Mark

"The Church is mission" and its missionaries are the baptised faithful of God who are called to that exercise just as they are called to be saints, as St Paul states (ICor1.2)

Mission requires the opportunity to be able to move from place to place easily, and it also requires a base to provide stability, in a home, to which the missionaries may return, God willing, to re-charge their batteries and to help them on their way to becoming saints as well.

The background to our discourse this morning is the 200 years from the middle of the fourth century when St Patrick left behind a Christian presence on these shores and moved, eventually, to Ireland. From there Columba took the faith to Iona and made that a secure base from which to convert Scotland. From Iona, Aidan and company were sent to begin the work of evangelising England which had by that time lost the faith, and they set up a base on the Island of Lindisfarne. It is from there that the north of England was again won for Christ

Nearly all the missions carried out in what our history books mendaciously call "the Dark Ages" -- between the years 600 and 1100 -- had some connection with the

Holy Island. The base is easy to locate on the map and in history, but its missionary sons and daughter are so numerous that it is not so easy to locate all of them.

Some are well known even today. We are honoured to have as our patron St Aidan, who as one of the founding fathers of Lindisfarne, arrived there with the first consignment of Irish monks from Iona in 635. They came at the invitation of King Oswald who was preparing to re-evangelise his Northumbrian kingdom after the upheavals of warfare. This was achieved, as always, by planting first a monastery and this in time developed a school for training English boys which eventually produced the second generation of missionaries. Among these were the blood-brothers Chad and Cedd who carried on the work in the north and in middle and eastern England. St Chad had a comparatively short life, but the importance of his work cannot be mistaken. He travelled widely in the midlands and north -- tradition has one stop not far away from here at Chadkirk near Stockport -- and Jenny Austerberry says of him "The picture which Bede gives of St Chad was of a quiet, gentle man, a man of great charm, wide sympathies, indefatigable energy, and a sincere faith. A man who went quietly about his work, content to serve wherever he was called, and to minister to all with whom he came into contact". ("Chad, bishop and saint" page 15)

But perhaps it is true to say that the greatest of this generation of missionaries was St Cuthbert who was a native Anglo-Saxon and trained in one of the many daughter houses of Lindisfarne, at Melrose, which is now in Scotland. The prior there was Eata who had been trained by Aidan, and when Eata was made bishop of Lindisfarne, Cuthbert went with him as prior. He was already well-known for his personal holiness and like Aidan before him, he withdrew to live the life of a hermit on the nearby island of the Inner Farne. Much against his will, Cuthbert eventually agreed to follow Eata as Bishop, but two years of constant travelling warned him that his end was near and he again retired to the Farne Island he loved so well. He was buried in the Church on Lindisfarne in 698 and eleven years later, when his coffin was opened, his body was discovered to be undecayed. It was placed in a wooden reliquary but when the Island was threatened by the Danes, it was removed for safety and for many years was transported around northern England by faithful monks, until at last it came to rest in Durham, where, surprisingly, it survived the Reformation and remains to this day.

One of the early missionaries who seemingly had no connection with Lindisfarne was St Paulinus. He came to Kent from Italy with the second batch of Benedictine monks to help St Augustine and he was sent north as Queen Ethelburga's chaplain and eventually he baptised her husband King Edwin in a wooden church at York at Pascha in 627/8. He spent some time touring the north, baptising continuously, accompanied by his faithful deacon, James, and he is noted for having built a stone church in Lincoln. Paulinus wrongly decided there was no future for the faith in the north after Edwin's defeat by the Welsh in 633, and he became Bishop of Rochester for the rest of his life. Seemingly, the Irish way of monasticism had no attraction for one who had been trained as a Benedictine in Rome.

The Irish way of living the religious life may have been somewhat primitive, but it was all embracing and provided opportunities for women as well as men. The first woman to be clothed as a nun in the Northumbrian Kingdom, was Heiu at a daughter-house of Lindisfarne at Hartlepool. She died in 657. Another foundation, this time in Scotland, at Coldingham, had as its first Abbess, St Ebba who was King Oswald's sister and St Hild was the first Abbess of what became a double monastery of men and women in Whitby also in 657. This soon became recognised as one of the

foremost monasteries in England, being renowned for its strict discipline and high standard of education. No less than five future bishops were trained there and Hild was respectfully known to all as "Mother".

