

# Archive 2005

## The Blessings of Christmas

Some thoughts on Christmas celebrations.

What a feast of Eucharistic joy this Christmas!

The day itself, falling this year on a Saturday, meant that Vespers Liturgy was followed by Divine Liturgy the next day and with yet another day to come in which to participate in the Sunday Holy Eucharistic Celebration of God's presence with us. Three consecutive days of worship, one of which also included the devotion of the Hours in the Christmas Eve vigil.

Family celebrations intermingled with worship makes this festive season complete. Those not able to be with us this year because of illness were also very much in our hearts and minds with special prayers for their peace and comfort. Also, those living far away with whom we may not have physical contact but who are very much in our thoughts and prayers. We thank God for the contact we do enjoy with family and friends in spirit and in worship across the miles that separate us.

Looking to the future:-

*"Then (after the incarnation) it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light, in the light of the Word,  
Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their negative being;  
Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before, selfish and purblind as ever before,  
Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the way that was lit by the light;  
Often haltering, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet following no other way."*

from 'The Rock' T.S.Eliot.

There is much that is negative here and true to life but also a determination to follow The Way of the light with humility, thanksgiving and hope. May we long continue to enjoy the freedom to worship and adore Christ and to share in the 'riches of His Godhead' in 2005 and for many years to come.

**CHRIST IS BORN - GLORIFY HIM!**

Dwynwen East

## Shaking the Earth



The tsunami devastation around the rim of the Indian Ocean caused by a massive underwater earthquake near Sumatra has caused suffering unknown in recent times as a result of a natural disaster. The loss of life, grief and physical damage will take many years of patient and diligent work to put right and to heal. Even so, many thousands of peoples' lives have been irrevocably changed if not destroyed by this event. Our prayers and our active love go out to all who have suffered and are suffering.

Such devastation arising from natural forces also has a profound impact on our believing. How can we say that God is all-powerful and that He cares for us if he allows such things to happen? We have been here before of course. On 1st November 1755 a massive earthquake struck the city of Lisbon and there was great loss of life. A shockwave of religious disturbance rapidly rippled across Europe and through the churches and sermons of the time. Some saw this as a warning of our mortality and the need to repent. Others, more influenced by the sceptical trends of the Enlightenment, saw the quake as confirmation of the bankruptcy of belief in an interventionist God. As the deist philosopher Voltaire wrote at the time:-

*"Will you say: 'This is result of eternal laws  
Directing the acts of a free and good God!' ...  
Did Lisbon, which is no more, have more vices  
Than London and Paris immersed in their pleasures?  
Lisbon is destroyed, and they dance in Paris!"*

Clearly, many Christians have not adjusted to a modern scientific view of the world in which God does not control the weather and keep his finger of the pulse of those subterranean movements known as plate tectonics that sustain the earth's volcanic and seismic activity. Those who have adjusted to this still speculate in a forlorn manner as to whether or not God could have created a world in which such disasters did not happen. In all of these attitudes may be detected that prevent an authentic religious response to such tragedies and these attitudes have a very modern and urban feel to them.

When all humans lived closer to nature than we now do in the developed world the following approaches to creation were neither prevalent nor possible in the daily struggle for survival:-

- (1) Sentimental romanticism about landscapes. (A twister does look beautiful from afar...)
- (2) I can get food without killing.
- (3) I need never see anyone die if things are arranged properly.
- (4) My life will not be seriously hindered by the weather or predators.

The kind of religious faith that developed close to nature did not conceive of creation without destruction also being also part of an ongoing natural cycle. Human stupidity and war, in comparison, were much more amenable to change. All you needed was a strong ruler who would enforce HIS peace and govern wisely. Rarely of course did you get such a person! In this we merely copied the behaviours of the herds of animals that we personally hunted, killed and ate. Meanwhile, in the realm outside the camp the destructive and creative vagaries of nature were BOTH given meaning through a religious view of the world as both threat and promise. If a storm threatened, you placated the gods responsible for it. If the harvest was good you made offerings to the goddess who had granted such fruitfulness. Many of these older religious attitudes linger; witness the reaction of many of the post-tsunami inhabitants of Phuket who would not at first return to the coast because the place still had "bad karma."

Urban humans live in a different self made environment. Occasionally we have rude awakenings when nature breaks through our physical defences and psychological evasions. The potential of such events to disturb our religious views, accommodated as they are to relative ease and safety, are profound. However, to be better aware, we should perhaps recognise our reactions for what they are ... misaligned to reality beyond our mental city walls.

In some senses we are doubly disabled in our ability to cope here. Not only have we lost touch with the natural world in all of its creative and destructive power, but we also still cling to the older religious world view that tries to make sense of that power in terms of God's active will. Insurance contracts speak of "acts of God." We know that such sentiments are silly but we cling to them nonetheless. It is so much easier to blame God than to accept that we live in a dangerous world and that he has given us the intelligence and the capacity to do something about that. There will always be loss of life in such incidents but suffering can be limited by taking sensible precautions - a good early warning system for earthquakes for example; something that governments in the area of the Indian Ocean had decided not to implement before the tsunamis struck.

When we have done all of this, the religious issue still remains but it has been redefined so as to exclude naive views of God suspending natural laws for our benefit. If God created a Cosmos whose ordered complexity could generate life we need to reckon with the fact that God's care for us is not an insurance policy against disaster but rather his willingness to come amongst us and help us deal with the pains of life and offer us the reality and the promise of resurrection ... a New Creation in which the sufferings of the present time will be as nothing compared with the glory that is to be revealed in Christ.

*"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance." (Romans 8:18-25)*

So, Christianity offers people both realism and hope. The realism prevents us from being disillusioned either with the world or God. The hope gives us the motivation to live and work and pray knowing that *"if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1).*

**Fr. Gregory**

# GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS

## A Voice from the Gulags

This month on 13th February, the Church commemorates all the [Russian New Martyrs and Confessors](#) of the Soviet yoke. This remarkable Matins prayer, often attributed to Father Gregory Petrov, a victim of Stalin's death camps reminds us that there is NO situation in which we cannot give thanks to God.



## GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS

### ODE 1

Everlasting King, Your will for our salvation is full of power.  
Your right arm controls the whole course of human life.  
We give You thanks for all Your mercies, seen and unseen:  
For eternal life, for the heavenly joys of the Kingdom which is to be.  
Grant mercy to us who sing Your praises, both now and in the time to

come.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

### IKOS 1

I was born a weak, defenseless child, but Your angel spread his wings over my cradle to defend me. From birth until now, Your love has illumined my path, and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity. From birth until now the generous gifts of Your Providence have been marvelously showered upon me. I give You thanks, with all who have come to know You, who call upon Your Name:

Glory to You for calling me into being.

Glory to You, showing me the beauty of the universe.

Glory to You, spreading out before me heaven and earth, like the pages in a book of eternal wisdom.

Glory to You for Your eternity in this fleeting world.

Glory to You for Your mercies, seen and unseen.

Glory to You, through every sigh of my sorrow.

Glory to You for every step of my life's journey, for every moment of glory.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

### ODE 2

O Lord, how lovely it is to be Your guest. Breeze full of scents -- mountains reaching to the skies -- waters like a boundless mirror, reflecting the sun's golden rays and the scudding clouds. All nature murmurs mysteriously, breathing depths of Your tenderness. Birds and beasts of the forest bear the imprint of Your love. Blessed are you, mother earth, in your fleeting loveliness, which wakens our yearning for happiness that will last forever in the land where, amid beauty that grows not old, rings out the cry: Alleluia!

### IKOS 2

You have brought me into life as if into an enchanted paradise. We have seen the sky like a chalice of deepest blue, where in the azure heights the birds are singing. We have listened to the soothing murmur of the forest and the melodious music of the streams. We have tasted fruit of fine flavor and the sweet-scented honey. We can live very well on your earth. It is a pleasure to be your guest.

Glory to You for the feast-day of life.

Glory to You for the perfume of lilies and roses.

Glory to You for each different taste of berry and fruit.

Glory to You for the sparkling silver of early morning dew.

Glory to You for the joy of dawn's awakening.

Glory to You for the new life each day brings.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

### ODE 3

It is the Holy Spirit Who makes us find joy in each flower--the exquisite scent, the delicate color -- the beauty of the Most High in the tiniest of things. Glory and honor to the Spirit, the Giver of Life,

Who covers the fields with their carpet of flowers, crowns the harvest with gold, and gives to us the joy of gazing at it with our eyes.

O be joyful and sing to Him:

Alleluia!

### IKOS 3

How glorious You are in the springtime, when every creature awakens to new life and joyfully sings Your praises with a thousand tongues! You are the source of life, the destroyer of death. By the light of the moon, nightingales sing, and the valleys and hills lie like wedding-garments, white as snow. All the earth is Your promised bride awaiting her spotless Husband. If the grass of the field is like this, how gloriously shall we be transfigured in the Second Coming, after the Resurrection! How splendid our bodies, how spotless our souls! Glory to You for the warmth and tenderness of the world of nature.

Glory to You for the numberless creatures around us.

Glory to you for the depths of Your wisdom--the whole world a living sign of it.

Glory to You: On my knees, I kiss the traces of Your unseen hand.

Glory to You, enlightening us with the clarity of eternal life.

Glory to You for the hope of the unutterable, imperishable beauty of immortality.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

### ODE 4

How filled with sweetness are those whose thoughts dwell on You: how life-giving Your holy Word. To speak with You is more soothing than anointing with oil, sweeter than the honeycomb. To pray to You lifts the spirit, refreshes the soul. Where You are not, there is only emptiness; hearts are smitten with sadness; nature, and life itself, becomes sorrowful. Where You are, the soul is filled with abundance, and its song resounds like a torrent of life:

Alleluia!

### IKOS 4

When the sun is setting, when quietness falls, like the peace of eternal sleep, and the silence of the spent day reigns, then in the splendor of its declining rays, filtering through the clouds, I see Your dwelling-place. Firey and purple, gold and blue, they speak prophet-like of the ineffable beauty of Your presence, and call to us in their majesty. We turn to the Father:

Glory to You at the hushed hour of nightfall.

Glory to You, covering the earth with peace.

Glory to You for the last ray of the sun as it sets.

Glory to You for sleep's repose that restores us.

Glory to You for Your goodness, even in time of darkness, when all the world is hidden from our eyes.

Glory to You for the prayers offered by a trembling soul.