In 663, Hild hosted the famous Synod of Whitby which brought to an end the calendar schism between the Celtic and the Anglo-Saxon Churches in England. At first, she supported the Celts under whom she had been trained, but later she accepted the Synod's decision to adopt the Roman/Byzantine Paschalion. Hild died on 17 November 680 after a long illness. During her time as Abbess, the monk known as the father of English poetry, Caedmon, wrote wonderful religious poems for the first time in the English language at Whitby.

About the same period, the monk known as the father of English Prose and History, the Venerable Bede, was busy with his life's work. He was born in 673 and at the age of seven was entrusted to the first Abbot of Jarrow, St Benedict Biscop. He remained in the monastery and when he was thirty, he was ordained a priest. Later he wrote:--"From the time of my receiving the priesthood until my 59th year, I have worked, both for my own benefit and for that of my brethren, to compile short extracts from the works of the Venerable Fathers on Holy Scripture, and to comment on their meaning and interpretation. And while I have observed the regular discipline and sung the services daily in the Church, my chief delight has been in study, teaching and writing." In addition to 25 commentaries on Holy Scripture, he wrote his famous "History of the English Church and People", together with several lives of English Saints and other works, all of which have come down to us.

Whilst on the subject of the arts, mention must be made of the Lindisfarne Gospels which were produced about 698 and which show the extraordinary skill which the monks attained in the making of books. The scribe was a monk named Eadfrith who became Bishop there in that year. The production of such precious objects -- books, crosses, sculptured stone etc -- was regarded by the monks as a form of

devotion. Some idea of the resources available to the monastery can be seen from the fact that the famous Gospel book contains 258 pages which would require about 130 calf-hides. (It is worth going into the new British Library near Euston Station to see this example of our heritage, the original Lindisfarne Gospels, now on display there in all its original glory).

The mission of the Church to the North brought the faith; it brought peace (for a short while until the Normans came); it brought education and culture, and for all this we can and must, give thanks. But our forebears were not just concerned with this land; they were minded to send missionaries to northern Europe as well. St Wilfrid began this trend almost by accident by preaching in Friesland on his way to appeal to the Pope in 681, after Archbishop Theodore had divided his diocese of York without any consultation. (This was not the Archbishop being high-handed so much as pressing on hurriedly with his great plan of bringing to the Church badly-needed organisation to replace the chaos. A Greek, appointed as a caretaker archbishop in 668 when himself was an old man, saw no reason to delay his great reform by the nicety of consultation).

Ten years later, more missionaries from these parts went back to Friesland under St Willibrord and though he himself did not see much success, his work paved the way for one hundred years of English pioneering work on the continent of Europe, and Willibrord is much better known there than he is in England.

The Church is mission, and when that mission is pursued with love and vigour, saints appear and miracles happen. Under God, the inspired Irish missionaries of the so-called "Dark Ages" in fact radiated a dawn-like clarity of light in a darkening world. Not only did the widespread preaching of the Faith and Word of God flourish, but with it went scholarship and learning, fine arts and literature, produced by careful attention to God and careful attention to His Creation, and carried out with craftsmanship and persistence. Sadly, because so much of their achievements were swept away after 1066, most of our fellow countrymen and women do not realise the importance of our valuable heritage from those 500 years when the true Faith flourished in this land.

Fr. John-Mark Titterington

The Church's New Year

by Fr. John-Mark

The Orthodox Church claims to go back to the beginnings of human life. But when you examine the claim, you discover that there are more beginnings than one. There is for example the beginning of Salvation History with Creation and Adam; there is the beginning of corporate or ecclesial life, with Abraham; there is the new beginning and the type of the Resurrection which came with Noah and the flood. Then there is the all-important new beginning when Israel came out of Egypt and settled in the land of Palestine. Life there was in turn renewed by the reformation of the fathers of Deuteronomy. Then there was another new beginning at the time of the seventh century prophets, Amos & Co., which culminated in the height of prophetic activity we call Isaiah.

Among all these new beginnings and reformations and restitution's, there have been three great and mighty manifestations of the Divine Glory. The first, Creation, has already been mentioned and this culminated in the birth of the first Adam. This was followed by the coming of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, born of the Blessed Theotokos, that flower and scion of the whole Hebrew race, Mary of Nazareth. This coming on earth of her Son culminated in the Cross and His Resurrection. The final expression of God's power was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which gave birth to the creation of Christ's Body, the ecclesial society of the Church.

All these events and people are commemorated in the Orthodox Calendar -- and this includes the important prophets of the Old Testament. One by one, they all pop up in the daily unfolding and commemorating of our Salvation History. Today, on 1st September, we commemorate at once all those many and varied beginnings. Properly the day is called "The Indiction" from the Latin, "to impose". This is a reminder that Constantine the Great chose this day to impose tax each year on his Roman subjects.

In this way September 1st became the start of a new year in the Roman Empire and so eventually, in the undivided Church as well. In passing, it is interesting to note that in Britain, our academic and judicial years also begin at this time. These, it is claimed, were so arranged by St Alfred, a great King, and founder of our educational system and by St Theodore, the Greek-born Archbishop of Canterbury who reorganised the dioceses of this country and their courts of justice. Strange, too, that our fiscal or tax year, still begins on what was, in the old Julian calendar, the Feast of the Annunciation, 25th March, and which, when transferred to the new calendar in 1752 became, 5th April.

Other new year's days abound. The new year of Our Lord, 1st January, is now no more than a gala celebration, and the Western Church regards Advent Sunday as the start of its new year. The Jews and the Muslims; the Hindu's and the Chinese all have different new year's days but amidst all these, we stick to 1st September, and we have to be ready to defend ourselves for this.

There appear to be three strands to its choice. The first has already been mentioned. We saw that Constantine started his tax year on this date and he was important to the early Church for ending anti-Christian persecution and for legalising Christianity, so his lead was important. This induced, secondly, the Bishops of the first Ecumenical Council in 325 to decree this day as the start of a new Church year. But strangely, enough, it was also commonly believed that the Exodus from Egypt took place during September, and the Orthodox Jewish New Year is also celebrated today, and other areas of Judaism celebrate it later in the month.

The third strand is that, tradition has the 1st September, as the day when Jesus Christ chose to come out of his obscurity and, for the first time, publicly proclaimed His mission, in His own home town of Nazareth, as recorded in this morning's Gospel. He read and then spoke on the 61st chapter of Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor.....and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"(Lk.4.16-22).

When talking about "time" the Greek of the NT uses two different words. Chronos refers, obviously, to chronological time, calendar time, time that moves on, second by second, day by day and year by year. And for all of us, this sort of time comes to an end when we die. So St Paul warned the Ephesians:-- "Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of the kairos because the days are evil"(5.15). By using the Greek word "kairos" there, St Paul means, not chronological time, but rather God's time, which stretches out into eternity and in which we are struggling to live now. Jesus, we believe, lived kairos time in that He never lost or ignored a single moment for doing good. He used time to the fullest:-- teaching, comforting, loving, preaching. Even when He was alone, He spent time in prayer, communicating with His Father, to discover how best to use the time that was left to Him on earth.

This new year can be for all of us a "year of Grace of the Lord", when we realise that we are called, despite the calendar and the chronos, we are called to live as best we can, in Kairos, in God's time, just because, as St Paul says, the days are evil. In our own strength, we cannot guarantee that we will persevere, but on this first day, we are called upon to look to OBL in a spirit of faith and dedication. The Gospel tells us that "the eyes of all were fastened on Him" We pray that on this first day, we might turn away from the sin which does so easily beset us, and fix our eyes on Christ and Him alone. We are called to use our chronos days, to enter into His kairos ways.

But there is another aspect of life reflected in our Calendar today. We began with the first act of God in our Salvation History, the Creation, and in modern times, our Church has now designated 1st

September as a "Day of Prayer for the protection of the environment". It is fully in keeping with our faithfulness to that great, Divine, act that we respect God's Creation. We are called to live within it, rather than attempting to dominate it, and so ultimately, to destroy it. To pray for the protection of the environment daily, is surely another way of proclaiming it to be for us, an acceptable year for the Lord.