Glory to You for the pledge of our reawakening on the glorious last day, that day which has no evening.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

### ODE 5

The dark storm-clouds of life bring no terror to those in whose hearts

Your fire is burning brightly. Outside is the darkness of the whirlwind, the terror and howling of the storm, but in the heart, in the presence of Christ, there is light and peace, silence. The heart sings:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 5

I see Your heavens resplendent with stars. How glorious You are, radiant with light! Eternity watches me by the rays of the distant stars. I am small, insignificant, but the Lord is at my side:  
Your right arm guides me wherever I go.  
Glory to You, ceaselessly watching over me.  
Glory to You for the encounters You arrange for me.  
Glory to You for the love of parents, for the faithfulness of friends.  
Glory to You for the humbleness of animals which serve me.  
Glory to You for the unforgettable moments of life.  
Glory to You for the heart's innocent joy.  
Glory to You for the joy of living, moving, and being able to return Your love.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 6

How great and how close You are in the powerful track of the storm! How mighty Your right arm in the blinding flash of the lightning! How awesome Your majesty! The voice of the Lord fills the fields, It speaks in the rustling of the trees. The voice of the Lord is in the thunder and the downpour. The voice of the Lord is heard above the waters. Praise be to You in the roar of mountains ablaze. You shake the earth like a garment; You pile up to the sky the waves of the sea. Praise be to You, bringing low the pride of man. You bring from his heart a cry of penitence:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 6

When the lightning flash has lit up the camp dining hall, how feeble seems the light from the lamp. Thus do You, like the lightning, unexpectedly light up my heart with flashes of intense joy. After Your blinding light, how drab, how colorless, how illusory all else seems.  
Glory to You, the highest peak of men's dreaming.  
Glory to You for our unquenchable thirst for communion with God.  
Glory to You, making us dissatisfied with earthly things.  
Glory to You, turning on us Your healing rays.  
Glory to You, subduing the power of the spirits of darkness and dooming to death every evil.  
Glory to You for the signs of Your presence, for the joy of hearing Your voice and living in Your love.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 7

In the wondrous blending of sounds, it is Your call we hear. In the harmony of many voices, in the sublime beauty of music, in the glory of the works of great composers, You lead us to the threshold of paradise to come, and to the choirs of angels. All true beauty has the power to draw the soul towards You and make it sing in ecstasy:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 7

The breath of Your Holy Spirit inspires artists, poets, scientists. The power of Your supreme knowledge makes them prophets and interpreters of Your laws, who reveal the depths of Your creative wisdom. Their works speak unwittingly of You. How great are You in Your creation! How great are You in man!

Glory to You, showing Your unsurpassable power in the laws of the universe.

Glory to You, for all nature is filled with Your laws.

Glory to You for what You have revealed to us in Your mercy.

Glory to You for what you have hidden from us in Your wisdom.

Glory to You for the inventiveness of the human mind.

Glory to You for the dignity of man's labor.

Glory to You for the tongues of fire that bring inspiration.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 8

How near You are in the day of sickness. You Yourself visit the sick. You Yourself bend over the sufferer's bed; his heart speaks to You. In the throes of sorrow and suffering, You bring peace; You bring unexpected consolation. You are the Comforter. You are the Love which watches over and heals us. To You we sing the song:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 8

When in my childhood I called upon You consciously for the first time, You heard my prayer; You filled my heart with the blessing of peace. At that moment I knew Your goodness, knew how blessed are those who turn to You. I started to call upon You, night and day, and even now, I call upon Your Name:

Glory to You, satisfying my desires with good things.

Glory to You, watching over me day and night.

Glory to You, curing affliction and emptiness with the healing flow of time.

Glory to You; no loss is irreparable in You, giver of eternal life to all.

Glory to You, making immortal all that is lofty and good.

Glory to You, promising us the longed-for meeting with our loved ones who have died.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 9

Why is it that on a feast-day the whole of nature mysteriously smiles? Why is it that then a heavenly gladness fills our hearts, a gladness far beyond that of earth, and the very air in church and in the altar becomes luminous? It is the breath of Your gracious love; it is the reflection of the glory of Mount Tabor. Then do heaven and earth sing Your praise:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 9

When You called me to serve my brothers and filed my soul with humility,

one of Your deep-piercing rays shone into my heart; it became luminous, full of light, like iron glowing in the furnace. I have seen Your face, face of mystery and of unapproachable glory.  
Glory to You, transfiguring our lives with deeds of love.  
Glory to You, making wonderfully sweet the keeping of Your commandments.  
Glory to You, making Yourself known where man shows mercy on his neighbor.  
Glory to You, sending us failure and misfortune, that we may understand the sorrows of others.  
Glory to You, rewarding us so well for the good we do.  
Glory to You, welcoming the impulse of our heart's love.  
Glory to You, raising to the heights of heaven every act of love in earth and sky.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 10

No one can put together what has crumbled into dust, but You can restore a conscience turned to ashes; You can restore to its former beauty a soul lost and without hope. With You, there is nothing that cannot be redeemed. You are Love; You are Creator and Redeemer. We praise You, singing:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 10

Remember, my God, the fall of Lucifer, full of pride; keep me safe with the power of Your grace. Save me from falling away from You; save me from doubt. Incline my heart to call upon You, present in everything.  
Glory to You for every happening, every condition Your Providence has put me in.  
Glory to You for what you speak to me in my heart.  
Glory to You for what you reveal to me, asleep or awake.  
Glory to You for scattering our vain imaginations.  
Glory to You for raising us from the slough of our passions through suffering.  
Glory to You for curing our pride of heart by humiliation.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 11

Across the cold chains of the centuries, I feel the warmth of Your breath; I feel Your blood pulsing in my veins. Part of time has already gone, but now You are the present. I stand by Your cross; I was the cause of it. I cast myself down in the dust before it.  
Here is the triumph of love, the victory of salvation. Here the centuries themselves cannot remain silent, singing Your praises:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 11

Blessed are they that will share in the King's banquet; but already on earth You give me a foretaste of this blessedness. How many times with Your own hand have You held out to me Your Body and Your Blood, and I, though a miserable sinner, have received this Sacrament, and have tasted Your love, so ineffable, so heavenly!  
Glory to You for the unquenchable fire of Your grace.  
Glory to You, building Your Church, a haven of peace in a tortured world.  
Glory to You for the life-giving water of baptism in which we find new birth.

Glory to You, restoring to the penitent purity white as the lily.  
Glory to you for the Cup of Salvation and the Bread of eternal joy.  
Glory to You for exalting us to the highest heaven.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 12

How oft have I seen the reflection of Your glory in the faces of the dead. How resplendent they were, with beauty and heavenly joy; how ethereal, how translucent their faces; how triumphant over suffering and death, their felicity and peace. Even in the silence they were calling upon You. In the hour of my death, enlighten my soul, too, that it may cry out to You:  
Alleluia!

## IKOS 12

What sort of praise can I give You? I have never heard the song of the cherubim, a joy reserved for the spirits above. But I know the praises that nature sings to You. In winter, I have beheld how silently in the moonlight the whole earth offers You prayer, clad in its white mantle of snow, sparkling like diamonds. I have seen how the rising sun rejoices in You, how the song of the birds is a chorus of praise to You. I have heard the mysterious murmurings of the forests about You, and the winds singing Your praise as they stir the waters. I have understood how the choirs of stars proclaim Your glory as they move forever in the depths of infinite space. What is my poor worship? All nature obeys You, I do not. Yet while I live, I see Your love, I long to thank You, pray to You, and call upon Your Name:  
Glory to You, giving us light.  
Glory to You, loving us with love so deep, divine, and infinite.  
Glory to You, blessing us with light, and with the host of angels and saints.  
Glory to You, Father All-Holy, promising us a share in Your Kingdom.  
Glory to You, Holy Spirit, Life-giving Sun of the world to come.  
Glory to You for all things, holy and most merciful Trinity.  
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

## ODE 13

Life-giving and merciful Trinity, receive my thanksgiving for all Your goodness. Make us worthy of Your blessings, so that, when we have brought to fruit the talents You have entrusted to us, we may enter into the joy of our Lord, forever exulting in the shout of victory:  
Alleluia! (Repeat Ikos 1, Ode 1.)

*An Akathist by Metropolitan Tryphon (Prince Boris Petrovich Turkestanov) +1934 - but frequently attributed to Father Gregory Petrov, who died in a Soviet prison camp.*

## A Brief History of God, Creation and You



**a lecture delivered by Margaret Silf at the Spirituality Conference organised by St. Peter's Chaplaincy on Saturday 26th February 2005**

[a note from the Web Master](#)

What is spirituality? If you asked a thousand people this question, you would probably get several thousand different answers. Often the received wisdom is that our spiritual (or religious?) quest is about finding a definitive "answer" to the big questions about the meaning of life, and once we think we have found it, to "practise" it, often rigidly and exclusively. This easily turns into "finding *the* answer", and dismissing all other "answers" as "wrong". The result: conflict, bigotry, fragmentation, and a stalling of the real spiritual journey.

But what if the spiritual quest were more to do with "becoming more and more fully human"? At present we are told that we use about 4% of our intellectual power. How much of our spiritual power are we using? And what might 100% look like? St. Irenaeus defines the glory of God as "the human person fully alive". Looked at in this light, the universal spiritual quest, focused on maturing together into our common and full humanity, might lead towards deeper cooperation, a mutual respect for each others' experience and sacred stories, and a common reverence for the Mystery that will always be beyond our power to know or imagine.

So this morning I'd like to share three thoughts with you: the first is about our shared and sacred story, going back to the very beginnings of the human race and revealing the stages so far in our "becoming human"; the second is about the challenge that we, in our own day and age, are being invited to embrace, in order to move forward into the next stage of our "becoming human", and the third is about how we might respond to this challenge at a personal level.

### **The Story**

Three and a half million years ago three people (probably two adults and a child) walked through a field of volcanic ash, and left their footprints behind, when the ash solidified. It was an ordinary (although perhaps a very distressed) walk for these three creatures. For us it is a momentous landmark, because it reveals that hominid creatures were already walking upright 3.5 million years ago. Those footsteps point forward towards what it will mean to become more fully human.

Another quantum leap occurred around the advent of homo sapiens, with a threefold increase in brain volume, probably connected with the changing social behaviour of our ancestors. To live in small hunting groups meant that they had to learn to relate to each other much more subtly and sensitively. Humankind had become a truly rational creature – capable of the knowledge of good and evil, and needing to make moral choices. Anthropologists call this stage the beginning of a true "theory of mind". It could also be regarded as the beginning of discernment.

Thus, homo sapiens marks a huge leap forward in the evolution of what it means to be human. Moreover, these quantum leaps are well documented in Genesis, and in the creation myths of other cultures. Clearly this is an ongoing story which is by no means complete. It also raises the question: "Is what we call 'the Fall' more truly a feature of our ongoing evolution towards fuller humanity?"

By 100,000 years ago, humankind had become a species with the potential for moral discernment. To enter into moral choice means, inevitably, to enter into the possibility of making drastically wrong choices. Humankind stood, as it were, in an Eden of vast new potential to become full reflections of the glory of God. The freedom to make choices, including wrong and harmful choices, marked a stage in our growth into that great vocation. Our knowledge, and practice, of both good and evil grew apace. We learned empathy and compassion. We learned to be co-responsible for each other. But we also learned to deceive each other – and ourselves – and to give vent to our envy and malice.