Creation began, and will continue, in Kairos, God's time, but we still have the duty during our Chronos, to protect it. So help us, God.

Time to Act

The recent horrors in America have deeply touched us all. It's not just for the reason that such unspeakably barbarous acts could be perpetrated against us that we must act together across the world but that (to quote John Donne) "any man's death diminishes me." That is why we must stand against death everywhere.

Does that make Orthodox Christians necessarily pacifist? No, although Christian pacifism is certainly a vital Orthodox witness. There are, however, nuances here within the Scriptures and Tradition itself. St. Paul's famous reference to the "he (who) does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4) does *not* sit awkwardly with his reference immediately beforehand in Romans 12:19 to "never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God." St. Paul makes a distinction between individual acts of peaceful resistance and trust in God and the role of rulers in exercising God's judgement on wrong-doing.

Osama bin Laden is not stupid. He is rarely the one to plant a bomb or hijack an aircraft. His role in facilitating and encouraging such attacks, however, is undoubted over recent years. If the Taliban will not help in bringing him to justice, the international community is obliged to do so. If that cannot be done without his death, so be it ... although every attempt should be made to extract him alive, (however unlikely). I am sure that the international community will demand strikes against his bases that are surgically precise. We must take pains to ensure that innocent civilians do not suffer. The challenge of chaos must not subvert the rule of law. This will call for uncommon leadership politically and militarily. Only time will tell whether or not these goals can be achieved in the forthcoming long and bitter struggle against these international evils.

Finally, two cautionary notes. Firstly, terrorism is parasitic. It cannot thrive in the soil of justice, reconciliation and peace for it is its very antithesis. Hitler thrived amongst the depredations of the Weimar Republic. Islamic suicide missions, charged with the grandeur of instant martyrdom and Paradise, wax in the imaginations of otherwise peaceful people who support or condone them. That such actions can be seen in any way, however perversely, as "honourable" is down to the fact that there *are* injustices in these countries that the West has ignored and continues to ignore. There is a link between the Holocaust inspired conscience of the West, the establishment of the State of Israel and the American deaf blindness to the Palestinian cause. Brutality becomes a "virtue" in the context of brutality. Confront and remove Zionist aggressive encroachments against Palestinian human rights and ethnic cleansing in the Middle East and the bombers will have no fear and anger off which to feed. Be a little more humble and self critical of godless western secular capitalism and militant Islam will have no "Satan" to fight. How readily the west slips into the language of "Infinite Justice" and "Crusades." Special forces may not wear crosses on their body armour today but the mentality still seems to endure (in politicians at least).

Secondly, what are we to make of the fury of Islamist fundamentalism, driven by its highly selective use of Qu'ranic verses against the "infidel." The answer to that question is exactly the same as might be found in a consideration as to why Christians might kill Christians in the name of Christ, (the Inquisition). Orthodox may smugly retort that "we have never done that." Well apart from one or two vicious Byzantine and Russian czars, that may be the case; but who could or should forget the pogroms against the Jews in Russia? We must all come clean and say that there is "good religion" and "bad

religion." "Good religion" is more wondrous and life enhancing than any merely humanist ethic. Bad religion though is definitely worse. How can we enable one to triumph over the other? Repentance, metanoia, LOVE. These changes must start with **me**.

Fr. Gregory

Saying "Boo!" to the Goose

We have an expression in Britain that someone is so nervous "they wouldn't say 'boo!' to a goose." David Blunkett's announcement to the Labour Party Congress that legislation would be introduced to outlaw incitement to religious hatred is welcome in many ways but not without its own problems and dangers. Clearly, this is the Government's reaction to the deplorable attacks on Muslims which has occasionally surfaced since 11 September. This nervousness is understandable but I submit that the proposed law will be likely to repress fair comment and freedom of speech in matters of religion.

The intimidation of the Islamist goose is that no one had better upset Muslim sensibilities. How far is this from the much abused law in Pakistan that nothing derogatory must be said or written about Mohammed, (the death penalty applies)? This is definitely one goose we must shout "boo!" at. Of course, "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," so if Christians get offended by derogatory comments about Christ in the media (and there are many), they also should be circumspect about demanding legal redress.

When David Blunkett was asked about these matters he, fairly, tried to make a distinction between incitement to hatred and criticising a religion's beliefs and practices. However, with the politically correct "victim mentality" so prevalent in our country and the confusion of religion with culture, I think it will become increasingly difficult to defend fair comment if this is seen to upset someone. This will seriously muddy the waters of freedom of speech if the English distaste for controversy shies away for the "goose's" angry public protests. The case of the "Satanic Verses" and Salman Rushdie comes to mind.

One thing is for sure ... if this law does come to the statute books and if hardline Muslims start using it then Christians will need to as well. This might be a realistic prospect if it were not for the fact that many western Christians seem to be quite unaffected by any kind of attack on the Faith. This is partly because, of course, the adherence to the faith "once delivered to the saints" is so weak amongst many such Christians. Perhaps then we should see a widening of the blasphemy law as yet another step along the road to an Islamist state and shariah law. Wake up Christians before it is too late! Orthodox come out of your ethnic shells and see here what happened to your own countries so many years ago! We have all been warned.

What can I do?

Reading this week the foreword, written by Thomas Hopko, to Sergius Bulgakov's book *The Orthodox Church*, he writes:- "...a time of change, confusion and chaos of apocalyptic proportions". He is referring here to the time, first half of the last century, when the book was written. He also refers to:- "..... a world gone mad in its worship of Man". So I ask myself if the truth applicable to those times is equally true today and the answer is that we have not learned anything nor have we progressed, rather we have regressed and it is only the means of achieving what we believe to be the truth that has changed.

Where is the truth, beauty and goodness of the Ancient Greeks now fulfilled in Christ? How are we, as individuals, to restore the beauty of holiness to a people who refuse God's forgiveness and mercy? How do we come to terms with our collective responsibility for the atrocities that are attacks against all of us? Apart from acknowledging the reality of our self-righteous selves, our pride and our lack of humility in all things then I know no other way forward into spiritual growth than through repentance.

Perhaps we need to wake up to the reality of threats to our planet by pollution or are the threats of the destruction of love more relevant at this time? If we focus our minds on the Giver of Life then we may find the answer through prayer and change our attitudes. I am sure that our God is grieving now but I am equally sure that He is teaching us. Are we ready to listen and learn? Will we recognise the gift of the cross and ask forgiveness? Metropolitan Anthony says:-

"All life is at every moment an ultimate act".

There are many questions here to which I would be pleased to find an answer and as the days shorten towards the Nativity of our Lord I ask myself another question: "Where is God in all this?" and yet I know that He is there making Himself known in whichever way He can to people who would not otherwise acknowledge His presence amongst them. May His love and mercy be evident now and ever and may we re-discover the Word and understand. Meanwhile, forgive Lord the sin that I am.

Three more questions on which to contemplate :-

How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath become His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?

Romans 11. 33-36.

Dwynwen East

Alice Meynell: "Christ in the Universe"

With this ambiguous earth
His dealings have been told us. These abide:
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

But not a star of all
The innumerable host of stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball.
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted Word.

Of His earth-visiting feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

No planet knows that this
Our wayside planet, carrying land and wave,
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.

Nor, in our little day,
May His devices with the heavens he guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way,
Or His bestowals there, be manifest.

But, in the eternities,
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear
A million alien gospels, in what guise
He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.

Oh be prepared, my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The infinite forms of God those stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

The Archbishop's Christmas Message (2001)



“But after faith is come we are no longer under a school master for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:25-27.

“But as many as received Him, to them he gave the power to become sons of God even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12

The event which took place today at Bethlehem, in a humble crib within a cave, is that of the Birth of the Infant Jesus, of the Incarnation of God. He is made Man in order to open the gates of Paradise to fallen man, driven as he has been out of the house of the Heavenly King. The star appearing in the East is the sign of victory over sin and of the defeat of Satan. It is a sign for the world. The more we take account of this truth the more we will appreciate the true value of God's gift; it alone can give us the resources for the struggle to reach a new life of freedom from the grip of fear and anxiety. Indeed, as God's children by faith in Jesus, we have acquired new life in the Spirit. Because of this it is now possible for us to live in communion with God and our neighbour in love, holiness and goodness.