Around five thousand years ago another threshold emerged in our human story – the coming of formalised religion, giving shape to the spiritual intuitions that have always been at the core of humankind. The time was right for the emergence of One who would lead us beyond everything we could imagine. The spiritual evolution of humankind had entered a new phase. Two thousand years ago, a different group of people – also two adults and a child, fled from an outbreak of "ethnic cleansing" into exile in Egypt. They left their footprints behind too, but theirs were "spiritual" footprints. They marked a path we are called to follow if we are willing, and ready, to take our first steps into the next stage of becoming fully human, and Truly Alive. For Christians, the True Life, totally aligned to the Mystery we call God, as lived by Jesus of Nazareth, is central to this process.

And so, humankind has evolved from "merely physical" – a part of the food chain, living by the rule of "eat or be eaten", to "physical + rational" in homo sapiens, to "physical + rational + spiritual", humanity becoming aware of itself amid the great cosmic context of life. Each individual life evolves, in "fast forward" through these stages too. Your personal story is woven into the great cosmic story.

And now, perhaps, we stand at a new threshold of our Becoming. On the one hand, we find ourselves entangled in a mesh of evil and deception that is impossible to even imagine, let alone disentangle, the cumulative effect of millennia of ego-centric choices. On the other hand, we have become creatures capable of reflecting on our own origins, relating in awesome wonder to the author of our being and shaping our future. In short, we stand on the threshold – perhaps? – of the next great quantum leap – beyond *Homo Sapiens*, to a new stage of what it means to be fully human. We might call it *Homo Transcendens*. Who knows?

## **The challenge**

Becoming fully and truly human is going to be sheer hard work, as well as being the most joyous and fulfilling destiny we could ever imagine. The sheer hard work is foreshadowed in Genesis, and, for Christians, expounded by St. Paul, and lived out, and died for, by Jesus. The path leads through a complete reversal of the way we have done things so far. In this new stage of Becoming, the first are the last, and we are only rich in what we give away. Paradox upturns all our expectations, and breakdown, as on Calvary, alone leads to breakthrough. We are being called to begin to live into the new paradigm, in a quantum universe where nothing is certain, and where every particle is inter-related with every other. If we dare to embrace this call, we must expect to attract opposition, as Jesus of Nazareth, and other enlightened ones did. We will experience the cross, each in our own way – partly through the

agony of dying to our own certainties and self-sufficiency, and partly through the hostility of all that chooses to reject the True Life.

For example, to become fully human, in the vision lived out for us in Christ, will mean a radical conversion of focus from:

Achievement to learning through failure

Status to authentic humility

Security to vulnerability

Certainty to mystery

Control to genuine freedom

Dominion to mutual service

Autonomy to inter-dependence

Accumulation of knowledge to maturing into wisdom

Emphasis on education to reflecting on experience

"Image" and masks to truth, reality, exposure

Taking to giving

Supremacy/competition to co-operation, mutuality

Pyramids of power to webs of relationship among equals

Doctrine and creeds to story, image and sharing of experience

Analysis to synthesis

"Either/or" to "both-and"

There is considerable consensus of opinion that we are living through a major (even unprecedented?) paradigm shift in our generation, and witnessing a huge surge in what we might truthfully call the "spiritual quest", alongside the sharp decline of traditional religious practice. We can't ignore it. But how can we respond to it creatively?

## **The response**

As we walk the journey of our own lives, we will also leave a footprint. We might do well to consider what kind of footprint that will be. Will it be the heavy print of those who take much more from life than they give back, who consume disproportionate amounts of the earth's resources? For most of us in the western world, this is a crucial question. Or will it be the slim footprint of the woman in South Africa, who says that when she dies she hopes she will have "spent everything she was given, for the greater good of all", and that she will "leave only a footprint behind, to mark the way for those who follow after"?

Traditionally, our Christian faith, as taught by the institutional churches, has guided us in these principles. Increasingly, however, these institutions are losing credibility, so what can we do now, if our

institutional guiding lights are flickering and fading? A few suggestions are offered below, for reflection. These include some approaches that you can try out for yourself today in the Zone Time.

*Cultivating stillness of heart and mind.* In stillness we see things more clearly, and open ourselves to hear the inner promptings of our soul, where God is indwelling. Stillness of heart is central to the spiritual journey. It is our personal entry point into the deep well of God, the place where we draw on the living water.

*Embracing the sacred in all that is around us* in our everyday living, and learning to enter more deeply into what we see and hear, allowing images, symbols, music, movement and the written word to touch the deeper layers of our psyche and awaken a spiritual response.

*Living reflectively.* As we reflect on our everyday experience, and what it means in this larger context of the human quest for wholeness, we are turning experience into wisdom, not just for ourselves, but for all. The labyrinth provides an excellent opportunity to begin to enter into this experience. A "reflected life" is also greatly helped by the companionship of a soul-friend, or *anam cara* – one whom we trust completely and with whom we can share unreservedly what is deepest in our heart.

*"Gospel saturation".* If we believe that Jesus of Nazareth embodies and empowers our vision of becoming "a human person fully alive", then our own choices and actions will be at their best when we are seeking to emulate the values and attitudes of Christ. We discover what these attitudes and values are really about by immersing ourselves, in a personal way, in the events and encounters recorded from his living and dying. The "midrash" tradition urges us to ask not "Did this really happen, and if so, when and where?" but rather "What does this story *mean*?"

*Relational living.* Human beings are relational creatures. How is the balance between: our relationship with God, our relationships with those we live and work with, our relationship with society and the world, and our relationship with all creation? Is any of these key areas out of order? What might we do to restore the balance?

*Listening to the prophets and mystics of our own time* – the famous and the obscure, the communal and the personal. The revelation of what it means to be "a human being fully alive" is an ongoing process. It didn't either start or stop two thousand years ago. Whose voices speak to you personally with the power of the prophet and the insight of the mystic?

*Hearing the voice of new science.* There are astounding parallels between the findings of new maths and physics, biology and cosmology, and the wisdom of the mystics through the ages, and in all spiritual traditions – e.g. the idea of emergence, the Gaia hypothesis, chaos theory, uncertainty, and the interrelatedness of all matter at the level of the sub-atomic particle.

*Embracing the necessity, and the power, of Calvary.* Breakdown leads to breakthrough. To live true to what it means to be truly human, will attract opposition. The shadow side of humanity will always seek to destroy the True Self, but the resurrection story reveals that this stripping actually exposes the kernel of who we truly are.

*Uncovering.* One of the hallmarks of the creation myth was the instinctive reaction to "cover ourselves". We have continued to build up our defences and our masks in this way for at least 100,000 years. The Christic vision calls us to peel off these layers, to risk our vulnerability – to shed the layers of the "less", to discover the "more" – "the human being fully alive".

*Engaging in the ongoing struggle between "fear" and "love".* The power of the nightmare threatens, especially in our times, to engulf us and embroil us in all kinds of "pre-emptive action" against any threat, real or imagined. How do we really feel about this? What hold does fear have over us at a personal and a communal level?

*Change begins with me!* We cannot change the structures of our world until, and unless, we are prepared to examine the structures of our own mental processes and the motivations of our own hearts. Personal spirituality is about this level of transformation – a transformation at the personal level which empowers transformation at the macro level. This is the spirituality of Jesus of Nazareth, and of all those, known and unknown, who seek to live true to the vision of what it means to be truly and fully human.

Eastern Orthodox spirituality teaches that "God becomes human so that humans can become divine". Perhaps to be fully human *is* to be divine, but as yet we are living at only a small percentage of what "full humanity" (or, as Jesus called it "life in all its fullness") means. The Enlightened One is the One who is both the trailblazer and the empowerer of our growth into all we have the potential to become. Spirituality is the process through which we engage with this challenge with our full will and consciousness. The story of the Two Wolves gives us a simple but powerful tool with which to begin this process, and to keep it going. Which wolf am I feeding?

The story of the "Portage Pine" gives us an image of what it means to stand on the edge, and to lead others to the breakthrough into all that lies beyond the horizon of *homo sapiens* – the threshold of *homo transcendens*.

### **Margaret Silf**

\* "Portage Pine" .... explanation to follow shortly.

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### **A Note from the Web Master**

I am one of two Orthodox Chaplains at the Universities of Manchester. I attended recently a Spirituality Conference organised by the St. Peter's Chaplaincy at the Manchester Metropolitan University at which I offered a presentation on the Holy Icons. Margaret Silf's lecture is published with her permission herewith. It made a great impression on me.

Margaret's keynote address is timely and insightful from an Orthodox point of view as she speaks from a non-Orthodox tradition in a manner that beautifully encapsulates some of our most cherished principles. We could enumerate these as follows:-

- (1) The spiritual goal of humankind to become more fully human / alive, (St. Irenaeus).
- (2) The dynamic model of human development linked to consciousness and freely willed choices toward good or evil.
- (3) The practice of stillness and transformative encounter with God the Life Giver which requires courage in the face of opposition both within ourselves and without.
- (4) The experiential basis of all spiritual development, the relinquishing of control toward freedom in God for the other.
- (5) The eschatology of a humanity recapitulated in Christ and energised by the Spirit toward deification, a new evolutionary opportunity in the human species afforded by grace.

Thank you Margaret for your contribution!

### **Fr. Gregory**

# Magna Carta Speaks

On June 10th 1215, nearly 800 years ago, a blow for liberty and justice was struck in this land by the barons at Runnymede when they forced King John to uphold equity and the rule of law. Principles were reaffirmed and extended, ancient principles, that assured all citizens of equal and fair treatment under the law. Today we need new barons (well, people) for a new King John. I speak of course of the Government's proposals to introduce house arrest for those who cannot be charged in any court but whom the State suspects of planning terrorist or other serious criminal activity. This is imprisonment without trial initiated by politicians rather than the judicial process.

Now, there is a serious problem here and it concerns suicide bombers. With this evil, the law has to *prevent* a crime rather than punish one already committed. Clearly, we need some form of supervision and monitoring but house arrest is a bridge too far. The appalling history of the use and abuse of this domestic internment by repressive regimes and its tendency to create martyrs to publicity should have warned the government to steer well clear. Surveillance technology exists to keep us safe. House arrest is one more nail in the coffin of our freedoms. Hopefully, this proposal will sufficiently arouse the judiciary and public opinion to head off this perilous erosion of 800 year freedoms. Let us hear again the relevant clauses from Magna Carta.