Born in a lowly cave, Jesus came to free human beings, renewing in them the image of God that was darkened by sin. He invites us to strengthen our bonds with the church He Has founded. It calls us to realise and live out what is noblest in us. By His coming Jesus has spread the light of the knowledge

of Him over all the world. He has brought to the one who believes in Him a life of peace. Only He can give this boundless peace.

The divine Infant, born in a mean cradle, has put on the nature of man in order to make it possible for men to enter into a relationship with the One who created them. He offers them a life that enables them to taste the glory of God and actively associate with His divinity. He has become human like us in order to sanctify us and cause us to share in the very dignity of God. Because of that he invites us to His table to take part in the great feast of the heavenly Kingdom. There, Luke the Evangelist tells us in the parable of the marriage feast, all are invited without exception, rich and poor, noble and depraved, the great and the lowly of this world, the wise and the foolish. The heavenly King has invited all those there at the Feast, through His Son Jesus, the Mediator; the intervention of prophets, saints, and just men of old have also played a part. And God continues now to make His offer ceaselessly as He speaks through pastors and teachers of the church saying "Come. All is ready."

The gathering of believers in Jesus are invited to the heavenly Feast. Those refuse who prefer the ephemeral things of this world to the joy from above. They refuse the grace of God which calls them to become His children. For that reason "none of these men who were invited shall taste of My supper." Lk 14:24.

The heavenly Father does not exclude anyone. He gives all of us His peace and showers us all with His blessings, His grace and the riches of His spiritual gifts. He asks us all, for his love surpasses all understanding and is the same for all. We have only to accept his Word and put it into practice. By a life of putting these virtues into practice - of integrity, holiness and faith - we will be in a position to respond to his invitation and share in the heavenly glory. The divine light that came from the cave at Bethlehem lights up the darkness of evil and causes it to flee. We must walk in this light if we are to have a place at the heavenly Table. There we will enjoy the blessings of God, and the good things which are eternal.

All those who know their conscience has been "made white" - lit up - through the light of the knowledge of God, this has been because their lives have been led according to the gospel and teaching of Jesus, their lives are anchored in Christ by a solid and deep faith. These are the ones who are invited to the heavenly Feast. They are the ones who will share in the riches which await them there. Their offerings are acceptable to God and they will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In commemorating the Birth of Jesus we ought to invite Him to be born in our hearts. "All of us who have been baptised in Christ have put on Christ." By His abundant grace He gives us the strength of a life lived in Him and strength to share in his work. As He has affirmed in his Gospel "He that believeth on me . . . out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" John 7 v 38. Or again "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" John 8:12.

Christmas 2001

**Archbishop
Metropolitan of Western and Central Europe**

Gabriel

Not of this World?

Who of us can seriously doubt the reality and presence of evil in our world? Which of us does not know that such darkness encroaches from time to time within our own hearts? When we hear the attempt of some to explain evil with reference to sickness or misfortune does this not have a very hollow superficial ring to it? For an Orthodox Christian everything must be judged against the Scriptures within the Tradition of the Church. Our response to evil in our lives and in our midst, from without and

from within, must be sustained from the gospel and not any homespun theory or contemporary secular analysis. Our Lord presents a true and Godly understanding of the matter in the gospel account of his casting out of demons, (Luke 11:14-20). He defends his own exorcism as an act of God with reference to its effect. If he had truly cast out the demon by the “prince of devils” (for that is what “Beelzebub” means) then the rule of Satan would not have fallen to the Kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, this had happened, therefore our Lord’s exorcism was an act of God Himself.

"But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."
(Luke 14:20)

A profound truth emerges from this conflict between Jesus and His detractors. God alone can vanquish Satan. All attempts to deal with evil that do not have God himself as the chief protagonist are doomed to fail. One of Satan’s most devious devices is to convince people that some evil or other has been dealt with when it hasn’t.