*(38) In future no official shall place a man on trial upon his own unsupported statement, without producing credible witnesses to the truth of it.*

*(39) No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.*

**Fr. Gregory**

## Astrology and the Occult

**by Fr. Gregory**

Tough words from Isaiah:-

*Stand now with your enchantments*

*And the multitude of your sorceries,  
In which you have laboured from your youth--  
Perhaps you will be able to profit,  
Perhaps you will prevail.*

<sup>13</sup>*You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels;*

*Let now the astrologers, the stargazers,  
And the monthly prognosticators  
Stand up and save you*

*From what shall come upon you.*

<sup>14</sup>*Behold, they shall be as stubble,*

*The fire shall burn them;  
They shall not deliver themselves  
From the power of the flame;*

*It shall not be a coal to be warmed by,  
Nor a fire to sit before!*

<sup>15</sup>*Thus shall they be to you*

*With whom you have laboured,  
Your merchants from your youth;*

*They shall wander each one to his quarter.  
No one shall save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15)*

Such prophetic denunciations go back to Leviticus ...

*'Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.  
(Leviticus 19:31)*

... and were consistently reflected in Old Testament subsequently, most notably when Saul consulted the medium at Endor and thereafter lost his kingship, (1 Samuel 28).

In the New Testament also, sorcery is condemned in the person of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9) and the exorcisms of our Lord himself take very seriously the dangers of souls vulnerable to demonic influence. Well into the patristic era, the message is the same ... astrology, spiritualism, necromancy, sorcery, divination ... all these things are demonically inspired because they subvert the love, justice and providence of God. Let us recall a few witnesses from this period concerning astrology:-

*If we are but instruments of heavenly rotations, then we do not have free will. And if mankind loses freedom, it loses everything. (St. Gregory of Nyssa)*

*Anyone who believes that our loving God would give power to stars in order to direct and govern our lives offends Gods justice and love. (St. Augustine)*

*If we are directed by star-power, then there is no such thing as good or evil, because we do what we do under the stars direction. This means that Gods commandments, that man shall not sin or that man shall do good, comes down to nothing but foolishness. (St. John Chrysostom)*

And so the present day, ostensibly a very rational era, a period of scientific progress and rational discourse. Well, it may be in university lecture halls, research labs or factory operation rooms but on the street we are very far from being a rational, faith inspired, and scientifically literate culture. Here we find superstition, folly and corruption of both mind and heart. A great religiosity prevails but this has nothing to do with Christianity and everything to do with evil, deluding spirits. Never has astrology, necromancy, divination, spiritism, paganism, outright Satanism even, been more popular. Sometimes the very people who believe in these dangerous deceits hold down jobs and lifestyles that require very rational approaches to life situations but somehow they manage to lead a double life when it comes to belief ... the crazier it seems the better. Channelling, crystals, astral travel, you name it, its all out there and its a major growth industry.

In a slightly more positive vein we could say that the fascination of moderns for such things reflects a terrible lack in our culture, a desert of religious feeling and a lack of authentic, life transforming spirituality in many of the mainline churches. In the absence of life giving water, people, who are all naturally religious however strident atheist voices may seem, seek to slake their spiritual thirst at strange wells. Falling sick they ascribe their poisoning to the culture they are rejecting whereas in fact the cure is worse than the disease ... but this they cannot see. Of course the culture itself doesnt help since it is an unwritten law that one can quite easily believe in Alice in through the Looking Glass vein in seven impossible things before breakfast, because, well, dear ... if that works for you.

*Can you keep from crying by considering things?' [Alice] asked.*

*'That's the way it's done,' the Queen said with great decision: 'nobody can do two things at once, you know. Let's consider your age to begin with -- how old are you?'*

*'I'm seven and a half, exactly.' 'You needn't say "exactly",' the Queen remarked. 'I can believe it without that. Now I'll give you something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day.' 'I ca'n't believe that!' said Alice.*

*'Can't you?' the Queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.'*

*Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said 'one can't believe impossible things.'*

*'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. [Through The Looking Glass, by Lewis Carroll]*

Such postmodernist nonsense has now made belief in the tooth fairy equivalent to belief in Christ and vice versa and with the same value. Couple with this a desperate desire never to offend anyone and to commend any nonsense so long as it is sincerely held and you have a recipe for madness, quite literally, an insanity.

How, then, are we to help people back towards sanity, towards Christ-mindfulness? We must of course warn but taking care not to appear as defensive or concerned only to condemn out of self-righteousness. We must show why such beliefs and practices are both irrational and dangerous. Having done thus we most certainly have not finished. Jesus warned about the man from whom an unclean spirit had departed becoming vulnerable to new infestations ...

<sup>24</sup>"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, "I will return to my house from which I came." <sup>25</sup>And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. <sup>26</sup>Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Luke 11:24-26)

It is for this reason that we must insist that when a person has repented that he seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit for only good can truly drive out evil by becoming embedded in a persons soul. For that to happen the Churchs prayers, faith, sacraments and common life must be embraced to the full. Any lukewarmness in this regard is asking for trouble. Suffice to say that many churches today just dont have the depth of spirituality, prayer and life in the Holy Spirit to provide for a believers armour and spiritual growth. In Orthodoxy we have got such a wonderful resource of deep wisdom and life changing potential in the Holy Spirit deeply coursing in our Tradition.. As St. Peter said to our Lord when he had delivered a difficult saying:-

Lord, to whom shall we go; you have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

Of no wizard, witch, necromancer, medium or astrologer of this can be said:-

You have the words of eternal life. Let us not neglect so great a salvation.

## **The Fathers on Money and the Proper Use of Wealth**

**by Fr. John-Mark Titterington**

The Orthodox Church often talks about having seven sacraments, but these seven in no way limit the idea of sacrament. We are taught that all of our life is meant to be lived in a sacramental way, that all our life is, as St Paul reminds us, "hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3). Clearly one area that requires "sacramentalising" is our use of wealth and possessions. This is because God not only provides us with the financial means of living, He also expects us to use these means wisely and compassionately, to the greater glory of God. So it is that the giving and receiving of our wealth have a way of affect ting our relationship with our Creator.

First it is important to state that the New Testament does not condemn riches or our private possessions but it does give us many warnings about having false priorities. Jesus' underlying command is to "seek

first the Kingdom of Heaven" and He jokes about the difficulties felt by rich people in getting to Heaven, yet He does associate with the wealthy and never condemns them.

The Church Fathers were suspicious of wealth because they thought that riches could only be gained by evil or questionable means, and Our Blessed Lord implied that He, too, thought that to be rich meant that you ignored the poor. It follows that the Fathers are almost unanimous in saying that riches are not evil in themselves, but that the misuse of wealth will bring damnation and earthly unhappiness. That early church Book of Prayers and Instruction, called the Didache, says:- "Do not turn away the poor and needy, but share everything you own with your brothers, and do not say what you have belongs only to you."

St. John Chrysostom put it well. He is saying that we must honour Christ in the way He wants to be honoured, which may not be the way we want to go about it. St Peter thought he was honouring Christ when he tried to stop Him washing his feet, but this was far from being genuine homage. So, he says "give God the honour He asks for, that is, give your money generously to the poor. God has no need of golden vessels, but of golden hearts. I am not saying that you should not give golden altar vessels...but that nothing can take the place of almsgiving." There you have it; first things first.

Our Lord warned us "you will always have the poor with you," (John 12:8) and it is significant that today, governments of the so-called developed nations are at last binding together to help the poor of Africa. Obviously we must support that effort without neglecting the poor of our own country.

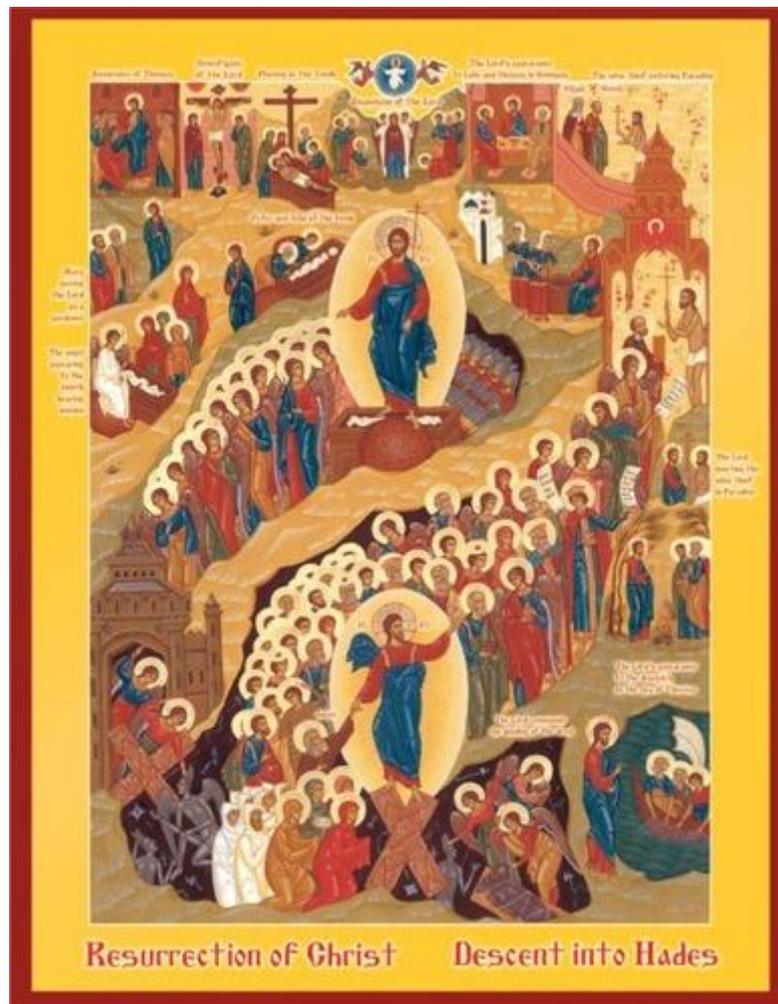
Of all the New Testament writers, St Paul was, if I may say so, "sold" on almsgiving and he urged all the churches he founded to collect for the poor Christians left behind in Jerusalem. To the Corinthians he urges:- "On the first day of the week let each one of you (*notice that: no exceptions!*) lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." (1 Corinthians 2:16). In other words, St Paul was recommending, systematic regular giving as something which should be done under God's guidance and for His glory. He was, I believe, trying to "sacramentalise" what the Corinthians gave.

Most of us do, as St Paul says, "prosper" – even the old age pension is going up –

so the question for most of us is, do we ask for God's guidance on what we give?

The bottom line is still Our Blessed Lord's:- "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you," and our prayer must be that of St John Chrysostom asking God to give us "golden hearts."

## **The Cosmos Renewed**



"Many indeed are the miracles of that time: God crucified; the sun darkened and again rekindled; for it was fitting that the creatures should suffer with their Creator; the veil rent; the Blood and Water shed from His Side; the one as from a man, the other as above man; the rocks rent for the Rock's sake; the dead raised for a pledge of the final Resurrection of all men; the Signs at the Sepulchre and after the Sepulchre, which none can worthily celebrate; and yet none of these equal to the Miracle of my salvation. A few drops of Blood recreate the whole world, and become to all men what rennet is to milk, drawing us together and compressing us into unity."

St. Gregory the Theologian

This extraordinary reference to Easter (this now being the season for the Orthodox) shows just how much the resurrection of Christ means to a Christian. It's the sheer regenerative power of the resurrection which drives this faith, ("a few drops of blood recreate the whole world.") It's not that the resurrection is some sort of way off hope for a believer but rather that the whole Cosmos now has potential for life having been liberated from corruption and death.

Some people can only see corruption and death in the world, (often the eyes do not lie). To be a Christian though is to see the world through God's eyes, not blind to its tragedy but seeing beyond its tragedy to something infinitely more powerful. This faith has sustained Orthodox Christians through incredible hardship and persecution over many centuries. It is a faith that billions have lived and died for. The reason? God in Christ makes all things new. Here is a freedom from corruption and decay that is forged out of Infinite Love ... the most powerful personal reality in the Cosmos. This is the "rennet" (clotting agent) that binds, heals, restores and brings all things into unity. It is life. Eternal life.

As St. Augustine declaimed:- "We are an Easter people and 'Alleluia' is our song!"

**Fr. Gregory**

# The Hype of the Clones

(republished from Fr. Gregory's [Blog](#))



In Newcastle, UK there are breathless announcements of [human cloning](#), likewise in South Korea. Unwisely, this has stirred up all sorts of premature excitements about stem cell miracle cures for this, that and the other. The trouble is, of course, that researchers just can't resist the hype ... and neither can the press.

Cloning pioneers know full well that if they go on the offensive about the benefits of therapeutic cloning, this is what the media will publish first, thereby drowning out any ethical objections about the harvesting of tissue from terminated embryos (cloned or otherwise) which always then slip innocuously to the end of news bulletins.

The trouble is of course that, ethical objections aside for one moment, such miracle cures are not "just around the corner." For therapeutic cloning to be available as a medical intervention, there has to be a plentiful supply of human ova. At the moment, researchers are using genetic material from IVF "discarded" embryos. These are "failed embryos" but even if the best of the crop were selected there is still the problem of dealing with gross defects in cloned organisms and the possibility of passing these on through stem cells along with such devastating conditions as human variant CJD.

Let's speculate for a moment though that all these severe difficulties have been ironed out (10 years?). Would therapeutic cloning still be ethical? Clearly, those who think that embryos are only genetic bits to be harvested and manipulated for whatever reason are going to have no problem with this. However, for those of us who believe that the human temple has been violated by such procedures with untold unforeseen spiritual and social costs in the years ahead, therapeutic cloning can never be justified, no matter what the much heralded benefits might be.

There are wider issues here of course to do with the manipulation of our own genetic destiny and the crafting of an upgrade to homo sapiens. How will homsap 2.0 deal with homsap 1.0? I can only shudder at these and other prospects. Merely being able to do something does not mean that it should be done.

## All Saints Sunday Sermon

by Fr. Gregory



Thousands of the friends of God once sanctified these isles in the first millennium. They are all in our Orthodox calendars. In the second millennium, barely a handful made it into Rome's calendar. In fact, before the Reformation when Christians started killing Christians the number of British saints in a 500 year period was precisely 13. All of those lived in the first 250 years. After 1253, there are precisely none.

I believe that there is a deep connection here between the lack of saints after Britain ceased to be Orthodox and the eventual fall of this country into heresy and unbelief. It is the saints that give us EVIDENCE of real, practical Christianity. Without the evidence of Christianity lived out whole heartedly and without reserve in the lives of actual Christian men and women of great holiness, and more especially when the memory of the saints has been erased from the English mind after the Reformation can we really be surprised that the gospel has lost its hold on the imagination and commitment of the English? No longer able to see, love and cherish Christ as made known in the lives of these men and women who can blame people for concluding that Christianity is a wholly impractical faith with little or no relevance to their own lives? The Orthodox Church can preach the Christian message until it is blue in the face but until it is able to SHOW great multitudes how it is both possible and highly desirable to BE a Christian through practical examples of holiness, it's wasting its breath.

Now, we can't just wait around and hope that some new examples of holiness will pop into our calendars and make people sit up and take notice again. WE are called to be saints; each and every one of us ... and there's no time like the present. We are the ones now called to BE Christ for others. God in the Church is not unmindful of what we need to achieve this.

First repentance. There can be no Christianity without repentance. Every Christian has to fall on his or her knees before his Creator and confess his / her utter impoverishment without divine grace. This is the prayer of humility. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." We shall never cease to need to have recourse to repentance. There will never be a time in this life when we shall have done with repentance.

Next we need to love as we have been loved ... indiscriminately, unconditionally, without reserve. Immediately we know ourselves to be incapable of such love. We simply do not have it in us. We can love, it is true, and we must start there ... but not end there. We must continue to pray to be filled with God's love so that our poverty can be enriched by his inexhaustible fullness ... his fullness in and with Love.

The first Christians converted a whole Roman world through this Love. "How these Christians love one another!" a pagan once said. There can be no anonymity, no secluded corner in an Orthodox Church. Love is our only being, our only calling. We do not judge. We love. They kill us. We love. They despise us, we love. Nothing can stand before this Love.

This Love makes saints as easily as breathing, BUT, (and this is the problem), do we REALLY want to walk this path? Are we prepared to pay the price of love, to die to live. God knows. Pray that there will be many who say "Yes" to God's call. We desperately need saints again in this country; holy men and women who will SHOW what it is to be a Christian. Are we willing to sign up for this? I do hope and pray so for on this God only will judge. Have you loved?

## **The Revenge of Malthus?** Why Live8 is only half the story

**by Fr. Gregory**



**Thomas Robert Malthus, 1766-1834**

This 18th / 19th century Anglican priest and economist spoke to his own age and only some of his insights are transferable to ours. His most devastating interpretation of observed human affairs in his *Essay on Population* (1798 / 1803) remains, arguably, as true today as it did then. [Malthus](#) contended that unchecked population growth was always self defeating. Beyond the level of economic sustainability, war and want would always cut back population size. His solution to this problem consisted of a blend of "moral restraint" (now superseded by contraception) and wealth creation, obviating the need for large and early start families.

His prophecies took hold largely in the west where we have indeed seen a stabilisation of the birth rate and a demographic skew toward the elderly. One could argue of course that such a transition has not occurred in the developing world because of a poor social infrastructure and the infancy of middle class aspiration. To some this sounds like special pleading for western bourgeois liberalism. What is of more enduring value in his thought though is the idea that sustainability has its own logic in a world of limited resource. It is in this logic that we see the Revenge of Malthus and the weakness of much of the political rhetoric about world development.

The simple truth (that Malthus would have understood so well) is that this world cannot sustain the lives of 6 billion humans (10 billion in 50 years) in the manner to which the rich north and west has become accustomed. Many people worry about America, Japan and Europe and the disproportionate impact on the global environment and development caused by these wealthy nations. However, soon we shall be shaking our heads at the prospect of India and China thirsting for fossil fuels, SUV's to consume them and carbon emissions in the Far East going through the roof. Maybe Africa will eventually join the party as well ... but nobody will truly be celebrating for long. The Malthusian limit is nearer perhaps than we think.

What Malthus couldn't have envisioned is a world where the limits to growth are as much environmental and ecological as they are economic; although these, of course, are all inextricably interdependent factors. It is this new situation that has wiped out his most favoured solution, making everyone middle class like himself ... small families, industrious, good housekeeping. Even if this was thought desirable it is now hardly possible. Middle class abstention is an indulgence of prosperity, and prosperity costs. Today prosperity costs the world itself, the ultimate sustainability limit.

So, what are the prospects, living as we do under the shadow of the Revenge of Malthus? Note that I am concerned with what I think WILL happen and how we can steer that more positively, not what SHOULD happen by dictat. What should happen is pretty much straightforward; mandatory birth limits, mandatory carbon emission limits ... a lot of other "mandatories." These don't sell well at elections though and in any case I am sufficient of a realist to recognise the dead hand of coercion and political repression lying dormant in such good intentions.

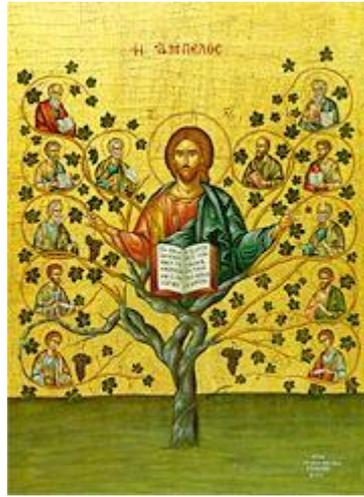
I don't see the developed or the developing world exercising self restraint. So long as we have nations and peoples' pursuing self interest based policies of growth and yet more growth we shall continue to global diminishing returns from an overstretched planet. The Americans and others think that there will be a technological fix for this ... the Holy Grail perhaps of nuclear fusion or genetic enhancement of crop production. What Malthus knew but what many politicians then and since choose wilfully to ignore is that the world itself sets limits on human growth no matter how smart we get at squeezing more juice out of the orange. There still only is one orange at the end of the day. I, therefore, see ahead two stark choices; adapt and down size or die in an environmental catastrophe.

The "adapt and down size" option presupposes a spiritual revolution in world humanity ... a shift to a way of living that embraces self restraint (rather than greed) as a virtue. As a Christian I am bound to say that this is both achievable and fruitful by the grace of God. However, such aspirations will only and can only apply to a subset of the world population. Christianity is a realistic faith and recognises the dangers inherent in such universal utopianism. Whenever humanity has entertained this notion its enablers have always eventually resorted to coercion and that is both unacceptable and unsustainable. Perhaps there is a third option though and one for which many will think this author crazy.

When we look to the natural world and its ecosystems we observe that expanding populations, when they reach their sustainability limit, either implode or seek out new food and land resources. The alternative for us, if we are to continue to grow, lies off planet. The earth just cannot support many more people than we have now. Already we are beginning to see the excitement of exploration moving off world and revealing huge potential in the solar system. The prize in terms of natural resources, outside any planetary gravity well and its energy deficit, lies in and with the [asteroids](#). There are enough primary metals in the asteroid belt to serve humanity for millennia. [Terraforming Mars](#) as a human habitat is already seriously being looked at. Truly, the earth is not the end. We have only just begun. Malthus can be defeated ... but only if we think REALLY big.

## **A NEW PLANT**

**by Dwynwen East**



We look forward with faith to the planting of more Orthodox Churches in our land and especially we pray for the [Macclesfield Mission](#) where, by the will of God, the Church of St. Theodore of Canterbury will open with Divine Liturgy on Saturday September 17<sup>th</sup> in the Silk Museum Heritage Centre, Macclesfield. We pray that the seed, already sown, will flourish and bear fruit in that place.