For a first example let us consider the Middle East. At the beginning of the 20th century it seemed obvious to the British Establishment that the Zionist case for a homeland in “Eretz Israel” for the world’s dispossessed Jews was most just. Here is the letter from Balfour to Lord Rothschild:-

*Foreign Office
November 2nd, 1917*

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

*"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, **it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.**"*

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

*Yours sincerely,
Arthur James Balfour*

Both statements concerning rights of Palestinians in Palestine and Jews in the diaspora have, in the intervening period, been violated on a grand scale. The evil of fascism which inflicted such a bloody toll on the Jews has insinuated itself via their suffering into a new oppression against the Palestinians. How so? Maybe the West turned a blind eye toward Zionism for so long because it felt so guilty about the Holocaust ... or at least, indirectly responsible for it by reason of its own longstanding anti-Semitism. The dignity of one people, however, cannot be secured by means of the oppression of another. Such “trade-offs” however unintentional are the currency of international politics when based on self-interest and power brokerage. One can only wonder sometimes at the extreme naiveté of so many politicians who think that they can solve problems in such a human-centred way. We are now paying the price of that naiveté; or rather, the Palestinians are. Yet again a host of evils have been attracted to the smell of injustice and the circle of suffering is widening.

For a second and connected example, let us consider the events of 11 September 2001. Terrorist evil is parasitic. It has no morality of its own being entirely concerned with fear and power. It must nonetheless, for propaganda purposes, clothe itself with some bogus respectability by appealing to a

sense of grievance on behalf of others. That bin Laden and his organisation can do this by celebrating the atrocious act as divinely inspired retribution seems to me to be sheer diabolism in the most literal sense. The deaths of 6000 become faceless statistics to terrorism and of no account because they are pinned to a grievance. When oppressed peoples' hearts have become so embittered by suffering they will listen to any demagogue and follow him into hell. Had not the rise of Hitler taught us this? Would Hitler have been able to unleash his terror against the Jews if the Weimar Republic had not been crushed by economic deprivation and political humiliation? So, if you like, bin Laden is our new tin-pot Hitler, a self-confessed genocidal psychotic who hates Jews, Christians, Americans and Westerners generally. But, he was preventable. We could have seen it coming. We could have made our resistance moral and spiritual rather than merely politically expedient. We could have insisted that Israel implement UN resolutions. We could have been unambiguous about the recreation of a Palestinian state. It's too late though now to talk about human rights. The devil has been uncaged.

So, what we need to combat this and all other evils is "the finger of God" - and Jesus referred to this in his defence against the disbelieving. The finger of God is a power, but not a power of this world; for did not our Lord say this to Pontius Pilate?

"Jesus answered, My kingship is not of this world: if my kingship were of this world, my servants fight, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews: but my kingship is not from the world." (John 18:36)

Of course, resistance to evil in this world may involve the use of force, and in this case such force against terrorism and those who harbour terrorists is entirely justified from a Christian point of view. However, the use of force is not the principal question; it's the purity of the heart that wields the sword that counts and not the sword by itself. In this matter Orthodox Christians cannot be wholly confident and comfortable. The very same knights that wore the cross of St. George on their breasts as they embarked on the disastrous 4th Crusade also betrayed their polluted unchristian hearts in their treatment of Orthodox Christians and Muslims alike. With faith in God come restraint, honour and the pursuit of noble ideals. This is the asceticism of the soldier saint who serves a higher law than that of Man, who relies on a power not his own but that comes from the Just Judge of all. Can we honestly say that our Governments, our politicians and our military apparatus in the West constitute a truly Christian symphony seeking daily guidance from God through His Church? Of course not and therein lies our danger and our weakness. We are relying on our own strength in this matter and not on the "finger of God." Such was the testimony of the prophet Isaiah many centuries before our own and his warning rings true still today: -

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord." (Isaiah 31:1)

No good will come of this. If terrorism is to be exorcised it will only be by the finger of God. By all means we should act, but only by the finger of God. Because we are not yet ready to this I fear that our house stands divided against itself and will fall. Let us avert this judgement of God and call our leaders to return on our behalf to the Living God. Maybe then our actions against terrorism will be more credible because they will be Kingdom actions rather than merely political actions.

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Fr. Gregory