Several years ago, before I became Orthodox, I remember reading a book on prayer by Richard Foster. In this book he said that prayer dares to believe that things can be different. He described a personal encounter with God that happened while Richard was looking at a decaying tree. In the opposite direction was a rock surrounded by water. Meditating on both these things he heard an inner voice saying to him "This is my Church," (the rotting tree), and then, "But this is what my Church is going to be," (the rock). Could this church be the Orthodox Church I wonder?

There is no denying that today the Orthodox Church provides us with the stability we are looking for in this increasingly secularised society. This church, rooted as it is in the Ecumenical Councils of the first few centuries and rock solid in its doctrine, continues into the third millennium of solidarity in both liturgy and teaching. These roots, dedicated to God, provide new shoots that are also His. Some will inevitably break off while others will spring forth sharing equally the nourishment from the same root. "If the root is holy, so are the branches." (Romans 11:16)

Prayer in all its forms is essential in allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us on our journey wherever that may take us. Many of us have been led to the Holy Orthodox Church in recent years and we thank God in His wisdom that this is so. He has opened up for us a global church where we can enjoy the fellowship of many different cultures in our worship of our God in Christ who is the visible expression of the invisible Creator. We are blessed and nourished in our faith by the multitude of Saints surrounding us in the Holy icons giving us confidence to acknowledge in veneration all those who have gone before yet are with us still and who help us on our way. Not least of these are the many Saints of Britain whom we remembered at Matins last Sunday.

By the grace of God our church of St. Aidan, planted a decade ago, grafted on to the tree and nourished by its roots continues to grow in fellowship, faith and love through prayer. Its apostolic ministry and sacramental grace guides and strengthens us in joy, righteousness and peace.

We pray, with the prophetic insight of God, who looked upon that rock, that He will continue to encourage new churches, find for them new leaders, sustain them in their infancy and strengthen them in their growth providing stability and hope for the people being places where one can "Lay aside all earthly cares."

"There is a deep peace, a serenity, in being Orthodox; nothing is demanded of us. No proof. No justification. No learning. Just faith." Mother Thekla. Blessed St. Theodore pray to God for us.

**Dwynwen East**

# "Jesus is Lord and He is Risen!"

(a sermon preached by Fr. Gregory on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)



".... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[Romans 10: 9]

St. Paul makes clear in this verse that in terms of the confession of faith there are two main elements that assure us of salvation:-

The Lordship of Jesus

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead

Let us examine these a little more closely. First we must understand what "Lord" means in "Jesus is Lord."

The Old Testament confession of which Christians are part insists that God is nameless in human terms. When Moses encountered the Burning Bush and the Divine Voice spoke to him, God refused to name Himself conventionally when asked. Moses is instructed to say that "I am who I am" has sent him with the message of freedom from oppression in Egypt. [Exodus 3:14]. This word in Hebrew is "Yahweh" and since Hebrew is often written without vowel marks the for consonant letters in English are YHWH, hence "Yahweh." The word 'GOD' is pretty meaningless, as is "theos" in Greek or "Deus" in Latin. The 'God' word is universal in human culture for the Divine. Even so, Jews to this day refuse to speak or write 'God' in full. Instead we find 'G-d' with the vowel missing.

The reason of course why Jews and Christians alike are reluctant to name God is because he is far beyond all human descriptions. He is transcendent.

<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

[Isaiah 55:8-9]

We cannot leave the situation there, however, God is not only transcendent, beyond all human categories of thought, high above the heavens, He is also closer to us than breathing, more radiant than any light of the heavens, more loving than any love of which we can conceive. The people of the first covenant, whilst retaining their grasp of the ineffable mysterious Godhead also insisted that he could be known in a close and intimate manner. His Presence filled both the Temple and the hearts and lives of the righteous. The Divine Name itself could come down from heaven to earth in the divine cloud of shekinah ... the same cloud that received Jesus at his Ascension.

The divine Name on earth for Christians then has to be Jesus and all the titles, names and descriptions that the people of the first covenant applied to God alone were applied quite readily and without embarrassment to Christ himself in the writings of the New Testament as reflecting the apostolic faith of the early Church. This faith, upheld by the Holy Fathers at the Seven Ecumenical Councils we Orthodox maintain to this day. We confess Jesus as Lord, "true God of true God." (Nicene Creed).

The title "Lord," is, of course, drawn from human society; as indeed is "King," another title given to Jesus. But here, the analogy breaks down for only to Jesus do we offer incense as God. The early Christians refused to burn incense to the Roman Emperor because they rejected the blasphemy of worshipping any man having a human father as God. For this many were whipped, burnt alive, eaten by wild beasts, martyred; all without complaint but rather as an offering of peace and a witness to their faith. The Lordship of the Divine Christ was proved by martyrdom in the early Church, not primarily by debate. How times have changed!

The Lordship of Christ does not just indicate his divinity, however, but also has striking practical implications for all Christians who confess it. We accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. We confess by word and deed that indeed he has the Lordship and as St. Paul himself says again in Philippians:

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

[Philippians 2:9-11]

Accepting the Lordship of Christ is not just a confession of the lips but also a confession of a life lived in obedience both to his call and His Word. Jesus himself referred to this:-

<sup>21</sup>"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

[Matthew 7:21]

So accepting the Lordship of Christ is doing the will of our Father in heaven. Anything less is worthless hypocrisy but also not excuse for those who look to Christian hypocrisy to justify their own self-satisfied inaction. ALL will have to stand before the judgement seat of Christ and this is clearly taught by our Lord Himself in his Parable of the Last Judgement, again in Matthew's Gospel:-

<sup>34</sup>"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

[Matthew 25:34-36]

So, accepting the Lordship of Christ will have a profound and long lasting affect in any Christian's life; Orthodoxy ... 'right believing' (lit.) and Orthopraxy (lit.) 'right action.' This is what leads to salvation.

What of the other tenet of our faith though indicated by St. Paul, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead? How can this also lead to salvation? Undoubtedly, without the resurrection from the dead we are utterly without hope.

<sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup>If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

<sup>20</sup>But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[1 Corinthians 15:14-20]

In fact the Lordship of Christ is itself established by the resurrection.

<sup>4</sup>and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

[Romans 1:4]

Jesus is Lord because in and through him the Blessed Trinity has destroyed death itself, which is the corrupting corruption of our primal and actual sins. As Lord over death and Life Giver the our Lord Jesus Christ makes POSSIBLE a truly righteous, Godly life. So many of our good intentions and good deeds are prevented or distorted by the "ego" ... our pride. Unless and until that is dealt with we are unable to accept the Lordship of Jesus practically, in a saving manner, as his disciples. We need to be transformed from within, born from above, not of the will of the flesh but of the Spirit of God himself. The Spirit can take our dead deeds and our ineffectual intentions and make them live by the power of Christ's resurrection. Those dry bones that littered the plain of Ezekiel's vision can indeed live for Christ is risen for all!

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' "

[Ezekiel 37:4-6]

You see! "Then you know that I am the LORD!"

This then is salvation to live a transformed life in obedience to God.

"... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[Romans 10: 1-10]

## Mercy

by Fr. Gregory



**Rembrandt: "The Prodigal Son"**

In 670 AD a Syrian monk named Isaac was consecrated bishop in Nineveh, modern day Mosul in northern Iraq. Although technically belonging to the Nestorian Church, St. Isaac the Syrian is a saint recognised in our calendars and indeed has been received by Christians of both east and west as a burning lamp of Orthodox truth. He has much to tell us on "loving enemies" ...

*"And what is a merciful heart? It is the hearts burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his*

*heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he continually offers up tearful prayer, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns in his heart without measure in the likeness of God.”*

— St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 8

Notice that St. Isaac’s first reference is to mercy. It would be difficult to find a word that so comprehensively encapsulates what our faith says about God. He is a merciful God. He does not hold our sins against us but rather forgives liberally, even seventy times seven does he forgive. God, like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, runs out to embrace us even as we return, disconsolate in our own eyes, to him. His mercy is inexhaustible because his Love is Infinite and enduring. The devil is utterly powerless in the light of that mercy. He fears it even because such mercy means that his long and vicious reign of “just deserts” is ended forever.

God does not forgive “fairly” – for such is Satan’s complaint. He forgives without keeping count. The devil would rather have a just God, a God who would return an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. At least then he could still play the role of executioner. Even that is now denied him. All that remains is his ability to deceive and to lie; to suggest to a Christian that the gospel is not true, or that God is perfidious, or that we are beyond redemption.

Listen to St. Isaac ... no one is beyond redemption. He even claims that the Love of God gives us confidence to pray for the demons! If we say that we are too sinful for God to save us then we are guilty of pride, masquerading as false humility. Despair at our own sinfulness is yet one more attempt to stay in control. It feels like hell of course, but it is a pattern of thinking inspired by the devil. Indeed if it feels like hell, then isn’t that the dead give away? Who but the devil would want us to despair? He keeps us in despair by making us think that we are pious and humble. Actually, we are rather letting him stay in control, which also keeps us centre stage and the actual merciful God way off in the wings. If we are disposed to think then that God himself is responsible for our miserable condition then our atheism is complete.

No, none of this is true. God always forgives those who come to him. He does not want us to languish without hope in the pit of our own despair. He does not want us to remain enslaved to the demons of self-hatred and self-accusation. He longs for us to be free of all this, for he who has been forgiven has been released from his great burden; he has the deep joy of the redeemed.

The devil though has one last cruel trick. As the Christian perseveres in his walk with God he becomes more acutely aware, (than he ever was before), that his sinfulness is much deeper and more comprehensive than he thought. The same choice presents itself yet again. To trust in the mercy of God or to despair at the devil’s bidding. He must still choose life, choose God. Even though he looks in the mirror and sees the full ugliness of which he knows himself to be capable, he must still choose life, still choose God. This will never change in this life. He must always choose life; he must always choose God.

St. Isaac knew that this was the measure of God’s love, the measure of God’s mercy. He knew that this love and mercy was even up to the task of releasing the demons from their bondage. What a vision; what a great hope! Rarely has anyone been so deeply etched with the reality and depth of God’s mercy and love as this Syrian bishop. Notice though that the saint asks himself: “And what is a merciful HEART?” True, he construes his own answer solely from the vantage point of a deeply Christian perception of the love and mercy of God but the frame of the question is OUR mercy, OUR love, OUR mercy in OUR hearts. Why? Because, unless we match in our own lives the mercy and love of God for all creatures, we risk losing our own salvation.

Not only does the Lord's Prayer teach us to forgive others as part of our own forgiveness but the parables do the same ... most notably the parable of the Unjust Steward who refused to forgive the debt of a subordinate when he had been forgiven by his own Master. He pays the price. He is cast out by the Master who initially forgave him everything.

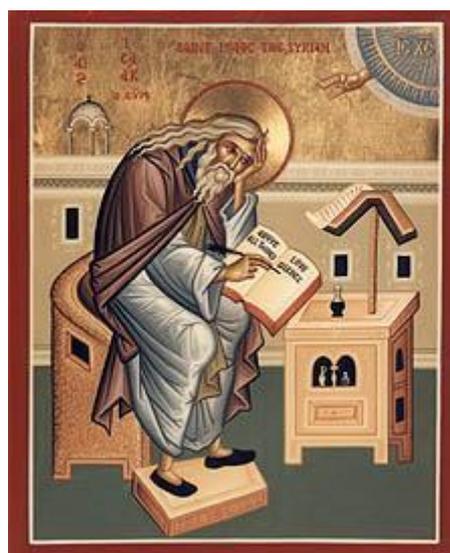
Make no mistake about it. A heart that is neither merciful nor loving will not enter the kingdom of God. Our Christian lives must therefore apply mercy to everyone and all things. It is the basis of our Lord's teaching that we should love our enemies; not just our friends, our families and those who do good to us; but also those who hate us and seek to do us harm.

This is, humanly speaking, of course is an impossible task. It is impossible for those, that is, who do not know the mercy of God or those who know it and refuse it. For those who know deeply and personally the merciful Love of God for all creatures however there is no other path. It is the path of the martyrs who, after the example and manner of St. Stephen the Protomartyr, prayed for mercy for those who killed him, echoing the words of the Saviour, "for they know not what they do." It is the path of those who have known the power of Love to vanquish evil in the most extreme of personal circumstances. It is truly the authentic Christian path ... but it requires faith and knowledge and a real and abiding adherence to Christ and love for Him. By such, therefore, we will be judged: - "Did you, my child, have my merciful heart?"

### St. Isaac the Syrian

He was born in Nineveh in the 6th century. He entered the monastery as a youth. Having perfected himself and succeeding in good deeds, he isolated himself in a desert cave to maintain silence, heeding only to himself and God. After a number of years, God summoned him to serve as the ruling bishop of the Nineveh Church. However, after being tonsured, Saint Isaac did not remain very long at his cathedra. This occurred because of the disobedience of a moneylender, who refused to act according to the Gospel. The Saint thought: "If they are not obeying God's directives in the Gospel, then what remains for me to do here?" He returned to his beloved hermitage in the desert. Here he lived in silence up to his death, abiding in deeds of self-denial, in struggles with the flesh and temptations of the demons.

Saint Isaac wrote much, relying on his vast spiritual experiences. His instructions came to us in the form of 91 homilies. He reposed in the 6th century.



### St. Isaac the Syrian

## No Fear

a response to fundamentalism

by Fr. Gregory



Fundamentalism is on the march it seems. Whether it's Christian Zionism or creationism in the US, Hindu nationalism in Gujarat, Islamic extremism in the Middle East, corrosive repressive religion is rearing its ugly head again. Many put this down to a rejection of modernism, a reaction against the shallow amoral emptiness of secular liberalism or the hubris of scientism. Doubtless all these play their part but for my money, the real culprit is fear.

It is fear that brings out the atavistic response of the reptilian brain, only in humans there is the demonic complexity of the collective. When faced with an imminent threat (actual or imagined) humans bond together. A belief system can be key to this bonding. The ideology of the group, reinforced by opposition from the object of fear, (again, real or imagined and therefore, defended by paranoia), enforces irrational unthinking conformity from the group. Fundamentalism is born.

One thing is clear. Fundamentalism can never be undone by reason alone, (for reason is the classic enemy of the fundamentalist). Irrationality is the language of fundamentalism. You cannot confront irrationality with argument. If fundamentalism is driven by fear then it can only be undone by love, (for perfect love drives out fear - 1 John 4:18).

Of course, love rarely if ever finds its way onto the politician's agenda. Love rarely, if ever, is considered as an effective weapon against superstition and hatred. There is no "real politik" of love ... only bombs and propaganda.

Enter the Church. We DO have the resources to combat the ideological darkness of fundamentalism. The gospel is the power of the Crucified; the promise of the Risen One. But, who is up to the task? Could we dare to say:- "Here am I lord, send me." Befriend a hateful person today. See the power of Love to melt the most hardened of hearts. But do be prepared to die in the attempt for such is the character of a Love that loves even enemies. This kind of love can break the vicious circles of fear, the foul mother of all hatreds; but it is not for the faint hearted. Only faith will do. Only such a faith as this is truly rational.

**Fr. Gregory**

## What's Right and What's Wrong with Secularism

by Fr. Gregory



There can be no doubt that aspects of secularism in western liberal democracies have proven their worth in the development of a civil society able to sustain various freedoms both personal and academic and to foster economic development. Other features of secularism have been less conducive to human flourishing and these touch on its relations with value bearing faith systems and cultures standing in antithesis to its most basic tenet ... that no ideology or faith shall command the attention of the public square.

Of course, secularism has tried to steer society by its own moral compass ... a loosely defined collection of various human rights. However, human rights, speak of entitlements, not ultimate meanings and daily responsibilities. Secularism cannot deliver such values and beliefs by its very nature. So, in places where secularism is pursued aggressively so as to relegate faith to the private and, therefore, marginal sphere, the reaction against such privation has caused protest and conflict. States can no longer afford to be amoral or to base ethical responses on populist appeal.

The riots in French cities (and to a lesser extent elsewhere in Europe) have been variously blamed on the social and cultural alienation, economic injustice, racism and the refusal of the French to track ethnic disadvantage on the grounds that all citizens are equal. Clearly some citizens are more equal than others. The Far Right of course have derived great political capital from all of this ... themselves stoking the fires of racism and then blaming it on others. What seems to have slipped past most peoples' attention, however, is the rejection of secular western liberal democracy by faith groups who see the secularist ideology as creating and enforcing a godless society. There can be no compromise between an atheist who seeks to build such a society and the believer who seeks to dismantle it; which is why there must be another way of doing things that doesn't pit one group against its diametrical opposite.

Tolerance is good but not good enough. Tolerance is equivalent to saying that peace is merely the absence of war; whereas in fact, peace is a positive thing. Peace needs building; it requires action. Similarly, a civil society which accepts that it can receive and learn from faith groups whilst retaining its refusal to prefer one religious tradition to another must be the way forward. It's sad that in the UK it took the London bombings of 7th July 2005 to bring forward this agenda. Aggressive secularists and religious fundamentalists alike have not welcomed such pluralist rehabilitation of faith in the public domain. No matter; it must proceed if we are to avoid the excesses of violence which arise when people feel that deeply cherished beliefs and values are not being publicly received but rather relegated to the margins of society where they remain, essentially, ineffectual.

If such pluralist engagement is to be credible, however, one platform of secularism must surely be both right and respected. No individual religious tradition should receive preferential treatment from the State. The implications are clear. The Church of England must be disestablished and the monarchy must be

allowed to embrace any faith, not exclusively the Anglican one. At one time an objection might be lodged that this would foster secularism and the decline of Christianity. The situation now, I believe has turned round 180 degrees. Only by such a move can religion receive the public respect it deserves, from any quarter. All faiths now need to come in "from the cold" before the temperature on the street gets too hot ... as we have seen in Paris and elsewhere this last month.

## The Thorn in the Flesh

by Fr. John-Mark



*(a sermon preached on 30th October)*

It is commonplace today to hear both Christians, and members of other religions, boast about what they call their “mystical experiences”. It is interesting that although St Paul said that he had had such experiences, he did not boast or go on about them. On the contrary, he “boasted” about what he called his “thorn in the flesh”, and by this he meant his weaknesses, his downsides. Unfortunately he doesn’t tell us what this “thorn” was. My guess is that it was malaria.

You may remember that he reminded the Galatians in his letter to them (4.13) that when he arrived among them he was ill. Acts tells us that he, Barnabas and John-Mark landed

at the port of Perga in Pamphilia and that coast is notorious for its strain of mosquitoes. So it is probable that they all went down with malaria which can be dangerous for young people and this perhaps explains why Barnabas sent his young cousin, John-Mark, back home to ‘Momma,’ whilst he and St Paul escaped from the bugs up into the hills near Pisidian Antioch. Without proper treatment, the malarial virus would certainly return from time to time, and it could also have affected his eyesight – another malady of his. Probably St Paul didn’t connect the two different illnesses and so he just refers to them as his “thorn in the flesh” and it is of this that he boasts not any mystical experience In doing this he was showing his converts that he was very human and frail and no giant of mysticism, nor for that matter, a master mind and know-all.

A couple of Sundays ago, we heard in the Gospel reading, Jesus declare:- “To you has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 8.10) and no doubt St Paul was aware of our Lord’s words. Thus is it noticeable that though he denies being a mystical being, he does use the Greek word ‘musterion’ frequently in his letters and this is usually translated into English simply as “mystery”. Unfortunately the English word mystery is now in the process of changing its meaning. Often today we hear people say something like:- “it’s a mystery which I cannot understand and never will”. This is not what the Greek word musterion means. Its meaning is best understood by the older English usage, when we called detective novels, “mysteries”. This described their format, in which how the crime was committed was not revealed until the end of the novel, and up to that point it remained a “mystery”.

And when St Paul talks of the mysteries of God, he means just that. God's plan for the salvation of the world had not been altered – it was there all along and clues to its existence were given down the ages, but it was left until, in the fullness of time, it was revealed fully in the birth, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension of His Son, Jesus. St Paul was, in his own words, drawing attention to, and repeating the teaching of our Lord:- “To you has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God”.

What then did Jesus and St Paul mean by these “mysteries of God”? Briefly put, the phrase was a kind of short-hand for truths which were revealed or made clear, to the faithful folk who had hearts which were responsive to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, but which others would not be able to understand nor appreciate. BUT, this doesn't mean that there was a whole raft of religious truth deliberately kept secret and only revealed to the select few. That was, and still is, the heresy called Gnosticism which has rightly been condemned all down the Church's history. Nor is it true to say that only bright people, those with ten “A” levels, can understand these mysteries. Even the disciples, you remember, found Jesus' teaching hard going on occasion.

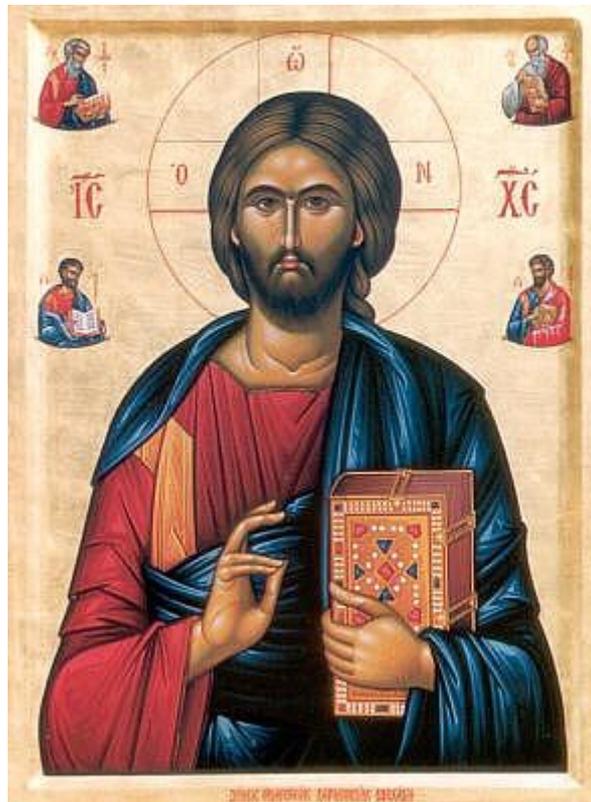
Jesus Himself declared that it is “babes”, the simple and the innocent, who are most open to accept the Gospel truths, and have the faith to receive it, and will come to know the reality of the Kingdom of God. Now, we have to be quite clear on this point. What Jesus was saying is, that the mysteries were open to those who are child-like, not those who are child-ish (Matthew 18.2) and there is a big difference. The spiritual attitudes which Jesus seems to have in mind are humility, dependence, lowliness and simplicity. The Fathers assure us that without humility there is no virtue at all, and that, above all else, humility will help us to seek and receive God's grace and mercy.

And here is the connection with St Paul's boasting about his “thorn in the flesh”. He wasn't boasting about his greatness or his goodness -- he left that, he said, to other people. Instead, he says, “of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities” (2 Corinthians 12.5) And in doing that, almost unconsciously, he was revealing his humility.

But notice what happened, when he asked God to remove this “thorn” from him. The Lord came back to him and said “My grace is sufficient for you, FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.” St. Paul goes on to comment on this interesting saying of God:- “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”. For St. Paul, his weakness, not his mystical experience, is the means of the power of Christ remaining in him.

## **"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" Evangelism in the Orthodox Church**

**by Fr. Gregory**



*NOTE: This is the text of a homily preached at St. Aidan's on Saturday 3rd December 2005. The context is specifically building Orthodox communities in the north of England; although the principles explained here can be implemented here anywhere and at any time.*

A good doctor who is expert at his craft will bring his patient to health only if he first rightly diagnoses the condition or disease from which he suffers. He will not apply the medicine haphazardly or irrationally but with a clear understanding of his patient's needs. The best doctor will also work with his patient's strengths and own latent power to heal so that the healing process is maximised through collaboration.

Evangelism as practised by the Orthodox Church is both the healing of persons and the healing of communities by helping both grow back into the life of God. Community evangelism can range from families and small groups to Empires and Superpowers.

The healing of persons is rightly called salvation and living a holy life toward union with God. An evangelist, a teacher and a pastor will all three practice God's healing art in three slightly different ways. The evangelist will share the gospel in words that his hearer will understand and respond to. The choice of words, place and time is at God's disposition and according to His wise and perfect understanding of each soul. The evangelist must, therefore, only speak and act when he discerns that the Holy Spirit has moved him to that point. The teacher will help the person apply God's Word to the particular circumstances of his inner and outer life by which is meant, his heart, mind, body and relationships with others. In this the teacher will also vitally depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit for there can be nothing worse than receiving an inappropriate or untimely word. Finally, the pastor will exercise God's healing art by building on the work of the teacher but with great care, respect, diligence and attentiveness to God, he will apply good counsel as a surgeon plies his instruments to heal and put the patient on the road to recovery; in this case, recovery in God who is our Divine Lover and Beloved.

Evangelism, therefore, in the Orthodox Church can never be separated from the cure of souls of which it is an integral part. But what of evangelism to and in communities, all the way up to superpowers? Is this not inherently more problematic as soon as one moves away from the particular and distinctive needs of persons? Not really. It's just that a different discipline is required under the general heading of preaching and living out the gospel. The diagnostic work is the same. We still have to work out what is

the patient's condition or illness. We still have to apply the cure in line with this diagnosis, collaborating with the patient's own latent, God given power to heal. The only difference, albeit a significant one, is that we must be more aware of communal trends and patterns of thought, of ideas and structures in human communities, of faulty presuppositions and, more positively, of moves toward God at the macro rather than micro scale.

Let's consider a practical example of this pre-evangelistic diagnosis. We need first to choose a community along with its culture, say England, more specifically the north of England. Here we must take care both to avoid easy self-serving cultural stereotyping (friendly north, unfriendly south) and not to neglect the way in which English culture permeates certain levels of life and thought, north and south.

It's interesting to note when surveying the location of Orthodox Churches using English amongst primarily convert communities that these parishes are more prevalent in parts of the country that, historically, have had a strong sense of regional autonomy. Since the geo-political centre of English life has moved to the southeast since the collapse of the first Industrial Revolution in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, this has left the other regions of England to rediscover an identity more based on history and precedent than in the south. We can see this process at work not only beyond England in the Celtic regions of Britain but within England itself, most notably in the North, the Midlands and the far West. This search for stability, local authenticity and roots has perhaps made communities in these areas more open to a Faith that has precisely these marks in its own self-understanding. It's easy to see how the northern English might respond to a faith "wi' now't taken out," rather than in the south and the home counties where the cultural paradigm has often been, sometimes relentlessly, to modernise at all costs, (whatever that means!) In many ways this gives the north of England, the Midlands and the far West a 'head start' when it comes to establishing English speaking Orthodox communities, and this in fact, statistically is what we see, (but, strangely, less so in the south west).

Finally, and this is necessarily a very cursory and slight survey of the religious scene in the North of England, we might identify a problematic factor. It is precisely this distance from the Establishment in all its forms and the history of non-conformity in the region that has left the religious culture rather dissipated, derelict and barren. Since the collapse of non-conformity in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a big gap opened up between this period of decline and the emergence of English Orthodox communities in the 1980's onwards, arguably, the new non-conformity in the North. For a time the house church movement, which had some of its roots in the north, held forth much promise in the Protestant tradition but this now seems not the force that it used to be. Orthodoxy now has a great potential here in the north but, as elsewhere in England, it continues to be blighted by a tenacious stereotype of being perceived as "foreign." The historical reluctance of ethnic Orthodox communities to engage religiously with English culture has, sadly, reinforced this perception. We in the English use communities need to address this perception and stereotype urgently by being much more pro-active in our self-branding as the historic faith of England, (and indeed Britain). The healing of our region in God, by which I mean the restoration of the Christian Faith and Church, will start and grow apace with our public celebration of its saints and the use of every opportunity to engage with local culture, community and concerns. I would even go so far as to say that Orthodox (of all jurisdictions) should refer to themselves not as Greek, Russian, Antiochian, Romanian etc., (as reflecting the Mother churches) but simply as Orthodox, or as in the case of primarily English use communities, even, *British Orthodox*.

When it comes to evangelism in the Orthodox Church, therefore, we have a lot to do but many opportunities by God to get going. We need to listen, look, learn and act to put our communities in better shape to give "a good account of the hope that lies within us." (1 Peter 3:15). For this we have not God's invitation but God's command. As St. Paul said, "woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

**Fr. Gregory**

## "Jesus Who?" - Nicholas Forgets



Sometimes on entering the ruin of a venerable old church it is possible to imagine ancient voices in prayer shimmering around the worn old stones. Listen very hard and you may catch something recognisable but long forgotten, a snippet of prayer perhaps, the invocation of a saint barely understood by the passing tourist. Such is Christianity and the Church now in this country. The echoes of this great Faith are adorned with baubles of consumerism and sentiment but they have lost their power to convert, to transform, to topple even Empires. There is nothing lacking in the words of course, their power; nothing lacking in God himself; but there is a great lack in our culture and it seems that I particularly feel it even more keenly as Christmas succeeds Christmas.

The Church I think, (and I mean the Orthodox Church and all those outside her who nonetheless share her faith), the Church needs to rediscover and enhance her presence and voice, not by compromise with the world in order to put a few more half-hearted Christians in the pews, (here today, gone tomorrow), but by living authentically and fully the Christian life. If that means that the Church numerically is smaller that matters not for the most needful thing is that her presence and voice is sure.

In respect of Christmas this means that Christians should simply observe and celebrate the festival on their own terms. We should neither sneer at the commercialism nor begrudge people their Winter Solstice festivities but we should certainly not confuse all of this with the birth of Christ. In many ways, perhaps, it becomes easier and easier to celebrate Christmas as it should ... our society resembles, religiously and culturally, more and more like pagan Rome as year follows year. A bitter sweet message for Christmas then, but one doubtless that we all recognise in the echoing ruins of a former glory, an age long gone.

**Fr. Gregory**

### **Grace: what is it?**

by Dwynwen East



My dictionary describes grace as meaning divine influence amongst other interpretations. Included in these definitions are the three days of grace one is allowed before the payment of a bill. Today that could well be three years! St. John of Kronstadt defines grace as "The blessed power of God given to the person who believes, and who was baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ in the Holy Trinity." From this definition we can assume that grace belongs to every baptised Christian. The question is how to realise its potential.

In this season of increased (dare I say manic) activity we need to remind ourselves to be still for a while and ponder on the reason for racing towards this festivity called Christmas. It is easy to become cynical and to think judgementally about the materialistic world in which we live. If only this season of the Nativity could be Christ centred! If only the church could mean more to people than the shops! Perhaps through prayer we could help to make this happen since all things are possible with God. Perhaps the grace and love of God is already there but we do not recognise it. Indeed, it must be there in the giving and receiving of gifts on Christmas day.

Grace has the power to change a person in the depths of the soul. It is comforting, cleansing, healing. It can change the money loving, avaricious person into a generous, benevolent, loving being. It can change the unbeliever into a lover of God if we recognise its importance to our lives. "Seek thee first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Matt 6:33.

Worldly activity often crowds out of our thoughts the need for prayer and action pleasing to God or to the salvation of our souls.

So then how do we attempt to attain the grace of God? The sacrament of Baptism has already been mentioned. Following on from this is the receiving of the Eucharistic sacrament with faith and thanksgiving. In repentance and forgiveness we receive God's grace and a closer relationship with Him in prayer and action. Grace comes to us through the power of the cross and through the Mother of God. Also we receive grace from acknowledging and venerating the Saints who have travelled the road before us. Bible reading and taking the Word of God into our hearts gives us the grace to believe and to understand. These are just a few of the many ways of attaining the grace of God and His love. It is there for the asking and continuously flows between our Father in Heaven and us, His flock.

Very little has changed from the time of St. John of Kronstadt in the nineteenth century to today with regard to our attitude to the acquisition of worldly goods. As it was then so it is now unfortunately, but love and generosity are also in evidence and can increase through prayer, in particular prayer for the world. Making time for moments of spiritual serenity and to contemplate on the love of God can help us to see beyond the pressures and the problems and to concentrate instead on the coming day of the incarnation and the true meaning of the peace of Christmas. God offers us love, not loathing. He gives us freely of His grace, not forcefully. He wants Paradise for us, not purgatory. Gennesaret not Gehenna.

**Dwynwen East**